

# Understanding Dark Tourism Research through Bibliometric Mapping from 2017 to 2025

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**A**bstract—This study aims to map the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and research trends in dark tourism scholarship over the past decade. It employs a systematic literature review combined with bibliometric network analysis of Scopus indexed journal articles published between 2017 and 2025, following PRISMA guidelines and using VOSviewer for data visualisation. The findings indicate a steady growth in dark tourism research, with dominant themes including thanatourism, memorial landscapes, visitor motivation, sustainability, and digital memorialisation, alongside increasing thematic diversification and uneven global research influence. The study is limited to English language publications indexed in Scopus, which may exclude relevant regional scholarship. Practically, the findings support the development of ethically informed destination management and interpretation strategies. Socially, dark tourism is shown to have potential to contribute to collective memory, ethical reflection, and social learning when responsibly managed. The originality of this study lies in its integrated bibliometric and thematic approach, which provides a comprehensive overview of the development of dark tourism research and offers a structured foundation for future theoretical and applied investigations.

**Keywords:** dark tourism; bibliometric analysis; thematic evolution; heritage tourism; visitor behaviour

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism refers to travel to places associated with death, suffering, disaster, and human tragedy, including sites of war, genocide, natural catastrophes, and memorial landscapes (Martini & Buda, 2020). As a growing segment of contemporary tourism, dark tourism functions not only as a leisure activity but also as a medium through which societies engage with difficult histories, collective memory, and moral reflection (Apetrei et al., 2024). In this context, dark tourism is not merely understood as visiting sites of death, but as a socially constructed practice shaped by historical narratives, cultural meanings, and ethical interpretations of past events (Zhang, 2022). The development of dark tourism is influenced by structural factors such as heritage management, political context, and tourism governance, as well as dynamic elements including media representation, digital platforms, and shifting visitor motivations (Tevely, 2025). Consequently, recent scholarship increasingly conceptualises dark tourism as a multidimensional and socially embedded phenomenon that reflects broader transformations in memory, culture, and global mobility.

Recognising dark tourism as an important site of meaning-making, destination managers, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders continue to develop strategies that frame tragic pasts for contemporary audiences (Assylkhanova et al., 2025). One significant development is the integration of educational, commemorative, and interpretive approaches into dark tourism destinations. These approaches operate not only as tools for attracting visitors, but also as mechanisms for shaping historical understanding, ethical awareness, and emotional engagement. This connection highlights the importance of linking theoretical perspectives on memory, morality, and tourism consumption with empirical studies of visitor behaviour and destination management, in order to better understand how dark tourism contributes to social learning and cultural reflection.

Dark tourism occupies a complex position within global tourism systems, similar to how memory functions within society (Liberato et al., 2019). When narratives of tragedy are carefully curated, dark tourism can foster empathy, reflection, and historical awareness. However, when poorly managed or excessively commercialised, it risks trivialising suffering, distorting historical facts, and reinforcing voyeuristic consumption of death (Ullah et al., 2025). Foundational theories of dark tourism, including Seaton's concept of thanatourism and Stone's spectrum of darkness, emphasise that visitor engagement with death-related sites varies in intensity, motivation, and moral framing (Magano et al., 2023). These perspectives demonstrate that dark tourism directly influences how societies remember violence, interpret past injustices, and negotiate the boundaries between commemoration and commodification.

Despite its growing prominence, dark tourism practice often prioritises market-driven objectives over ethical and educational considerations (Chen & Xu, 2021). Many dark tourism initiatives struggle to balance visitor demand with respect for victims, survivors, and affected communities. Effective dark tourism management requires sensitivity, transparency, contextual accuracy, and cultural awareness, all of which vary across destinations and sociopolitical settings (Barbu Kleitsch & Bader-Jurj, 2026). Managerial misjudgements such as sensationalist interpretation, inappropriate marketing strategies, or exclusion of local voices can undermine the moral legitimacy of dark tourism and provoke public controversy. Thus, dark tourism should not be viewed merely as a niche tourism product, but as a

complex cultural practice that requires careful negotiation between remembrance, representation, and responsibility (Martini & Buda, 2020).

Within tourism studies, dark tourism is increasingly recognised as a lens through which broader issues of sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility can be examined (Lv et al., 2022). Destinations associated with trauma often face long-term social and economic consequences, and tourism development in such contexts can either contribute to healing and regeneration or deepen existing inequalities (Lundin & Soulard, 2025). When dark tourism is aligned with principles of responsible tourism and inclusive heritage management, it can support local development, strengthen collective memory, and promote intercultural understanding (Bilginoğlu, 2025). Conversely, when deeper social grievances and power asymmetries are ignored, dark tourism may result in superficial engagement and symbolic consumption rather than meaningful reflection.

Before developing comprehensive frameworks for dark tourism research and practice, scholars must consider several enabling conditions. These include inclusive interpretation processes that involve affected communities, ethical guidelines that prioritise dignity and accuracy, transparent governance structures, integration of educational objectives, avoidance of exploitative narratives, and long-term evaluation of social impacts on host societies (Tripathi & Bansal, 2025). These conditions are essential for ensuring that dark tourism contributes positively to cultural understanding rather than reinforcing harm or misrepresentation.

Defining dark tourism solely as travel to sites of death is therefore insufficient. Dark tourism encompasses a wide range of destinations, practices, and meanings, including memorial tourism, genocide tourism, disaster tourism, and heritage interpretation related to violence and loss (Siti Hamidah & Hakim, 2023). It involves the interaction of tourists, narratives, spaces, and institutions within specific cultural and historical contexts. The growing integration of digital media, online reviews, and promotional platforms further complicates how dark tourism is produced, consumed, and evaluated in contemporary society.

Acknowledging the expanding role of dark tourism in global tourism discourse, this study examines how dark tourism has been conceptualised, analysed, and developed within academic scholarship over the last decade.

Preliminary exploration of the literature reveals influential contributions addressing visitor motivation, ethical debates, destination management, and cultural representation. These studies indicate that dark tourism research has evolved significantly, moving from definitional debates towards more nuanced discussions of experience, morality, and social impact.

From this perspective, research on dark tourism offers an opportunity to map global scholarly contributions, identify leading actors, and examine thematic developments within the field. Although previous studies have reviewed specific aspects of dark tourism, such as motivation or ethics, while previous studies have examined dark tourism through systematic reviews, comprehensive bibliometric analyses that map the intellectual structure and evolving research trends of dark tourism scholarship over the last decade remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study combines a systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed publications from 2017 to 2025 in order to present a comprehensive overview of publication trends, thematic structures, and collaborative networks in dark tourism research. Based on this objective, the study proposes five research questions:

RQ1: How has dark tourism research developed over the period from 2017 to 2025?

