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THE APPLICATION OF SOR THEORY IN TOURISM RESEARCH: MAPPING WOS DATA-BASED RESEARCH

Abstract: This study aims to examine the use of Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory in tourism studies through bibliometric analysis. SOR theory, which provides an important theoretical framework for understanding tourist behavior, has been used to analyze how tourism experiences are shaped by environmental stimuli and the effects of these stimuli on tourists' psychological processes. The study analyzed 125 articles in the Web of Science database to identify scientific collaborations in this field, the most contributing authors and institutions and the most frequently used keywords. The study reveals that new technologies, especially digitalization and virtual reality tourism, offer powerful analysis tools when considered in the context of SOR theory. The study also found that SOR theory has not been sufficiently examined in different destination types and geographical regions such as rural tourism, ecotourism and cultural heritage tourism and that these areas present important gaps for future research. These findings may contribute to the development of more targeted and personalized marketing strategies in strategic planning in the tourism sector.

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Key words: Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory, Tourist Experience, Tourism Studies, WOS Database, Bibliometric Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is recognized as one of the most dynamic and growing sectors in the world, both economically and socio-culturally (Gnanapala and Sandaruwani 2016). The rapid development of tourism on a global scale necessitates the exploration of new theoretical frameworks that will enable a better understanding of tourist behavior, destination marketing and tourist experiences (Caldeira and Kastenholz 2019). In this context, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, which is increasingly gaining ground in tourism research, stands out as an important theoretical basis for understanding tourists' behavioral responses (Yang et al. 2022). This theory offers a powerful analytical tool to reveal

how touristic experiences are shaped and which factors affect tourists' psychological and emotional responses (Kim et al. 2018).

SOR theory posits that environmental stimuli cause changes in the internal organism of the individual and that these changes are reflected in outward behaviors (response) (Karim et al. 2021). This theoretical model has been widely applied to understand the effects of elements experienced in tourist destinations on tourist behavior (Chen et al. 2021). Factors such as the image of a tourist destination, the quality of services offered, natural and cultural attractions are considered to be important factors that affect tourists' behaviors ranging from destination choice to revisit intentions (Ramkissoon et al. 2011).

There has been a growing interest in the application of SOR theory in the context of tourism studies. This interest can be considered as an important step towards a more in-depth study of tourism experiences and a better understanding of the psychological processes of tourists. Research in large academic databases such as Web of Science (WoS) reveals that SOR theory is increasingly being used in tourism studies and that important scientific collaborations are taking place in this field. Especially countries such as China, the USA and Malaysia have made significant contributions in this field.

Tourist experience is the sum of personal and subjective feelings, thoughts and memories experienced by individuals during their interaction with a destination, which is at the centre of the travel process (Agapito et al. 2013; Tanriverdi et al. 2025a). When this experience is considered within the scope of Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) SOR model, it can be better understood how the physical and social environmental stimuli (Stimulus) of the destination affect tourists' perceptions, emotions and cognitive processes (Organism) and how behavioural responses (Response) emerge as a result (Ciki and Tanriverdi 2025). Experience tourism is an approach to tourism that encourages tourists to move from being passive observers to active participants in the places they visit and to interact more deeply with the cultural, natural or social elements offered by the destination (Jenkins and Bristow 2024; Tussyadiah 2014). In this context, tourism destinations aim to offer visitors not only places but also memorable and meaningful experiences (Ciki and Tanriverdi 2023a; de Fraihas Coelho et al. 2018; Ogretmenoglu et al. 2023; Tanriverdi et al. 2025b).

The multisensory nature of the experience plays a critical role in understanding tourist behaviour (Jiang 2022; Ogretmenoglu et al. 2025). A tourist experience is not limited to visual attractions (Ciki et al. 2025; Scarles 2009), but includes a variety of sensory stimuli such as sounds (sounds of nature or the city), smells (smells of local cuisine or natural environment), tactile sensations (architectural textures or contact with nature) and even tastes (local flavours). This multisensory integration leads to a richer and deeper state of "organism", strengthening tourists' bonds with the destination (Wang et al. 2025). As highlighted by many researchers (Agapito et al. 2013; Jiang 2022; Jenkins and Bristow 2024), these sensory inputs can directly influence tourists' attitudes towards a destination, their level of satisfaction and ultimately their behavioural intentions such as to revisit or recommend it. Therefore, when analysing the tourist experience within the framework of SOR theory, considering in detail how these sensory dimensions function as "Stimulus" and how they are processed within the "Organism" will provide a more comprehensive explanation of tourist behaviour.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the use of Stimulus-Organism-Response theory in tourism research. In this context, tourism studies related to SOR theory in the WoS database were examined and the main trends, key researchers and collaborations of these studies were evaluated using bibliometric analysis method. This analysis on SOR theory will provide important implications for the use of this theory in the field of tourism and will provide an important framework for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SOR theory is a theoretical framework for explaining the effects of environmental stimuli on individuals and how these effects translate into individual responses. The theory was initially developed in the field of psychology and later adapted to various social sciences, especially consumer behavior and marketing research (Mehrabian and Russell 1974). According to the SOR model, an external stimulus creates an effect on the emotional and cognitive processes of the organism and a behavioral response emerges as a result of these processes (Vieira 2013). In this framework, individuals' responses to environmental stimuli are shaped by the internal states of the organism (Chang et al. 2011).

