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ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:
Most governments, local organizations, tourism agents, and scholars have extensively promoted ecotourism in recent years. However, government policies have been ignored, public opinion has not been updated, the local tourism infrastructure is incomplete, and operational practices have been poor for a long time. This is because ecotourism has not made any empirical profits, and additionally, it has even incurred more practical costs, which have encouraged few tourism agents to execute and operate ecotourism correctly. The contributive findings of this study are the following: (1) Beyond the evaluated measurements of quantitative and qualitative analyses, the sustainable development of ecotourism essentially creates benefits for the local industry and the environment, and actively assists the industry in improving the business environment, in enhancing service quality, and in creating ecotourism benefits. (2) It is very apparent that the tourism offices of central and local governments, as well as related travel agents and local organizations, have to be trained with regard to the appropriate consumption of sightseeing products, with a consideration of productive yield and a critical focus on quality instead of quantity.

Keywords: sustainable development of global ecotourism; environmental education concepts; social cognition theory (SCT); environment society governance (ESG).

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism, which has appeared in academic literature since the late 1980s, is a special form of nature-based tourism that maintains the well-being of the local community while protecting the environment and provides tourists with a satisfying nature experience and enjoyment (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996; Higgins, 1996; Orams, 1995). With years of research and development, ecotourism has risen to be a subject of investigation in the field of tourism research (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). In 2002, the United Nations declared it the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE), and the professional Journal of Ecotourism was established in the same year.

With the progress and maturity of ecotourism as an academic research field, countless scholars have put forward standards and definitions for ecotourism (Sirakaya et al., 1999; Wight, 1993). The main objectives of ecotourism emphasize long-term sustainable development (Whitelaw et al., 2014), including the conservation of natural resources, the generation of economic income, education, local participation and the promotion of social benefits such as local economic development and infrastructure (Ardoin et al., 2015; Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Krüger, 2005; Oladeji et al., 2021; Ross & Wall, 1999; Valdivieso et al., 2015). It can also boost rural economies and alleviate poverty in developing countries (Snyman, 2017; Zhong & Liu, 2017).

With unrestricted increasing attention to the ecological environment and the improvement of environmental awareness, ecotourism is becoming ever more prevalent, and the demand for tourism is increasing year by year (CREST, 2019). This increase, however, leads to a number of environmental,

social and economic challenges in the development of ecotourism. For example, due to the low public awareness of ecotourism, the increase in tourists has brought a series of negative impacts on the local ecological environment, culture and economy, including disrespect for local culture and environmental protection, as well as more infrastructure construction and economic burden to meet the needs of tourists (Ahmad et al., 2018; Chiu et al., 2014; Shasha et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020). Such challenges and contradictions are urgent problems to be tackled by the sustainable development of ecotourism. Especially against the backdrop of the current pandemic, tourism has experienced a severe blow, but climate change and other environmental issues have not been improved (CREST, 2020). In this context, facing these challenges and difficulties, it is essential to re-examine the future development path of ecotourism, to explore how government agencies can formulate appropriate management policies while preserving the environment and natural resources to support sustainable tourism development. Accordingly, it is necessary to consult literature in the field of ecotourism to understand the research progress and fundamental research issues, to identify challenges, suitable methods and future research direction of ecotourism.

Some previous reviews of ecotourism offer a preview of research trends in this rapidly developing area. Weaver and Lawton (2007) provide a comprehensive assessment of the current state and future progress of contemporary ecotourism research, starting with the supply and demand dichotomy of ecotourism, as well as fundamental areas such as quality control, industry, external environment and institutions. Ardoin et al. (2015) conducted a literature review, analyzing the influence of nature tourism on ecological knowledge, attitudes, behavior and potential research into the future. Niñerola et al. (2019) used the bibliometric method and VOSviewer to study the papers on sustainable development of tourism in Scopus from 1987 to 2018, including literature landscape and development trends. Shasha et al. (2020) used bibliometrics and social network analysis to review the research progress of ecotourism from 2001 to 2018 based on the Web of Science database using BibExcel and Gephi and explored the current hot spots and methods of ecotourism research. These reviews have provided useful information for ecotourism research at that time, but cannot reflect the latest research trends and emerging development of ecotourism either of timeliness, data integrity, research themes or methods.

This study aims to reveal the theme pattern, landmark articles and emerging trends in ecotourism knowledge landscape research from macro- to micro-perspectives. Unlike previous literature surveys, from timeliness, our dataset contains articles published between 2003 and 2021, and it will reveal more of the trends that have emerged over the last 3 years. Updating the rapidly developing literature is important as recent discoveries from different areas can fundamentally change collective knowledge (Chen et al., 2012, 2014a). To ensure data integrity, two bibliographic datasets were generated from Web of Science, including a core dataset using the topic search and an expanded dataset using the citation expansion method, which is more robust than defining rapidly growing fields using only keyword lists (Chen et al., 2014b). And from the research theme and method, our review focuses on the area of ecotourism and is instructed by a scientometric method conducted by CiteSpace, an analysis system for visualizing newly developing trends and key changes in scientific literature (Chen et al., 2012). Emerging trends are detected based on metrics calculated by CiteSpace, without human intervention or working knowledge of the subject matter (Chen et al., 2012). Choosing

this approach can cover a more extensive and diverse range of related topics and ensure repeatability of analysis with updated data (Chen et al., 2014b).

