Special Interest Tourism Research Trends in Indonesian Journals: A Review from Design to Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map the trends and characteristics of special interest tourism research in Indonesia in the period 2020–2024. The method used is content analysis with a focus on six main aspects: number of publications per year, type of research, research subjects, tourism topics studied, data collection instruments, and data analysis methods. Data were obtained through a systematic search on Google Scholar on April 26, 2025 using the keyword "special interest tourism." From approximately 104,000 initial results, after filtering based on year of publication and title relevance, 74 data were obtained, of which only 42 articles were fully accessible and 34 of them were used as research samples. The results show fluctuations in publication trends, with significant spikes in 2023 and 2024. Qualitative research dominates, while quantitative and mixed methods are still minimal. The most frequently used instruments are observation sheets and triangulation, while common data analysis techniques include SWOT and qualitative descriptive. Government and tourists emerged as the most research subjects, reflecting a focus on tourist policies and experiences. The topics studied are very diverse, ranging from tourist behavior, environmental conservation, tourist villages, to tourism product innovation. This study concludes that special interest tourism is increasingly in demand as a field of study, but the methodological approach still tends to be exploratory and descriptive. It is recommended to strengthen quantitative and mixed-method methods and expand the focus of research on policy, creative economy, and sustainability. These results are expected to be an initial reference for researchers and stakeholders in developing more comprehensive special interest tourism research in the future.

Keywords :
Data Analysis; Indonesian Tourism Journal; Research Trends; Special Interest Tourism; Tourism

A. INTRODUCTION

Special interest tourism (SIT) is a form of tourism that focuses on the motivations and special interests of tourists, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, and adventure tourism. Pradana et al., (2024) noted that 87.5% of tourists are interested in visiting SIT destinations, including nature tourism, camping, mountain climbing, forest exploration, tourist or traditional villages, and agrotourism. Interestingly, there has been a shift in the profile of tourists, where most SIT actors currently show similar characteristics to mass tourists who seek new experiences but still consider aspects of risk and comfort (Ma et al., 2020; Wulandari et al., 2022). In addition, research by Rosid (2021) shows that word of mouth (WOM) has a significant positive effect on perceived value and revisit intention, and WOM also directly influences tourists' revisit intentions. Furthermore, Br Ginting et al., (2023) found that tourist motivation and the quality of SIT destinations as independent variables have a fairly large influence, reaching 60.2%. By definition, SIT can be understood as a special form of tourism that focuses on a particular theme and is usually carried out privately by individuals who want to explore their interests (Abdullah & Syed Jaafar, 2021).

SIT has unique characteristics in the global tourism landscape because it focuses on the motivations, special interests, and personal experiences of tourists, which distinguishes it from mass tourism. Ingram et al., (2021) found that members of literary communities are more likely to visit literary-themed tourist destinations, especially if they are familiar with the related books or films, while general tourists are less likely to consider such backgrounds before visiting. In addition, tourists from literary communities also prefer independent travel over organized travel when traveling abroad. Meanwhile, research by Zakariya et al., (2020) which examined 58 buildings and locations showed that these places have the potential to attract the interest of built environment professionals through technical tour activities. Tourism experiences that are tailored to specific interests are considered to have a greater impact because they are in line with the needs of tourists. Based on a comprehensive bibliographic review and input from an expert panel, Pulido-Fernández et al., (2019) concluded that this tourism typology falls into the category of special interest tourism, which develops from three general types of tourism — namely rural, nature, and cultural tourism — and is closely related to various other specific forms of tourism. The study also revealed the existence of a connection with various activities and services that continue to develop, which further emphasizes the complexity of the characteristics of SIT. In addition, another potential of SIT is astrotourism, which is based on tourists' interest in sky-related activities, such as night sky observation and astrophotography, generally in the context of nature tourism (Soleimani et al., 2019).

The main problem in special interest tourism lies in the lack of in-depth understanding of tourist needs and the quality of destination management.