SOR Theory has three main components: stimulus (S), organism (O) and response (R). Stimuli can include factors from the physical or social environment (Buxbaum 2016). The organism refers to the psychological and physiological processes of the individual (Järvilehto 2009). These processes include the emotional, cognitive and motivational states of the individual (Peng and Kim 2014). Finally, the response represents the behavioral response of the organism to the stimulus (Mladenović et al. 2023). This response can be either a positive response (e.g., decision to buy) or a negative response (e.g., rejection). The SOR model provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding how individuals respond to complex environmental factors (Zhang et al. 2019).

SOR theory has been widely used in tourism research in recent years. Since tourism is a dynamic experience and a field where environmental stimuli are intense, the use of the SOR model in the tourism context is quite natural (Wang et al. 2023). Tourists' experiences are influenced by many stimuli such as the physical environment (nature, architecture, weather, etc.) and the social environment (service quality, interactions with local people) in the destinations they visit (Caldeira and Kastenholz 2018). In this context, how tourists react to these environmental stimuli and how these reactions are shaped can be analyzed in depth with the SOR model (Nguyen 2023).

The use of SOR theory in tourism makes great contributions, especially in understanding tourist behavior (Kim et al. 2018). For example, a positive experience (stimulus) in a destination may increase the level of satisfaction (organism) of the tourist, leading to an intention (response) to visit that destination again (Chen et al. 2021). Likewise, a negative experience may negatively affect the perception of the destination, resulting in a negative behavioral response (Shah et al. 2024). SOR theory provides a useful tool to analyze and predict such behaviors (Ming et al. 2021).

SOR theory is frequently used in tourism marketing and destination management. Especially in digital marketing and social media campaigns, the effects of online content on tourists can be analyzed with the SOR model (Baber and Baber 2023). For example, a destination's visuals (stimulus) shared on social media can affect the emotional responses (organism) of potential tourists and create an intention to visit the destination (response) (Abbas and Rosmah 2022). In this context, tourism businesses and destination management organizations can strategically use the SOR model to guide tourist behavior and generate positive responses (Chen et al. 2021).

With the development of technology, virtual reality and digital tourism applications have gained an important place in tourism research (Huang et al. 2015). Virtual reality offers tourists the opportunity to have an experience without being physically present in a destination (Neuburger et al. 2018). SOR theory is also used to analyze such digital experiences. In the context of virtual reality tourism, visual and auditory stimuli can influence tourists' emotional responses (organism) in the virtual environment, which can create a real visit planning decision (response) (Sann et al. 2023).

The use of SOR theory in tourism research is increasing and it is the subject of more and more research, especially in areas such as destination management, tourist satisfaction and digital tourism (Kim et al. 2018). The flexible nature of the theory facilitates its adaptation to different tourism contexts. Moreover, studies based on the theory contribute to the development of more effective destination management and marketing strategies. SOR theory will continue to make important con-

tributions to the tourism literature as a valuable tool in understanding the emotional and cognitive processes of tourists (Cheung et al. 2021).

Analyzing the effects of environmental stimuli in tourism, understanding the internal processes of tourists and their reactions as a result of these processes are of great importance for both academic research and applied tourism management. In this context, SOR theory offers a rich research area at both theoretical and practical levels.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses bibliometric analysis to examine the place and development of SOR theory in tourism research. Bibliometric analysis is a method that statistically analyzes academic studies published in a particular research field to identify the main trends and important researchers of this field (Ciki and Tanriverdi 2023b; Sigala et al. 2021). This method is preferred because it provides the opportunity to comprehensively assess the impact of SOR theory in the field of tourism. In addition, bibliometric analysis has been successful in identifying the current status, gaps and saturation points of certain themes in many previous tourism studies (Barač-Miftarević 2023; Bhowmik 2021; Ciki 2022; Garrigos-Simon et al. 2018; Hodak and Krajinović 2020; Jimenez-Garcia et al. 2020; Okumus et al. 2018; Singh et al. 2021). In this context, Web of Science database was used to examine SOR theory-based studies in the field of tourism.