In addition, Shneider's four-stage theory will be used to interpret the results in this review. According to Shneider's four-stage theory of scientific discipline (Shneider, 2009), the development of a scientific discipline is divided into four stages. Stage I is the conceptualization stage, in which the objects and phenomena of a new discipline or research are established. Stage II is characterized by the development of research techniques and methods that allow researchers to investigate potential phenomena. As a result of methodological advances, there is a further understanding of objects and phenomena in the field of new subjects at this stage. Once the techniques and methods for specific purposes are available, the research enters Stage III, where the investigation is based primarily on the application of the new research method. This stage is productive, in which the research results have considerably enhanced the researchers' understanding of the research issues and disclosed some unknown phenomena, leading to interdisciplinary convergence or the emergence of new research directions or specialties. The last stage is Stage IV, whose particularity is to transform tacit knowledge into conditional knowledge and generalized knowledge, so as to maintain and transfer the scientific knowledge generated in the first three stages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scientometrics is a branch of informatics that involves quantitative analysis of scientific literature in order to capture emerging trends and knowledge structures in a particular area of study (Chen et al., 2012). Science mapping tools generate interactive visual representations of complex structures by feeding a set of scientific literature through scientometrics and visual analysis tools to highlight potentially important patterns and trends for statistical analysis and visualization exploration (Chen, 2017). At present, scientometrics is widely used in many fields of research, and there are also many kinds of scientific mapping software widely used by researchers and analysts, such as VosViewer, SCI2, HistCite, SciMAT, Gephi, Pajek and CiteSpace (Chen, 2011, 2017; Chen et al., 2012).

Among these tools, CiteSpace is known for its powerful literature co-citation analysis, and its algorithms and features are constantly being refined as it continues to evolve. CiteSpace is a citation visual analysis software developed under the background of scientometrics and data visualization to analyze the basics that are included in scientific analysis (Chen, 2017; Chen et al., 2012). It is specialized designed to satisfy the need for systematic review in rapidly changing complicated areas, particularly with the ability to identify and explain emerging trends and transition patterns (Chen et al., 2014a). It supports multiple types of bibliometric research, such as collaborative network analysis, co-word analysis, author co-citation analysis, document co-citation analysis, and temporal and spatial visualization (Chen, 2017). Currently, CiteSpace has been extensively used in more than 60 fields, including computer science, information science, management and medicine (Abad-Segura et al., 2019; Chen, 2017). In the process of data retrieval, it is frequently confronted with the choice between recall rate and precision rate. To address the problem of low recall rate in keyword or topic retrieval, Chen et al. (2014a, b) expanded the retrieval results through 'citation expansion' and 'comprehensive topic search' strategies. However, when the recall rate is high, the accuracy rate will decrease correspondingly. In practical standpoint, instead of refining and cleaning up the original search results, a simpler and more efficient way is to cluster or skip these unrelated branches. Priority should be placed on ensuring recall rate, and data integrity is more important than data for accuracy.

Therefore, two ecotourism documentation datasets, the core dataset and the expanded dataset, were obtained from the Web of Science by using comprehensive topic search and citation expansion method. The latter approach has been proved more robust than using keyword lists only to define fast-growing areas (Chen et al., 2014b). A key bibliographic landscape is generated based on the core dataset, followed by more thorough research of the expanded dataset.

The core dataset The core dataset was derived through comprehensive subject retrieval in Web of Science Core Collection. The literature type was selected as an article or review, and the language was English. The period spans 2003 to 2021. The topic search query is composed of three phrases of ecotourism: 'ecotour*' OR 'eco-tour*' OR 'ecological NEAR/5 tour*'. The wildcard * is used to capture related variants of words, for example, ecotour, ecotourism, ecotourist and ecotourists. The related records that are requested include finding these terms in the title, abstract or keywords. The query yielded 2991 original unique records.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