RQ2: Which countries and institutions contribute most significantly to dark tourism scholarship?

RQ3: Which journals serve as the leading outlets for dark tourism research?

RQ4: What thematic trends and conceptual frameworks characterise contemporary dark tourism studies?

RQ5: Who are the most influential authors and collaborative networks in dark tourism research?

Systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis offer complementary strengths. Systematic review enables in-depth examination of research content, while bibliometric analysis provides performance indicators, conceptual mapping, and network visualisation. Accordingly, RQ1 reflects the content-oriented focus of the systematic review, RQ2 and RQ3 address performance analysis, RQ4 explores thematic development through science mapping, and RQ5 examines patterns of scholarly collaboration within the dark tourism research landscape.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Dark tourism has emerged as a significant field of inquiry within tourism studies, attracting sustained scholarly attention over the last two decades. Early conceptualisations of dark tourism focused on defining its scope and boundaries, with Lennon (2017) introducing the term to describe visits to sites associated with death, disaster, and atrocity. Seaton (1999) earlier conceptualised a similar phenomenon through the notion of thanatourism, emphasising tourists' motivations to engage with death-related experiences. These foundational works positioned dark tourism as a distinct form of tourism consumption, rooted in both historical curiosity and emotional engagement with human suffering.

Subsequent scholarship expanded beyond definitional debates to explore the motivations and experiences of dark tourism visitors. Research has consistently shown that visitors are driven by a combination of educational, commemorative, emotional, and moral motivations rather than mere fascination with death (Sigala & Steriopoulos, 2021). For many tourists, dark tourism sites function as spaces of learning and reflection, enabling engagement with difficult histories and collective memory. Studies examining visitor experience highlight the emotional intensity of dark tourism encounters, often characterised by empathy, sadness, and moral contemplation (Light, 2017). These findings challenge simplistic assumptions that dark tourism is inherently voyeuristic or sensationalist.

Alongside motivation and experience, ethical considerations have become a central theme in dark tourism research. Scholars have raised concerns regarding the commodification of tragedy, the risk of historical distortion, and the moral responsibilities of destination managers (Light, 2017). Ethical debates often focus on the balance between commercial imperatives and respectful representation of victims and survivors. Tripathi & Bansal (2025) argues that ethical dark tourism requires careful interpretation, contextual accuracy, and sensitivity to local communities. Failure to meet these standards may result in public backlash, reputational damage, and the erosion of trust between stakeholders and visitors.

Another prominent strand of literature examines dark tourism destinations as heritage and memory sites. Research in this area highlights the role of museums, memorials, and former conflict zones in shaping national and transnational narratives of the past (Pfoser & Stach, 2025). Dark tourism sites are not neutral spaces but are embedded

within political, cultural, and ideological contexts that influence how history is presented and remembered. Studies have shown that state involvement, curatorial choices, and narrative framing significantly affect visitor interpretation and meaning-making processes (Barbu Kleitsch & Bader-Jurj, 2026). This perspective underscores the importance of power relations and representation in dark tourism development.

In recent years, dark tourism scholarship has increasingly adopted interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating perspectives from sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and communication. Researchers have explored the influence of media and digital platforms on the popularisation and interpretation of dark tourism destinations, particularly through social media, virtual tours, and user-generated content (Light, 2017). These developments have transformed how dark tourism is marketed and consumed, raising new questions about authenticity, emotional engagement, and ethical responsibility in digital environments.

Despite the growing volume of research, several gaps remain within the dark tourism literature. Existing studies are often fragmented, focusing on specific destinations, themes, or methodological approaches. Comprehensive assessments of the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and collaborative patterns of dark tourism research are still limited. Moreover, most reviews remain narrative or thematic in nature, lacking systematic mapping of scholarly production over time. Addressing these gaps requires integrative approaches that combine systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis to provide a holistic overview of how dark tourism research has developed, diversified, and matured within the global academic landscape.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis to examine the development and structure of dark tourism research within scholarly publications and to reveal the bibliometric profile of this research domain. In several references, this combined methodological approach is referred to as Systematic Literature Network Analysis (SLNA). Previous researchers have applied SLNA to identify research trends by integrating a systematic literature review (Newman & Gough, 2020) with bibliographic analysis (BA) (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

In this context, the SLR component of the study followed the PRISMA model guidelines (Moher, 2009), which outline a systematic process of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of sources, as illustrated in Figure 1. The bibliometric analysis component was employed to identify research patterns, examine publication trends, and visualise metadata related to dark tourism studies, including co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, and institutional collaboration structures.

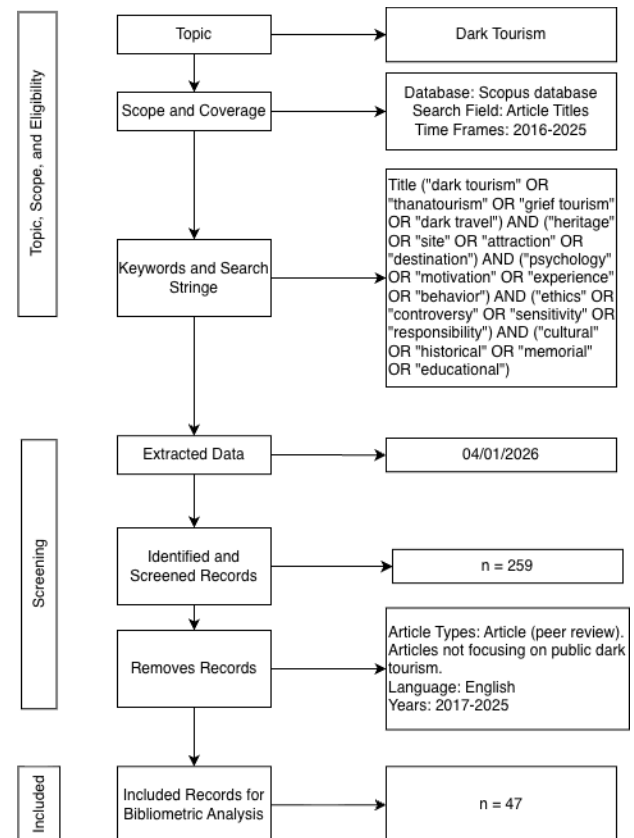


Figure 1 Diagram of the PRISMA. PRISMA, preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses

#### 3.2 Data Search and Identification

The data for this study were obtained from the Scopus database, accessed on 4 January 2026. The dataset consisted of peer reviewed journal articles published over the last ten years from 2017 to 2025 that examined dark tourism as a research topic. Scopus was selected as the primary data source because it is Elsevier's abstract and citation database, launched in 2004, and is widely recognised as one of the most comprehensive academic databases used in international scholarly research. Articles indexed in Scopus generally undergo a rigorous peer review process, ensuring the quality,

credibility, and reliability of the data used in this study.