Web of Science is a reputable resource that is frequently preferred in literature searches thanks to its high impact factor, peer-reviewed journals and the reliable citation data it provides. The dataset used in the research was collected from the WoS database at the July 2025. During the search process, the keywords "Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory" and "Tourism" were used and the search was conducted to cover title, abstract and keywords. As a result of the first search, a total of 215 publications were reached. However, in order to make the scope of the research more specific, the context of the research was narrowed by applying some criteria. First of all, only "hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism" was selected among the WoS categories. In addition, the language of the studies was marked as English only and the type of publication was selected as articles (including early access, reviews and research articles). In this way, a data set suitable for the purpose of the research was reached. Finally, publications that did not fit the research context were identified one by one and excluded from the study. As a result, a data set consisting of 125 studies in total was obtained. The data set was created and downloaded as a savedrecs file.

The bibliometric data used in this study were exported from the Web of Science database in "full record and cited references" format as savedrecs.txt file. Before importing the data into the VOSviewer software, some preprocessing steps were performed to improve the quality of the analysis. First of all, conceptual repetitions and synonymous terms in the keyword fields were identified and merged; for example, expressions with different spellings such as "SOR Theory", "Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory" were gathered under the umbrella of "Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory". For this purpose, a special thesaurus file was prepared and integrated into the VOSviewer analysis.

Vosviewer software, one of the software used for bibliometric analysis, was used[1]. Vosviewer is a tool that enables visual mapping of collaborations, citation networks and keyword relationships in the literature. This software, which is widely used in different fields, stands out as an effective tool in special fields such as tourism studies (Mulet-Forteza et al. 2018). VOSviewer, which can process information from large databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, Dimensions, and PubMed, provides researchers with comprehensive and visual data analysis.

[1] https://www.vosviewer.com/ (accessed: October 5, 2024).

Within the scope of this study, collaborations between authors, collaborations between countries, most cited studies and keyword analysis were performed (Van Eck and Waltman 2010). In addition to these, the main parameters of the research include the number of publications by year, the most contributing authors and institutions, the most cited articles and the most popular keywords. Furthermore, co-citation analysis for sources and bibliographic coupling analysis for documents were used to assess where SOR theory is concentrated in tourism research and where research gaps exist.

RESULTS

Fig. 1 presents the annual distribution of publications on the use of SOR theory in tourism studies. The first publication on SOR theory and tourism in the WoS database dates back to 2018 (first publication cited). It has been observed that the research using SOR theory as a theoretical basis, which has attracted more and more attention in tourism research, has gained significant momentum especially in the last four years (the results of this research cover publications up to July 2025). 2024 was the year with the highest number of publications in this field with 37 articles.

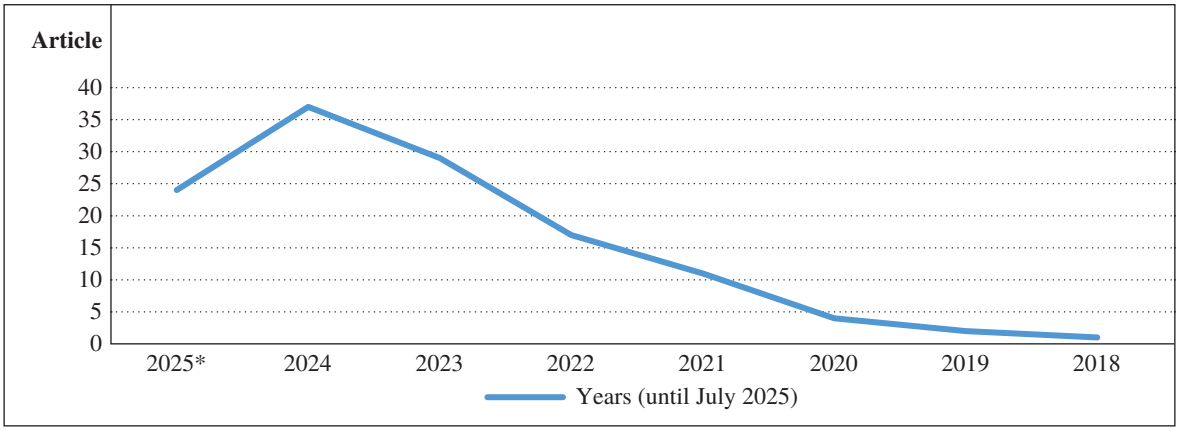


Fig. 1. Distribution of publications by years
Source: own elaboration based on Web of Science database.

The most productive countries

Fig. 2 shows the cross-country collaborations of academic studies in the field of SOR theory and tourism. Prior to the analysis, a threshold of at least 3 articles was set and analyzed. The reason for this is to obtain a map that clearly shows the connections of the countries with more contributions. The People's Republic of China (n = 26) stands out as the country with the highest number of contributing authors in this field. China is followed by the South Korea, Turkiye and England with 7 articles, the USA and the India with 6 articles. Countries such as Malaysia, Australia and Thailand also have important connections on the map and collaborations between these countries are particularly noteworthy. China, as the country with the largest node, has realized strong scientific collaborations both on its own and with other countries. South Korea and England also have a number of collaborative relationships.This distribution therefore shows that SOR theory in tourism research is receiving widespread attention globally. The map also reveals particularly strong collaborations between countries in Asia and Oceania, highlighting the important contributions of these regions to SOR theory and tourism studies.