However, how can the interaction and mutual dependence of the triple balance among environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economically profitable growth be analyzed in global ecotourism? The triadic interaction of social learning theory (SLT) was employed to perform an in-depth and comprehensive evaluation of the stated interaction and mutual dependence of the triple balance elements in global ecotourism in order to induce what we call the most core sustainable development of ecotourism with environmental education concepts (MCSDEEC). The most important reason for this is that the SLT was created to analyze the triadic interaction of three essential aspects: personal cognition (PC)—individualism; personal action (PA)—behaviorism, and society identification (SI)—environmentalism. At present, the PC of the SLT conforms to the E of the ESG, matching the appraisement of the outcomes of environmental conservation due to the recent heightening of public awareness of the need for environmental conservation. The PA of the SLT corresponds to the S of the ESG, supporting the evaluation of the efforts in cultural preservation to maintain tourism. The SI of the SLT contains the G of the ESG, which deals with economically profitable growth with respect to maximal economic development under the natural restrictions of local tourism. Based on the created concept of the SLT, most human behaviors have resulted from environmental conditions. An in-depth and comprehensive discussion and evaluation can thus be performed on the sustainable development of global ecotourism by means of the sustainability of the ESG, and the triple interaction and mutual dependence of the SLT; in particular, an educational concept is included and considered in order to powerfully enhance the change in human behavior. This would directly enhance the triple balance in achieving the sustainable development of global ecotourism, as illustrated in Figure 1.

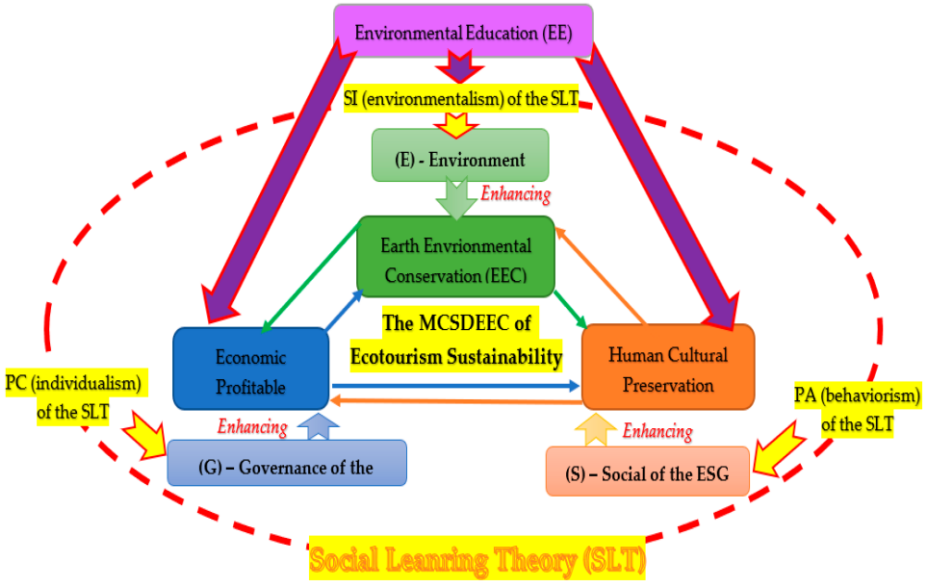

Figure 1. Main research concept.

In order to strengthen the research's validity, accuracy, and representativeness of large-scale questionnaires, factor analysis (FA), as employed in quantitative analysis, was firstly applied in order to assay large-scale weighted measurements. Subsequently, in consideration of the greater research reliability, exactness, and professional character of the experts' questionnaires, the analytical network process (ANP) in qualitative analysis was further employed to analyze the expert's weighted measurements. Specifically, this research creatively consolidated the measured consequences into the assessed measurements of the ANP of qualitative analysis in order to formulate the research topic: An Empirical Research on the Sustainable Development of Ecotourism with Environmental Education Concepts.

CONCLUSION

Most governments, local organizations, tourism agents, and scholars have promoted ecotourism in recent years. However, government policies have been ignored, public opinion has not been updated, local tourism infrastructure is incomplete, and operational practices have been poor for a long time, because ecotourism not only lacks empirical profits, but also involves more practical costs, which has resulted in only a few tourism agents being really willing to execute and operate ecotourism correctly. The support provided by the government to those who want to invest in the ecotourism industry does not include as much financial and policy support as that given to those who promote domestic mass tourism. This move has not only prevented the scale of Taiwanese ecotourism-related industries from being increased, but it has also caused the Taiwanese ecotourism industry to fail, largely due to the long-term neglect of Taiwanese ecotourism by relevant practitioners in tourism-related industries and by local residents. In order to actively create a win–win situation, with a triple balance among environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economically profitable growth in ecotourism, sustainable development is the only answer for the economy, community, tourism industry, government, and tourists in Taiwan. After a series of evaluated measurements, the three main findings of this study are as follows:

(1)Beyond the evaluated measurements of the quantitative and qualitative analyses, the sustainable development of ecotourism essentially creates benefits for the local industry and the environment, and actively assists the industry in improving the business environment and service quality and in creating ecotourism benefits;

(2)The highest weights of the CFQQ (0.1315), ACSP (0.0189), and DOTUTE (0.1026) of the G of the ESG and the RSRML of the E of the ESG were located in the CSK of the S of the ESG. This is very apparent, and suggests that the tourism offices of central and local governments, related travel agents, and local organizations have to be trained with regard to the appropriate consumption of sightseeing products, with a consideration of productive yield and a critical focus on quality without quantity.

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