To identify publications relevant to the study objectives, the search was conducted using the following keyword string: ("dark tourism" OR "thanatourism" OR "grief tourism" OR "dark travel") AND ("heritage" OR "site" OR "attraction" OR "destination") AND ("psychology" OR "motivation" OR "experience" OR "behavior") AND ("ethics" OR "controversy" OR "sensitivity" OR "responsibility") AND ("cultural" OR "historical" OR "memorial" OR "educational"). These keywords were selected to capture a broad yet focused range of literature addressing dark tourism from multiple perspectives, including destination characteristics, visitor motivation and experience, ethical considerations, and cultural and historical contexts.

The search was conducted within the "topic" category in Scopus, covering titles, abstracts, and keywords, to ensure comprehensive retrieval of relevant studies. Inclusion and exclusion criteria, as

presented in Table 1, were applied to refine the dataset. Only peer reviewed journal articles written in English and directly related to dark tourism were included, while conference proceedings, editorials, book chapters, reviews, and unrelated studies were excluded.

After finalising the dataset, all bibliographic information was exported in CSV format for further processing. The data were analysed using VOSviewer to generate bibliometric visualisations, including co authorship networks, keyword co occurrence maps, and country collaboration patterns. Additional analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel for data cleaning and descriptive statistics, Publish or Perish software to validate citation counts and impact metrics, Scholarcy for structured content summarisation, and EdrawMax for the preparation of charts and diagrams. The results are presented in the form of tables, figures, and thematic visualisations to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the structure and development of dark tourism research

Table 1 Inclusion–exclusion criteria

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Topic relevance	Articles that examine dark tourism, including thanatourism, grief tourism, or dark travel, in relation to heritage, destinations, visitor motivation, experience, ethical considerations, cultural representation, or historical interpretation.	Articles unrelated to dark tourism; studies focused solely on general tourism, leisure travel, hospitality management, or heritage studies without any connection to death, tragedy, or commemorative contexts.
Document type	Peer reviewed journal articles.	Conference papers, editorials, book chapters, review articles, dissertations, working papers, and news articles.
Language	English language publications.	Non English publications.
Timeframe	Publications from 2017 to 2025.	Publications outside the designated timeframe.
Indexing	Documents indexed in Scopus.	Documents not indexed in Scopus.
Accessibility of data	Articles with accessible abstracts and bibliographic metadata sufficient for screening and analysis.	Articles lacking abstracts or essential bibliographic information.

### 3.3 Statistical Analysis

In this study, the 10 most influential publications on dark tourism were examined in detail according to their research focus, journals of publication, contributing institutions, key concepts, analytical approaches, methodological designs, and suggested directions for future research. The bibliometric analysis followed the principles of bibliometric theory, applying mathematical and statistical methods to analyse relevant literature across diverse fields related to dark tourism, including tourism studies, cultural studies, psychology, and heritage research (Adams, 2009; Budd, 1988; Diem & Wolter, 2013).

This study utilised VOSviewer software version 1.6.16 to perform the bibliographic analysis. VOSviewer is a freely available computer program designed to construct and visualise bibliometric maps. Compared with other bibliometric mapping tools, VOSviewer places particular emphasis on producing accessible and interpretable graphical representations of large bibliometric datasets (van Eck & Waltman, 2017).

The features of VOSviewer were especially useful for visualising the metadata of dark tourism publications, including analyses of bibliographic coupling, co authorship networks, and co citation relationships. This enabled an in depth examination of collaboration patterns among authors, thematic linkages across research topics, and the interconnections among key concepts within the dark tourism research landscape.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dark tourism is closely associated with the ways societies engage with death, tragedy, and difficult heritage, and it plays an important role in shaping cultural memory, visitor experience, and ethical reflection. The dynamics of dark tourism are influenced by multiple factors, including historical context, cultural values, modes of interpretation, and the psychological motivations of visitors. Previous studies suggest that engagement with dark tourism sites is not merely driven by curiosity, but also by educational intentions, commemoration, and a desire to understand past suffering. As observed across various destinations, the meaning and impact of dark tourism are shaped not only by site characteristics but also by the narratives presented and the involvement of local communities, heritage institutions, and tourism stakeholders.

Over the past decade, research on dark tourism has expanded beyond early descriptive discussions of

macabre attractions to include more critical and interdisciplinary perspectives. Contemporary studies increasingly address visitor motivation, emotional experience, ethical responsibility, and issues of representation and authenticity. This development reflects a growing recognition that dark tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon requiring insights from tourism studies, psychology, cultural studies, heritage management, and ethic.

The findings of the bibliometric and systematic literature review conducted in this study reveal clear publication patterns, emerging thematic trends, leading journals, contributing countries, institutional affiliations, and commonly applied methodological approaches within dark tourism scholarship. These patterns were analysed in relation to the research questions and objectives established earlier.

Figure 2 illustrates the research trends in dark tourism studies from 2017 to 2025, presenting both the number of publications (Documents) and the average citations per year (MeanTCperYear).

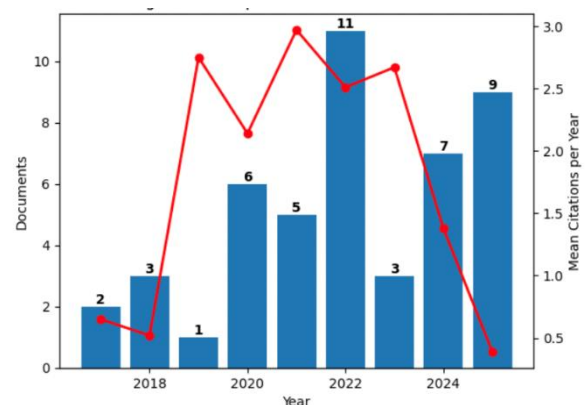


Figure 2 The publication data in 2017–2025 with the number of documents and MeanTCperYear

The data indicate that the number of publications on dark tourism shows an overall upward trend from 2017 to 2025, although with noticeable year-to-year fluctuations. In 2017, only two documents were published, followed by three documents in 2018 and a decline to one document in 2019. A more substantial increase is observed in 2020, with six publications, and this level of scholarly output remains relatively stable in 2021 with five documents. The most significant growth occurs in 2022, when the number of publications reaches eleven documents, before declining to three documents in 2023. Publication activity rises again in the most recent years, with seven documents published in 2024 and reaching a peak of nine

documents in 2025. This pattern indicates a growing and sustained academic interest in dark tourism research, particularly after 2020.