Fig. 2. Collaboration of relevant countries
Source: prepared by the author via the VOSviewer program.

The most prolific authors

Fig. 3 shows the collaborations and number of publications of the most published authors on tourism and SOR theory. Among the authors shown, 11 – including Alastair M. Morrison – have each published two articles on the subject. Alastair M. Morrison stands out as the most cited author among them (with 109 citations). In addition, a total of nearly 163 authors have contributed to the research until the date of analysis. Among these authors with two publications each, the second author with the highest number of citations is Heesup Han with 105 citations.

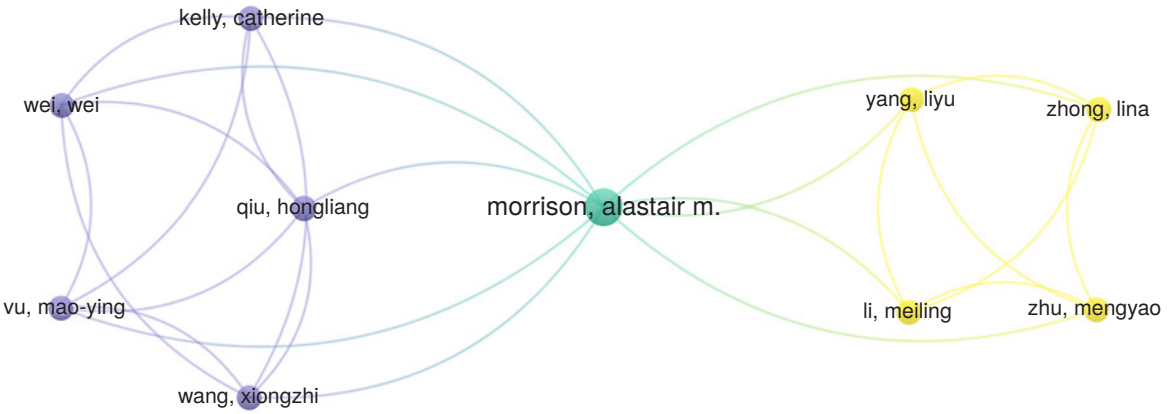


Fig. 3. Collaboration links between researchers
Source: prepared by the author via the VOSviewer program.

The most cited articles

Table 1 lists the 5 most influential articles on SOR Theory and tourism published in WoS journals. M. J. Kim et al. (2018) published an article on this topic that has been utilized the most by other researches. This article on "consumer behavior in virtual reality tourism", which stands out in the field, was published in the *Journal of Travel Research* and received a total of 748 citations until the date of the analysis (18.07.2025). This research is followed by the article published by S. An et al. (2021), which received a total of 179 citations. This article was published in *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*. In the third place in the list of the most influential articles is the research conducted by S. Talwar et al. (2023). This research, which has 159 citations in total, was published in the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. The article published by H. Qiu et al. (2023) is the fourth most cited article. This research, which was cited 109 times in total, was published in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism. Finally, Zhang and Xu's (2019) research is the fifth most cited article in Wos with 97 citations and was published in *Tourism Management*.

Table 1. Top 5 most cited articles

Author(s)	Title	Journals	Citation (WoS)	Year
Kim M.J., Lee C.K. and Jung T.	Exploring consumer behavior in virtual reality tourism using an extended Stimulus-Organism-Response Model	*Journal of Travel Research*	748	2018
An S., Choi Y. and Lee C.K.	Virtual travel experience and destination marketing: effects of sense and information quality on flow	*Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*	179	2021
Talwar S., Kaur P. and Dhir A.	Digitalization and sustainability: virtual reality tourism in a post pandemic world	*Journal of Sustainable Tourism*	159	2023
Qiu et al.	The effect of destination source credibility on tourist environmentally responsible behavior: an application of stimulus-organism-response theory	*Journal of Sustainable Tourism*	109	2023
Zhang H. and Xu H.G.	A structural model of liminal experience in tourism	*Tourism Management*	97	2019

Source: own elaboration.

Top contributing institutions

Fig. 4, created using VOSviewer software, shows the academic institutions that have made the most contributions in the field of SOR theory and tourism. Based on the articles analyzed, the institutions with at least three publications are positioned on the map according to the collaboration network. The collaborations between these institutions show that the field is developing with strong connections at the international level. According to the data obtained from the WoS database, Kyung Hee University, Macau University of Science and Technology, University of Johannesburg and Shandong University stand out as the institutions that contribute the most in this field with 3 articles each.

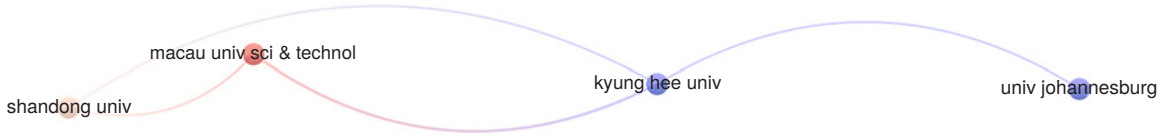


Fig. **4**. Most Contributing Organizations
Source: prepared by the author via the VOSviewer program.

The most popular keywords

Fig. 5 shows the most frequently used keywords and the relationships between these words in studies in the field of tourism and SOR theory. Keywords that appear at least twice in the studies are included in the map. The map shows that researchers concentrate around certain themes and some concepts come to the forefront. The most frequently used keyword is "Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory" and this keyword was mentioned in 33 studies. Along with "place attachment", destination image and flow experience are among the most used keywords (4 occurrences each) in tourism studies based on SOR theory. In addition, "memorable tourism experiences" (3 occurrences) has emerged as one of the most preferred keywords in tourism research that sets SOR Theory as a theoretical foundation.

The density of these keywords reveals that research, especially around SOR theory, focuses on issues such as memorable tourism experiences, place attachment and tourists' perceived destination image. The concept of Flow Experience refers to the satisfaction tourists derive from their experiences and the state of flow, while Place Attachment emphasizes tourists' emotional attachment to specific destinations. These concepts are frequently addressed in studies on tourism and SOR theory, indicating the growing interest of researchers in these topics. The map also shows that other keywords such as social media, authentic experience and behavioral intention are also included in the studies and make important contributions to the tourism literature.

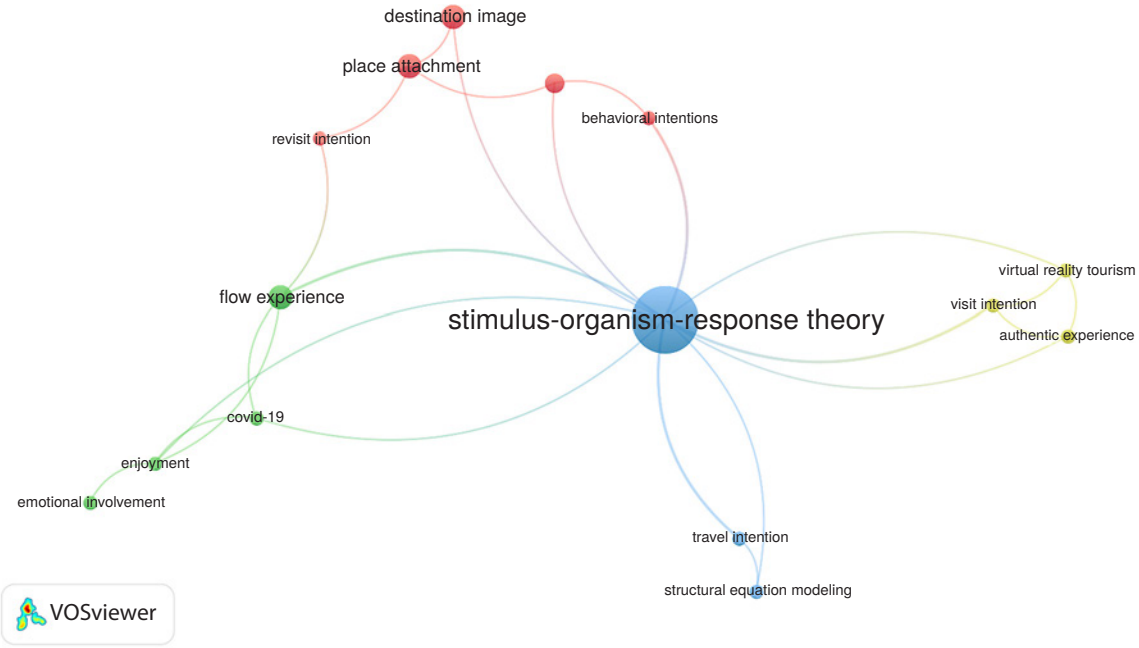


Fig. 5. Relationships between popular keywords
Source: prepared by the author via the VOSviewer program.

Co-citation analysis

Co-citation analysis is one of the key methods used to explore citation relationships, offering insight into how an article influences subsequent research (Song et al. 2023). This approach uncovers the connection between two articles by examining how often they are cited together. When applied within bibliometric studies, co-citation analysis helps identify the journals and authors that play a significant role in shaping the evolution of a particular research topic (Sharifi 2021).

Fig. 6 presents the findings of the co-citation analysis for the sources related to this topic. Out of the 1303 sources analyzed, 40 met the inclusion threshold of 20 citations. The analysis identified three distinct clusters. In the green cluster, the most influential journal is *Tourism Management*, with 312 citations. The blue cluster is led by the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, which has 88 citations. Meanwhile, the third cluster is also primarily influenced by the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, with 119 citations.