Regarding citation impact, the MeanTCperYear values vary considerably across the observed period. The highest average citation rate is recorded in 2021, with a MeanTCperYear value of 2.97, suggesting that publications from this year achieved the strongest scholarly influence. High citation averages are also observed in 2019, with a MeanTCperYear of 2.75, and in 2023, with a value of 2.67, indicating that studies published during these years addressed themes of notable relevance within dark tourism scholarship. In contrast, lower MeanTCperYear values are found in 2017 (0.65), 2018 (0.52), and 2025 (0.39), which can be attributed to the limited volume of publications and the shorter time span available for citation accumulation in more recent years.

Despite these fluctuations, the overall trend demonstrates an increasing academic engagement with dark tourism topics. The rise in publication numbers after 2019 reflects the steady expansion of research interest, while variations in citation averages suggest differences in the immediate scholarly impact of individual studies depending on their thematic focus and timing.

In summary, these results highlight that dark tourism research is both expanding and diversifying. The field shows increasing attention to interdisciplinary approaches that integrate tourism studies, psychology, cultural studies, and heritage research. This growth provides a solid foundation for future studies to further examine ethical concerns, visitor motivations, and the role of dark tourism in shaping cultural memory and educational practices.

#### *4.1 Can dark tourism contribute to sustainable cultural understanding and ethical engagement?*

Dark tourism, particularly when framed within heritage interpretation and ethical tourism practices, plays a significant role in shaping visitor perceptions, collective memory, and cultural understanding of past tragedies. Rather than functioning solely as a form of niche tourism, dark tourism has increasingly been recognised as a medium through which societies negotiate meaning, responsibility, and remembrance. Research suggests that well-managed dark tourism sites can contribute to educational outcomes, reflective engagement, and ethical awareness, thereby fostering more responsible forms of tourism consumption and heritage appreciation (Gardiner, 2022).

Several studies emphasise that dark tourism should not be understood merely as the consumption of sites associated with death, but as a complex social and cultural practice shaped by narratives, emotions, and power relations. For instance, Mangwane (2019) highlights how dark tourism experiences are embedded in local cultural contexts and postcolonial dynamics, influencing how histories of suffering are represented and interpreted. Similarly, Craig Wight (2020) demonstrates that visitor engagement at dark tourism sites is closely linked to authenticity, emotional intensity, and the perceived legitimacy of interpretative frameworks.

From a heritage perspective, dark tourism has been shown to intersect with issues of memory politics, identity construction, and place-making. Wyatt (2021) illustrates how heritage interpretation at dark tourism sites can mediate between commemoration and tourism development, while Tibergien (2022) further argues that spatial narratives and geographical context play a crucial role in shaping visitors' ethical and emotional responses. These findings suggest that dark tourism operates not only at the level of individual experience but also within broader cultural and spatial systems.

Ethical considerations remain central to dark tourism scholarship. Čakar (2020) and Šuligoj (2022) underline the importance of responsible management practices, particularly in relation to commodification, sensitivity toward affected communities, and the risk of trivialising suffering. Their findings indicate that ethical tensions emerge when economic objectives overshadow commemorative and educational purposes, reinforcing the need for governance frameworks that prioritise respect, accuracy, and inclusivity.

More recent contributions further expand the scope of dark tourism research by examining contemporary visitor behaviour and emotional engagement. Dresler (2023) explores how visitor motivations and affective responses evolve in response to changing social contexts, while Wyatt (2024) demonstrates that emotional immersion and reflective meaning-making are key determinants of visitor satisfaction and learning outcomes. These studies collectively suggest that dark tourism experiences are increasingly shaped by psychological and experiential dimensions rather than purely site-based attributes.

In addition, MacCarthy (2021) highlights the managerial implications of dark tourism for destination planning and stakeholder coordination,

emphasising the need to balance visitor demand with ethical responsibility and community interests. This reinforces the view that dark tourism functions as a multi-actor system involving heritage managers, tourism authorities, local communities, and visitors.

Table 2 presents the ten most cited publications in dark tourism research, summarising their key concepts, methodological approaches, scholarly contributions, and proposed directions for

future research. Taken together, these studies underscore the importance of interdisciplinary approaches that integrate tourism studies, heritage research, psychology, and ethics. The findings suggest that when managed responsibly, dark tourism can contribute not only to tourism development but also to deeper cultural understanding, ethical reflection, and sustainable heritage practices.

Table 1 The 10 most cited publications on Dark Tourism (2017–2025)

References	Cites	Titles	Key concepts	Methods	Scholarly highlights	Future research
(Gardiner, Vada, Yang, Khoo, & Le, 2022)	57	Recreating history: The evolving negotiation of staged authenticity in tourism experiences	Dark tourism; ethics; moral gaze; visitor engagement	Qualitative analysis of visitor narratives and site interpretation	Demonstrates how ethical framing shapes visitor reflection and moral responsibility	Examine ethical interpretation across different cultural and geographical contexts
(Craig Wight, 2020)	56	Visitor perceptions of European Holocaust Heritage: A social media analysis	Authenticity; emotional experience; dark tourism motivation	Mixed-method approach combining surveys and qualitative interviews	Shows that perceived authenticity intensifies emotional and reflective visitor experiences	Explore digital mediation of authenticity in dark tourism sites
(Wyatt, Leask, & Barron, 2021)	46	Interpreting difficult heritage: Dark tourism and memorial landscapes	Heritage interpretation; memorialisation; difficult heritage	Qualitative case studies of heritage sites	Highlights the role of interpretation in balancing commemoration and tourism development	Comparative studies of memorial interpretation across regions
(Çakar, 2020)	28	Investigation of the Motivations and Experiences of Tourists Visiting the Gallipoli Peninsula as a Dark Tourism Destination	Ethics; commodification; responsible tourism	Conceptual analysis supported by empirical examples	Identifies tensions between commercialisation and ethical responsibility	Develop governance frameworks for ethical dark tourism management
(Mangwane, Hermann, & Lenhard, 2019)	22	Who visits the apartheid museum and why? An exploratory study of the motivations to visit a	Postcolonialism; cultural representation; dark heritage	Qualitative interviews and narrative analysis	Reveals how power relations shape dark tourism narratives in	Examine local community perspectives in