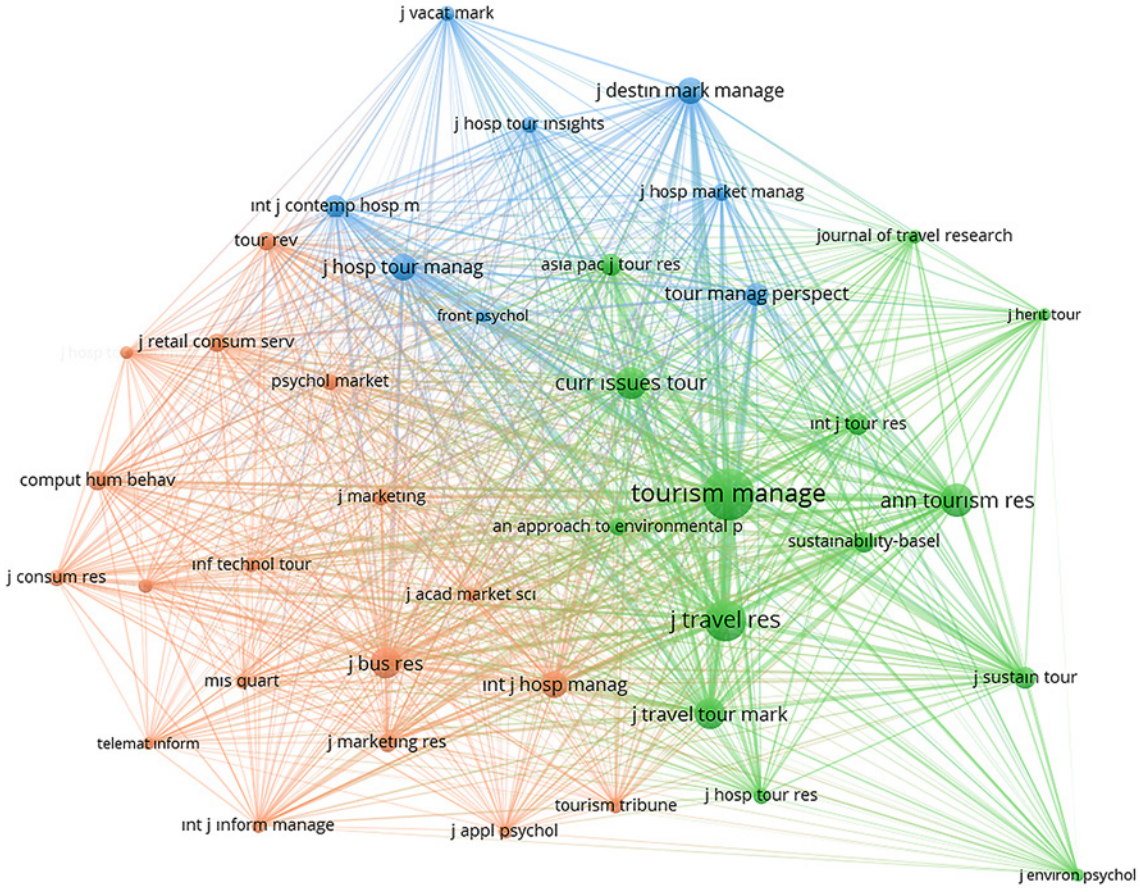


Fig. 6. Co-citation analysis for sources
Source: prepared by the author via the VOSviewer program.

Bibliographic coupling

Bibliographic coupling is a method used in addition to co-citation analysis and the two complement each other (Song et al. 2023). By offering a different perspective, it helps to examine similarities between research topics and authors. In a nutshell, while co-citation analysis analyzes cases where two articles are co-cited in another study, bibliographic coupling counts the common sources of a given group of documents (Boyack and Klavans 2010). In this study, bibliographic coupling between authors and countries was done using VOSviewer software.

Fig. 7 illustrates bibliographic coupling, which helps identify the key articles in film tourism by analyzing the shared references between documents. This method classifies articles into groups based on common citations, taking into account both the number of connections and their strength. According to this approach, Kim emerges as the leading author, with 256 connection strengths and a total of 748 citations. Following Kim, Qiu ranks second with 155 connection strengths and 109 citations[2].

[2] https://www.vosviewer.com/ (accessed: October 5, 2024).

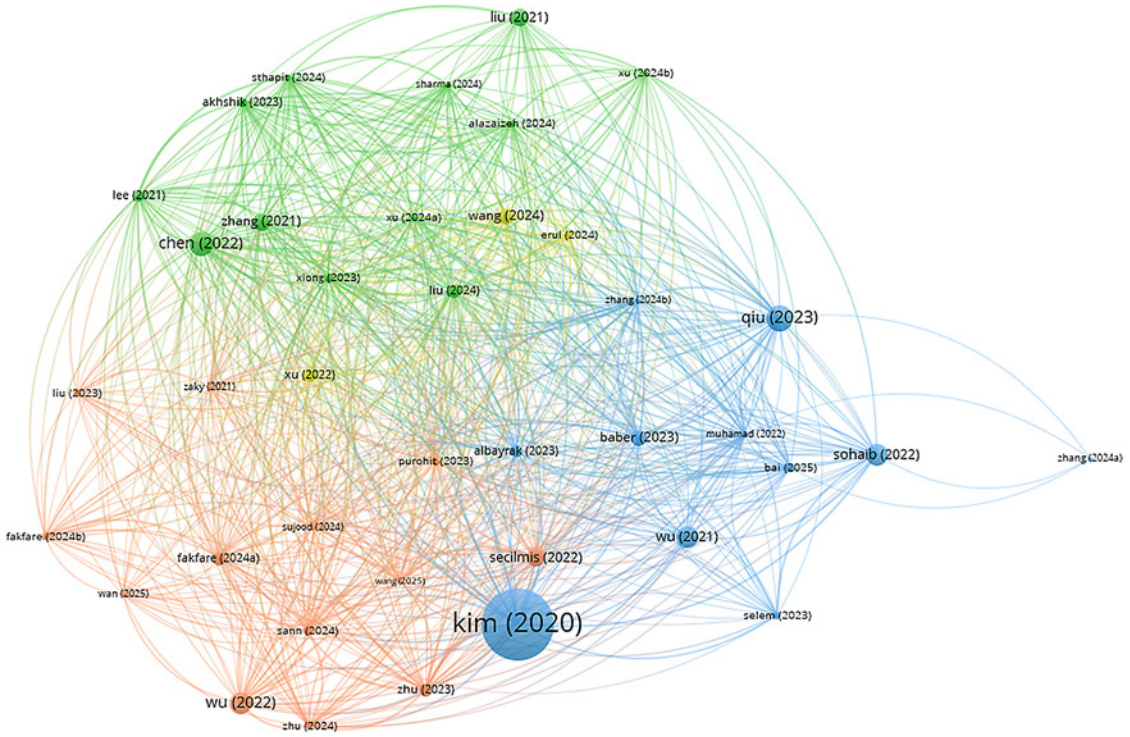


Fig. **7**. Bibliographic coupling of authors
Source: prepared by the author via the VOSviewer program.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive review of the use of SOR theory in the tourism literature and demonstrates the implications of the theory on touristic experiences and behaviors. Specifically, based on a bibliometric analysis of studies in the Web of Science (WoS) database, this study details the increasing use of SOR theory in tourism research and provides both theoretical contributions. In this context, the most important finding of the study is that SOR theory should be considered not only as a behavioral model but also as a dynamic tool for understanding tourists' responses to environmental and psychological stimuli.

This study makes two main contributions to the literature. First, it has comprehensively assessed the current state of the art on the use of SOR theory in tourism studies. This theoretical framework has been considered in a holistic perspective in this study and an attempt has been made to bring together all the important contributions in the field of tourism. In this way, researchers are provided with the opportunity to see more clearly the application areas of the theory in the tourism sector. Secondly, the study demonstrates that SOR theory offers an effective analytical tool not only in classical tourism contexts, but also when considered in conjunction with emerging technologies such as digitalization and virtual reality.

However, the research has also revealed some important research gaps. Although there has been an increase in the number of studies on SOR theory, there are limitations in examining its effects on different types of destinations and tourist segments. For example, the application of the SOR model to specific destinations such as rural tourism, ecotourism or heritage tourism and the different tourist groups visiting these destinations has not been examined in sufficient depth. Furthermore, the limited

use of SOR theory, especially in regions other than Asia and Western countries, reveals that studies based on the theory have an uneven geographical distribution. This regional concentration can be explained by several key factors. Europe and some Asian countries have increased the need for theoretical frameworks to understand tourist behaviour and experiences, as they are fast growing and dynamic destinations in the global tourism market. In particular, the tourism economies of countries such as China have shown great interest in adopting psychological models such as SOR theory to analyse the complex behaviour of local and international tourists. Moreover, the large population and tourism mobility can offer researchers access to large and diverse data sets. In this context, future studies should be conducted to investigate how SOR theory works in different cultural and socio-economic contexts.

The study shows that applications of SOR theory in tourism can be used to understand not only the individual behavior of tourists, but also broader outcomes such as destination choices, satisfaction levels and revisit intentions. This theoretical approach emphasizes that tourists' interactions with environmental and psychological stimuli is a critical component to be considered in destination marketing and tourist satisfaction studies.

In practical terms, this study provides important clues to tourism businesses and destination management units in their strategic planning processes. SOR theory enables the development of more targeted and personalized strategies in destination management and marketing by revealing the relationship between the stimuli, psychological processes and reactions that shape tourists' experiences. This theory can be used as a powerful tool to understand and act upon the emotional and cognitive processes of tourists' experiences in a destination.