References	Cites	Titles	Key concepts	Methods	Scholarly highlights	Future research
		dark tourism site in South Africa			postcolonial contexts	dark tourism destinations
(Šuligoj & Kennell, 2022)	18	The role of dark commemorative and sport events in peaceful coexistence in the Western Balkans	Sustainable tourism; responsibility; heritage management	Case study analysis of heritage destinations	Emphasises sustainability as a core principle in dark tourism governance	Integrate sustainability indicators into dark tourism policy evaluation
(Dresler, 2023)	16	Multiplicity of moral emotions in educational dark tourism	Visitor emotion; experience design; affective tourism	Quantitative survey and experiential analysis	Shows how emotional intensity influences learning and visitor satisfaction	Longitudinal studies on emotional impact of dark tourism visits
(Tiberghien & Lennon, 2022)	16	Managing authenticity and performance in Gulag Tourism, Kazakhstan	Tourism geography; spatial narratives; place-making	Qualitative spatial and interpretive analysis	Demonstrates how geographical context shapes meaning-making processes	Explore spatial storytelling through digital and immersive technologies
(Wyatt, Leask, & Barron, 2024)	13	Designing dark tourism experiences: an exploration of edutainment interpretation at lighter dark visitor attractions	Emotional immersion; learning; visitor behaviour	Structural equation modelling	Establishes links between emotion, reflection, and educational outcomes	Test model across different types of dark tourism sites
(MacCarthy, 2021)	13	Using Dialectic Thematic Analysis in dark tourism: Combining deductive and inductive reasoning in a modular method	Destination management; stakeholders; ethics	Qualitative stakeholder interviews	Highlights the role of coordination among managers, communities, and visitors	Investigate participatory governance models in dark tourism management

#### 4.2 The analysis of the most contributive countries with the highest number of publications on dark tourism

The thematic trend developing in the top contributing countries to dark tourism research was analysed and is presented in detail in Table 3 and Figure 3. This analysis highlights the geographical distribution of scholarly output and citation impact within the field of dark tourism studies.

Table 3 indicates that several countries are actively engaged in producing publications related to dark tourism, although the volume of publications and citation impact varies considerably across regions. The United Kingdom emerges as the leading contributor, with a total of 19 publications and 114 citations, indicating both high productivity and strong scholarly influence. Japan ranks second in terms of publication output with 10 articles; however, these publications have not yet accumulated citations, which may reflect their recent publication dates or limited international visibility.

Indonesia contributes 9 publications with a total of 4 citations, demonstrating a growing academic interest in dark tourism within Southeast Asia. China follows closely with 8 publications but no recorded citations, suggesting that while research activity is increasing, its global academic impact remains limited at this stage. Spain contributes 7 publications with 14 citations, reflecting moderate productivity and citation performance.

Australia stands out in terms of citation impact relative to its publication volume, producing 6 publications that have accumulated 70 citations. This indicates that Australian contributions to dark tourism research are particularly influential within the scholarly community. Romania contributes 5 publications with a total of 1 citation, while the United States produces 4 publications with 6 citations.

Hungary and the Philippines each contribute 3 publications. Hungary records 1 citation, whereas the Philippines achieves a higher citation count of 11, suggesting stronger visibility and impact despite similar publication output. Overall, these findings reveal an uneven distribution of scholarly influence across countries, where higher publication volume does not necessarily correspond to higher citation impact.

In summary, the geographical distribution of dark tourism research demonstrates both concentration and diversity. While European and Asia-Pacific countries dominate in terms of

publication output, citation impact varies significantly, highlighting differences in research visibility, journal placement, and thematic relevance. These patterns suggest opportunities for greater international collaboration and comparative research to enhance the global development of dark tourism scholarship.

Table 2 Top Contributing Countries in Dark Tourism Research

Countries	Total Publications	Total Citations
UK	19	114
JAPAN	10	0
INDONESIA	9	4
CHINA	8	0
SPAIN	7	14
AUSTRALIA	6	70
ROMANIA	5	1
USA	4	6
HUNGARY	3	1
PHILIPPINES	3	11

The networks of countries contributing to dark tourism research are presented in Figure 3. The results indicate that scholarly contributions originate from a diverse range of countries, reflecting the international scope of dark tourism as a research field. Countries with higher publication output and citation impact tend to occupy more central positions within the collaboration network, suggesting stronger international visibility and research connectivity.

The United Kingdom emerges as a key contributor, reflecting both a high volume of publications and substantial citation impact, which positions it as an important hub in the global dark tourism research network. Australia also demonstrates a strong presence, particularly in terms of citation influence, indicating that its scholarly contributions resonate widely within international academic discourse. Spain and the United States show moderate levels of engagement, contributing to the diffusion of dark tourism research across different geographical contexts.

Several Asian countries, including Japan, Indonesia, China, and the Philippines, are increasingly represented within the research

landscape. Although some of these countries display lower citation counts or more limited collaborative reach, their growing publication output suggests emerging participation in international dark tourism scholarship. This pattern points to opportunities for expanded cross-national collaboration, particularly between established research centres in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

Overall, the collaboration network highlights an uneven distribution of international

research linkages, where countries with strong publication and citation performance are more centrally connected, while others remain on the periphery. These findings suggest considerable potential for strengthening international collaboration in dark tourism research, especially through comparative studies and joint projects that bridge regions with differing research capacities and thematic priorities

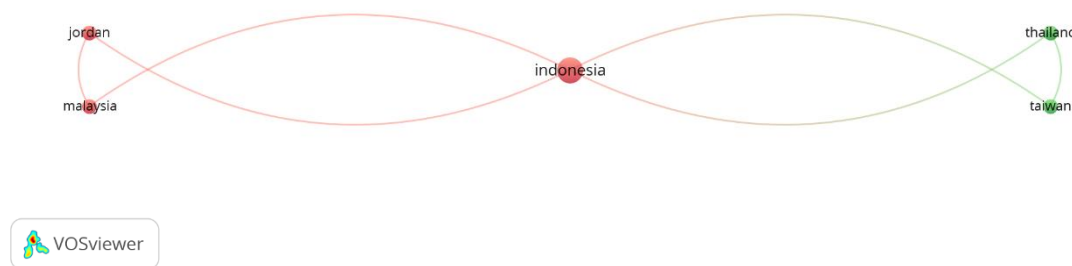


Figure 3 Co-occurrence network of the most contributive countries

Recent trends illustrated in Figure 3 show that Indonesia occupies a central position within the international co-occurrence network, indicating its role as a key connecting country among several regional partners. The strongest collaborative links are observed between Indonesia and neighboring or regionally proximate countries such as Malaysia, Jordan, Thailand, and Taiwan. This pattern suggests that research collaboration in this field is currently more regionally clustered rather than globally dispersed.

The visualization highlights the importance of regional academic networks in shaping research output, particularly within Southeast Asia and its adjacent regions. Countries such as Malaysia and Jordan form a closely connected cluster with Indonesia, while Thailand and Taiwan appear linked through another collaborative pathway, reflecting emerging cross-regional research interactions. However, the limited number of nodes and connections also indicates that international collaboration remains relatively concentrated and has not yet expanded extensively to a broader global scale.

Overall, these findings underscore the strategic role of Indonesia as a regional hub in this research field, while also pointing to the need for wider international engagement beyond regional partnerships. Strengthening collaboration with countries outside the immediate regional network

could contribute to greater knowledge exchange, higher citation impact, and a more inclusive global research landscape in the future.

Figure 4 presents a density visualization map of the most contributive institutions generated using VOSviewer. The map highlights several institutional hotspots, indicated by areas with higher color intensity, which represent institutions with a relatively higher frequency of publications and stronger research presence in this field. Among the most prominent institutions are the Asian Institute of Tourism, Universitas Indonesia, the College of Tourism and Hospitality, and the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at De La Salle University.

The concentration of bright areas suggests that institutional contributions are unevenly distributed, with a limited number of universities acting as major knowledge hubs. These institutions appear to play a central role in shaping research output and academic collaboration, particularly within the tourism, hospitality, and sustainability-related dimensions of dark tourism. Conversely, the surrounding lower-density areas indicate the presence of other institutions with more limited publication output or weaker collaborative intensity.

Overall, this density map illustrates that research on dark tourism is driven by a core group of highly productive institutions, while broader institutional participation remains relatively dispersed. This pattern points to opportunities for

expanding inter-institutional collaboration and strengthening research capacity across a wider range

of universities to foster a more inclusive and interconnected academic network in future studies.

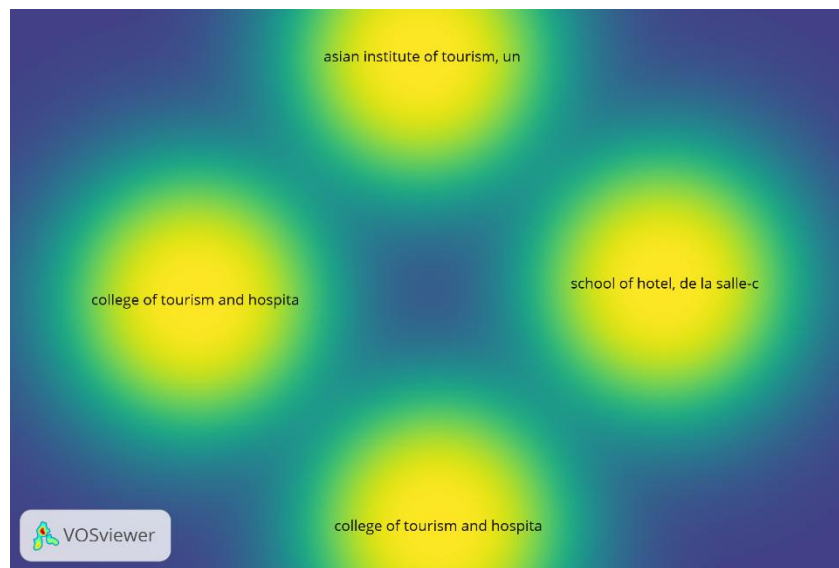


Figure 4 Density visualization map of the most contributive institutions

Figure 5 presents the most contributive institutions based on total publications in this research field. Chiba University emerges as the leading institution with 8 publications, followed by Jinan University with 7 publications. Griffith Business School ranks third, contributing 5 publications. Institutions with a moderate level of contribution include Edinburgh Napier University Business School and President University, each with 4 publications. Meanwhile, Pukyong National University and Tshwane University of Technology each recorded 3 publications, indicating a growing institutional engagement in this area.

Finally, Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios, Duquesne University, and Edinburgh Napier University each contributed 2 publications, reflecting emerging but still limited institutional participation. Overall, the distribution illustrates that research output is concentrated in a small number of institutions, while broader institutional involvement remains fragmented, suggesting opportunities for expanded collaboration and knowledge production in future studie

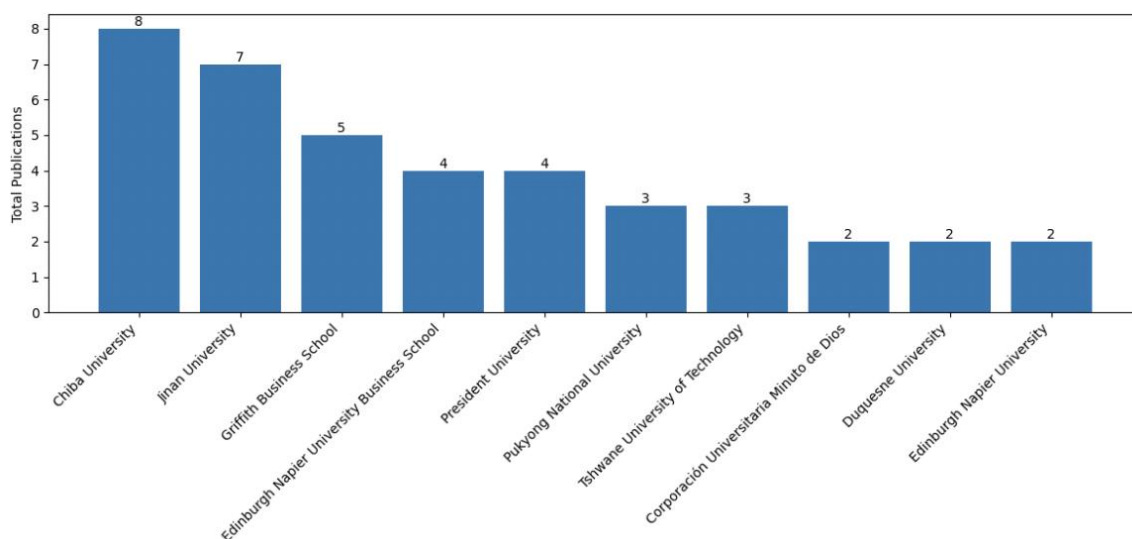


Figure 5 Most contributive institutions

It is important to note that the number of documents produced by an institution is not always directly proportional to its citation impact. While institutions such as Chiba University and Jinan University lead in terms of publication volume, other institutions with fewer documents may still achieve notable scholarly visibility through highly cited individual articles. This pattern indicates that research influence in dark tourism is shaped not only by productivity but also by the relevance, quality, and timing of publications.