The results of this study suggest that for destinations to maintain their competitive advantage, it is not enough to focus only on service quality, but also to strategically manage the sensory and emotional stimuli that will deepen tourists' experiences. For example, presenting a destination's unique cultural or natural elements in a way that leaves a lasting imprint on tourists' memories can create a positive brand image. In this context, destination managers can analyze tourists' reactions to sensory stimuli, such as visual, auditory and even olfactory stimuli, to build stronger emotional attachments.

This study reveals that the SOR theory should not be viewed solely as a standalone model but rather as a flexible theoretical scaffold that can be integrated with other psychological and experiential frameworks. Concepts such as service quality, place attachment, flow experience, and authenticity often intersect with SOR theory, allowing for richer, theory-driven explanations. Thus, SOR can act as a meta-framework that supports interdisciplinary tourism research, particularly in understanding complex affective and cognitive responses in various tourism contexts.

Findings suggest that the SOR theory not only explains behavioral outcomes but also serves as a tool to measure the depth and intensity of tourist experiences. Beyond simple outcome variables such as intention to revisit, the theory allows researchers to capture more nuanced mental transitions, emotional resonance, and memory traces evoked by environmental stimuli. Therefore, SOR theory should be expanded to interpret experiential dimensions in tourism, moving away from traditional satisfaction-based models to more sophisticated emotional and cognitive mappings.

The bibliometric findings highlight the increasing relevance of digitalization, virtual environments, and social media in SOR-based tourism research. This reveals a theoretical opportunity to extend the SOR model beyond physical stimuli to symbolic and digital stimuli–such as social media content, influencer marketing, and virtual storytelling. In this regard, the model could be applied to explore how tourists cognitively and emotionally process mediated content before the actual travel experience. This shift from physical to representational stimuli expands the scope of the theory and strengthens its relevance in technology-driven tourism contexts.

In addition to the theoretical implications, this research also offers some practical implications. Firstly, by demonstrating how environmental stimuli trigger psychological and behavioral responses among tourists, this study provides a practical foundation for destination managers to develop more experience-oriented environments. Utilizing the SOR framework, decision-makers can strategically design physical spaces, sensory cues, and visitor pathways to optimize emotional responses and engagement with the destination.

The findings suggest that tourism marketing should not rely solely on rational elements like price or service quality, but also consider emotional and sensory triggers. Marketing content that incorporates vivid imagery, soundscapes, or immersive storytelling aligned with SOR principles can create stronger emotional bonds and increase visit intentions. Social media strategies, for instance, can be enhanced by incorporating elements that induce flow and engagement.

Given the rise in studies involving digital technologies such as VR and AR within the SOR framework, businesses operating in immersive environments (e.g., museums, theme parks, digital exhibitions) can use these insights to fine-tune user experiences. By identifying which stimuli (e.g., visual or auditory cues) lead to desired emotional or behavioral responses, technology investments can be better aligned with user expectations.

This research provides an analytical map of key authors, institutions, and countries working with SOR theory, making it a valuable resource for tourism practitioners seeking academic collaboration. Destination managers, hospitality businesses, or government agencies can identify leading experts or institutions and initiate partnerships to apply SOR-based findings in real-world scenarios – such as co-developing emotion-driven experience designs or behavioral intervention strategies.

Given the SOR framework's strength in analyzing responses to environmental stimuli, it can be instrumental in designing nudges and interventions aimed at promoting responsible tourist behavior. Whether it involves encouraging waste reduction, respecting local culture, or protecting natural heritage, practitioners can utilize emotionally resonant stimuli (e.g., storytelling, signage, sensory cues) to trigger more sustainable and ethical responses from tourists.

Limitations and future research

This research has some limitations. First, it was conducted on studies in the Web of Science (WoS) database. This prevents it from fully reflecting all research on SOR theory and tourism studies. After a certain period of time, researchers can expand the scope of the analysis and compare it with the results of this research. The study includes only articles published in English. Moreover, this excludes studies on SOR theory in other languages. Moreover, the study focused solely on articles, excluding conference proceedings, book chapters, and doctoral theses, which may also contain significant contributions to the field.

The research highlights that less work has been done on specific destinations such as rural tourism, ecotourism and cultural heritage tourism. In the future, more research could be done to understand how SOR theory works in these areas. On the other hand, the use of SOR Theory has generally focused on Asian and Western countries. In other geographical regions, especially in culturally diverse places such as Africa, South America or the Middle East, research on how the theory works is limited. Studies examining tourists' responses to environmental stimuli in different cultural and socio-economic contexts are needed.

Since this research is based on bibliometric analysis, interpretations of the content and methodological depth of the studies are limited. Although conceptual maps, review of the current state of the literature and citation analyses are instructive, other elements such as how individual studies interpret the theory, which measurement tools they use or in which contextual conditions they apply it have been ignored. Future studies should include deep conceptual variations in the literature through systematic reviews or content analyses.

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