These trends suggest that even institutions with a relatively limited number of publications can strengthen their academic reputation and position themselves as important contributors within the field. Overall, the global landscape of dark tourism research reflects a combination of established institutional leadership and emerging centers of excellence, highlighting the potential for growth through broader, more inclusive international and inter-institutional collaboration.

#### 4.3 A contribution analysis of the journals publishing dark tourism studies

Another important aspect of this study concerns the contribution of academic journals that publish research on dark tourism within their respective thematic scopes. The analysis identifies a diverse set of journals that have served as publication outlets for dark tourism scholarship, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field, particularly its intersections with tourism management, cultural studies, geography, and sustainability.

Table 4 Leading Journals Publishing Dark Tourism Studies

SOURCE	TC	TP
ANNALS OF TOURISM RESEARCH	11	2
TOURISM GEOGRAPHIES	27	2
TOURISM MANAGEMENT	113	2
ACADEMICA TURISTICA	3	1
ENLIGHTENING TOURISM	2	1
EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF TOURISM RESEARCH	28	1
GEOJOURNAL OF TOURISM AND GEOSITES	2	1
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CUBAN STUDIES	1	1
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CULTURE, TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY RESEARCH	22	1
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND PUBLIC HEALTH	12	1

As presented in Table 4, publications on dark tourism are distributed across several leading tourism and hospitality journals. Tourism Management emerges as the most influential source in terms of citation impact, recording the highest total citations (TC = 113) despite publishing only two articles (TP = 2). This indicates that articles published in this journal tend to achieve substantial scholarly visibility and influence. Other prominent journals include Tourism Geographies (TC = 27; TP = 2) and the European Journal of Tourism Research (TC = 28; TP = 1), both of which demonstrate strong citation performance relative to their publication volume.

Several journals contribute to the field through single but impactful publications, such as the International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research (TC = 22; TP = 1) and the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (TC = 12; TP = 1). Meanwhile, Annals of Tourism Research, although publishing only two articles (TP = 2), also contributes to the academic discourse with a total of 11 citations, underscoring its role as a reputable outlet for theoretically grounded tourism research.

Overall, the distribution of publications suggests that dark tourism research is well integrated into high-impact tourism journals, even when the number of published articles remains relatively limited. This pattern highlights the importance of journal quality and disciplinary fit over sheer publication quantity. Future dark tourism research would benefit from targeting established tourism and hospitality journals with strong citation performance to enhance research visibility, scholarly impact, and cross-disciplinary engagement.

#### 4.4 Analysis of thematic trends of publications on dark tourism

Thematic analysis of publications plays a crucial role in this study because examining thematic trends in dark tourism research allows scholars to identify research directions, assess novelty, and connect multiple interdisciplinary perspectives. By analysing keyword co occurrence networks, researchers are able to select relevant themes and research objects, clarify scholarly contributions, and support the advancement of knowledge within the field of dark tourism. Given the multidimensional nature of dark tourism, which intersects tourism studies, heritage research, psychology, and ethics, thematic mapping provides an important foundation for understanding how the field has evolved over time.

Figure 6 presents an overview of the author keywords identified in the dataset. This analysis is based on keywords selected by the authors, under the assumption that these terms best represent the research focus and expertise of the contributing scholars. The co-occurrence network reveals several thematic clusters, with the keyword dark tourism occupying a central position, indicating its function as the main conceptual node connecting diverse research themes.

One major cluster is centred on keywords such as thanatourism, memorial landscape, death, and cultural tourism. This cluster reflects the continued prominence of heritage oriented and commemorative perspectives within dark tourism research. Studies within this thematic area focus on how sites associated with death and suffering are interpreted, represented, and integrated into cultural and historical narratives. The presence of terms such as discourse analysis and fear suggest an increasing scholarly interest in interpretative processes and emotional responses, rather than solely in site classification or typology.

Another prominent cluster highlights keywords related to motivation, affect, and authenticity. This thematic grouping indicates a growing emphasis on visitor psychology and experiential dimensions of dark tourism. Research in this area seeks to understand why tourists are drawn

to sites of tragedy and how emotional engagement influences meaning making, ethical reflection, and learning outcomes. The appearance of location specific keywords, including Auschwitz, Berlin, Con Dao, and references to Filipino culture, demonstrates that empirical studies remain strongly grounded in case based and place specific contexts, often linked to national memory and post conflict narratives.

A further cluster is associated with digital memorials and edutainment, pointing to an emerging research direction that examines the role of digital technologies and mediated interpretation in dark tourism experiences. This thematic development reflects broader transformations in tourism communication and heritage presentation, where digital platforms increasingly shape visitor engagement, narrative construction, and commemorative practices.

Figure 7 provides a temporal overlay analysis of index keywords, in which node colours represent the average year of publication and node sizes indicate the frequency of keyword occurrence. Earlier studies, represented by darker blue tones, primarily focused on foundational concepts such as thanatourism, heritage tourism, and visitor motivations. This phase reflects the initial consolidation of the field through definitional clarification and behavioural exploration.

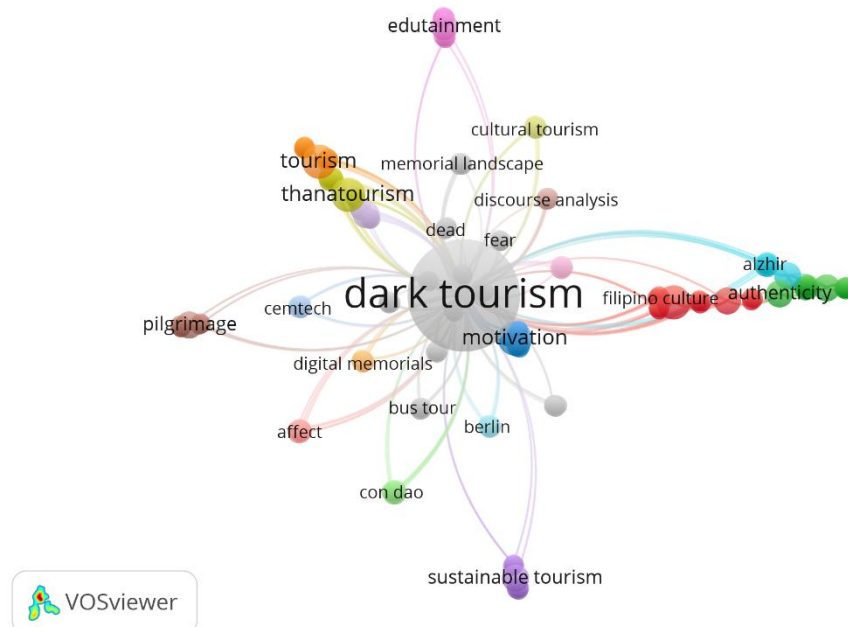


Figure 6 Co-occurrence networks of research themes based on author keywords

Studies published during the middle period, shown in green tones, increasingly addressed themes such as *tourist behaviour*, *tourism development*, and *cross cultural validation*. This shift indicates a broadening of methodological approaches and an expansion of theoretical perspectives within dark tourism scholarship. More recent studies,

highlighted in yellow tones, place greater emphasis on *sustainable tourism*, *behavioural intention*, *digital memorialisation*, and *cross modal experiences*. These trends suggest a growing alignment between dark tourism research and contemporary concerns related to sustainability, ethics, and technological mediation.

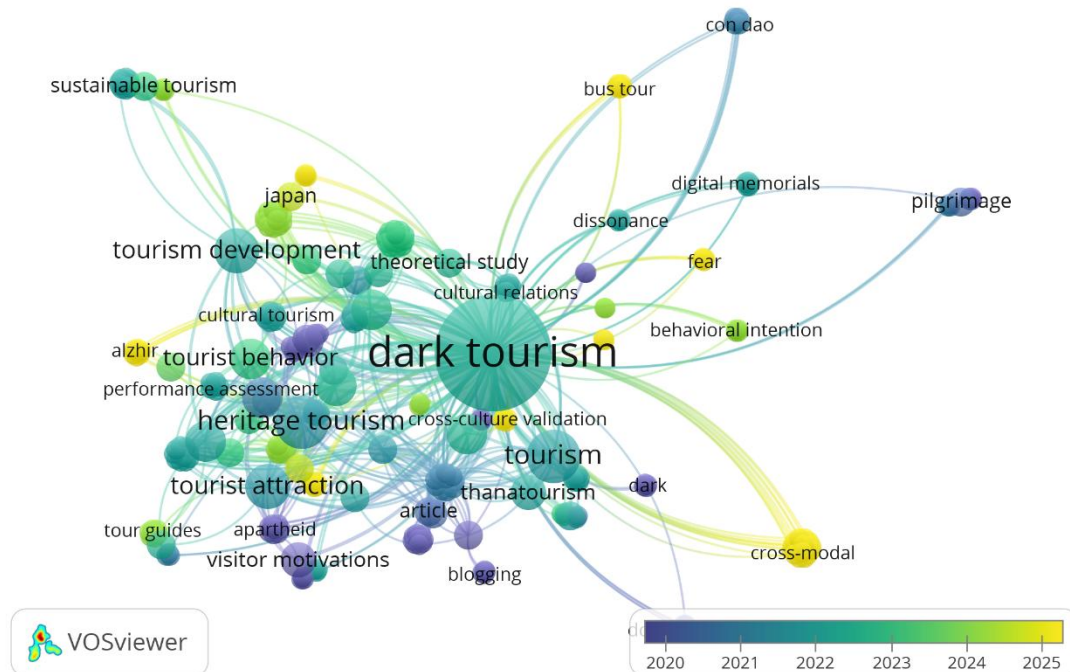


Figure 7 Co-occurrence networks of research themes based on index keyword

Overall, the keyword co occurrence analysis demonstrates that dark tourism research has developed from an early focus on site based and definitional issues towards a more interdisciplinary and reflexive field of inquiry. Current scholarship increasingly integrates psychological, cultural, ethical, and technological perspectives, positioning dark tourism as a complex social practice rather than a marginal tourism phenomenon. These findings highlight substantial opportunities for future research that further connects dark tourism with sustainability studies, digital communication, and critical heritage scholarship, thereby enhancing both theoretical depth and practical relevance.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This article presents a systematic literature network analysis of dark tourism research. Using the Scopus database, it provides a comprehensive overview of scholarly developments and offers a structured roadmap for future research in this field. While a

substantial body of literature has examined dark tourism from conceptual, experiential, and ethical perspectives, relatively few studies have mapped its intellectual structure through an integrated bibliometric and systematic review approach. This study addresses that gap by analysing publication trends, thematic patterns, and collaborative networks within dark tourism scholarship from 2017 to 2025.

The systematic review of the ten most influential articles reveals a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches. These studies address themes such as visitor motivation, emotional engagement, authenticity, ethical responsibility, heritage interpretation, and destination management. Despite their diversity, a shared insight emerges: dark tourism is a complex social and cultural practice that extends beyond site visitation and requires careful negotiation between commemoration, education, and tourism development. The literature consistently emphasises that responsible dark tourism depends on ethical

interpretation, sensitivity to affected communities, and meaningful engagement with historical narratives.

The keyword co occurrence analysis highlights the dominant and emerging research themes within the field, including thanatourism, memorial landscapes, visitor behaviour, sustainability, and digital memorialisation. These thematic clusters provide valuable direction for future research by indicating areas of consolidation as well as topics that are gaining increasing scholarly attention. In parallel, the author based bibliographic coupling network illustrates the global knowledge structure of dark tourism research, identifying key contributing countries, institutions, and collaborative patterns. The findings demonstrate that while research output is growing across regions, scholarly influence remains uneven, suggesting the need for stronger international and cross regional collaboration.

By integrating bibliometric mapping with thematic analysis, this study traces the evolution of dark tourism research over the past decade and offers practical insights for advancing the field. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of how dark tourism scholarship has developed and where future research efforts may be most productively directed. Overall, this study provides a foundation for further theoretical refinement, evidence based policy development, and responsible tourism practices that recognise dark tourism as an important medium for cultural memory, ethical reflection, and social learning.

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