This is reflected in the history of special interest tourism in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s, where tourism promoters recognized the potential of mountain climbers, but the recreational practices that developed actually showed a politically imposed racial hierarchy. This shows that without inclusive management and a proper understanding of tourist characteristics, special interest tourism can reinforce existing social inequalities (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2024). Another obstacle is shown by Sumarmi et al., (2023) that the development of tourist areas has not been maximized where the development of the area needs to be carried out sustainably, starting with community participation, visitor training for environmental conservation, and training through Special Interest Tourism activities. (Luthfiah et al., 2023). Therefore, to meet the needs of tourists and optimize destination management, Oktavia & Heldayani, (2019) proposed a strategy for developing special interest tourism objects, namely a) completing and improving tourism facilities and infrastructure through iconic, instagrammable and tripadvisor according to digital trends, b) improving human resources based on the digital creative economy, c) increasing collaboration between the government and managers in developing tourism through sales missions, festivals/events and famtrips.

As an alternative solution, a literature review or systematic review is needed to trace and analyze the trend of SIT research in Indonesia, including research design patterns, use of instruments, analysis techniques, and research themes that appear in scientific articles in national journals. Through this approach, it is hoped that applicable recommendations can be formulated for academics and practitioners, so that in the future SIT research will not only focus on empirical themes but also strengthen the methodological foundation. In addition, the results of this study can also be a guide for novice researchers to choose the right research approach according to the topic being studied.

Previous studies have discussed various topics related to SIT, ranging from tourist motivation or behaviour, economic and social impacts, culture, to the sustainability of special interest tourism destinations (Wijaya et al., 2024; Pranita et al., 2020; Nair & Mohanty, 2021; Muliani & Krisnawati, 2022; Abdillah et al., 2022; Lee & Bai, 2016). However, so far there has been no study that specifically maps the methodological trends used in these studies in Indonesia. This gap indicates a lack of understanding of the direction, diversity, and quality of SIT research methodologies that have been conducted. This study is novel because it not only looks at research themes, but also maps the research design, instruments, and analysis techniques used; hence it can provide a more complete and in-depth picture of the development of SIT research in Indonesia.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the trend of special interest tourism research in Indonesian journals by reviewing research designs, data collection instruments, analysis techniques, and main themes raised in the period 2020–2024. This study also aims to answer several important questions, including: what is the trend in the number of SIT research from year to year, how diverse is the research design used, what are the dominant topics, what instruments are used by researchers, and what analysis techniques are applied in SIT research.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a comprehensive understanding of the direction and quality of SIT research in Indonesia, with a view of preventing repetition of themes, encourages innovation, and improves the methodological quality of further research. The results of this study are expected to be an important reference for academics, journal editors, policy-makers, and tourism practitioners to design more effective and competitive special interest tourism research and development policies at the national and global levels.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a content analysis approach to map the trends and characteristics of special interest tourism research in Indonesia. The study focuses on six main aspects: (1) number of publications per year; (2) type of research; (3) research subjects; (4) tourism topics explored; (5) data collection instruments used; and (6) data analysis methods. Data sources were obtained through a systematic search on Google Scholar on April 26, 2025 using the keyword "wisata minat husus" to identify relevant publications related to Special Interest Tourism in Indonesia. Google Scholar was chosen as the sole database because it has a broad scope, is multidisciplinary, and provides open access to a variety of relevant academic literature, including national and international journals, proceedings, and research reports that are often not indexed in other databases. Google Scholar is also considered more representative to reach publications related to special interest tourism that may not be recorded in more stringent international databases such as Scopus or Web of Science. The initial search resulted in around 104,000 entries. After excluding documents that were only citations (around 95,000), the search was tightened with a publication year filter between 2020 and 2024, resulting in 15,500 entries. Furthermore, filtering was carried out based on the title to ensure suitability with the research objectives, which then obtained 74 articles for further analysis.

The content analysis process was carried out through several stages: first, collecting relevant data based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria that had been set; second, categorizing the data into six main aspects; third, systematically coding the data to identify patterns and trends; and fourth, interpreting the results to interpret the meaning of the coded data

and relating it back to the research objectives. This process was carried out repeatedly to ensure the reliability and consistency of the findings.

As an important note, of the 74 selected articles, only 42 articles can be fully accessed. The articles consist of 34 scientific articles and 8 community service articles. However, this study only focuses on the analysis of scientific articles, while community service articles are excluded from the dataset because they do not match the focus of the study. This limited access is one of the limitations of the study that can affect the completeness and representativeness of the study results.

C. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
Number of Publications

The data presented in Figure 1 shows the dynamics of the number of special interest tourism publications in Indonesian journals during the period 2020–2024. At the beginning of the period, 2020 recorded six publications, which then decreased slightly in 2021 and 2022 to five publications each. However, this trend reversed in 2023 and 2024, with a significant increase to nine publications per year. This pattern indicates that although there was initially stagnation or even a slight decline in researchers' attention to the theme of special interest tourism, in the last two years there has been a surge indicating an increase in academic interest and attention to this field.

The increase in publications in 2023–2024 is likely related to the growing awareness of the importance of developing more sustainable, personalized, and interest-based alternative tourism segments, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. This surge may also reflect the post-COVID-19 pandemic impact, where tourists' interest in more meaningful and interest-based experiences has increased, attracting the attention of researchers (Sudjana et al., 2021; Salimah et al., 2023).

In addition, These findings emphasize the tendency of more explorative special interest tourism research, where qualitative approaches are chosen to explore complex social, cultural, and economic phenomena in depth. This is in line with Creswell dalam (Lima & Newell-McLymont, 2021) opinion which states that qualitative research is more appropriate for contexts that require a deep understanding of human experiences and the meanings they produce. The dominance of qualitative research also reflects the early development stage of special interest tourism in Indonesia, where researchers are still focused on mapping phenomena, identifying key issues, and exploring potential.

However, the low number of quantitative and mixed-method studies indicates limitations in empirical validation and more rigorous hypothesis testing. This is a critical note because the

sustainability and development of special interest tourism require strong data to support evidence-based decision-making (evidence-based policy). The lack of quantitative approaches can also slow down efforts to measure economic, social, and environmental impacts more objectively, which is very important in the context of tourism policy and investment.

Thus, these results not only map methodological trends but also provide strategic implications for the development of special interest tourism research. A strong push is needed to increase the number of studies using quantitative and mixed-method approaches so that the resulting studies are not only descriptive, but also able to offer prescriptions and predictive models that are relevant to stakeholders.
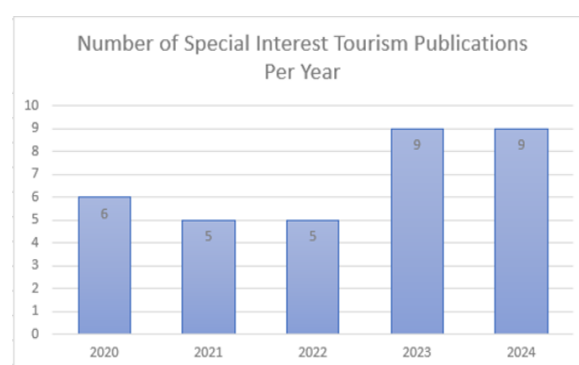

Figure 1. The improvement trend of the Number of Tourism Researches with Special Interest Tourism as the main Concern in Indonesia within 5 years.

Types of Research

The data in Figure 2. shows a very strong dominance of qualitative approaches in special interest tourism research in Indonesia, with 24 out of a total of 34 publications (around 70.6%) using this method.

Meanwhile, the mixed-method approach was only used in four studies, and the quantitative approach appeared in three studies, a number that is even the same as the "unidentified" category (3 studies) which did not clearly state the type of approach used.
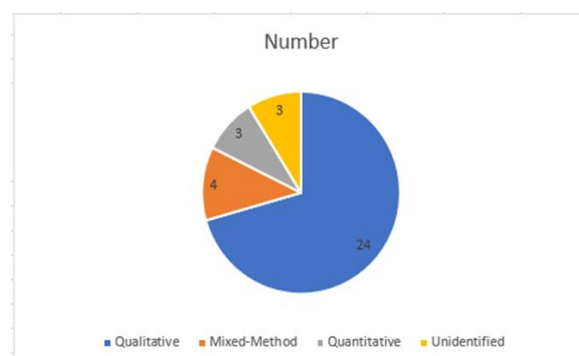

Figure 2. The Distribution of Researches with Special Interest Tourism as the Main Concern based on Types of Research

The dominance of qualitative research can be interpreted as a reflection of the need for in-depth exploration of social, cultural, and behavioral phenomena of special interest tourists, which often require an interpretive approach to understand subjective meanings, motivations, and experiences. This is understandable considering the many themes in special interest tourism that are closely related to local values, beliefs, perceptions, and narratives, such as in cultural, religious, or ecotourism.

However, the low proportion of quantitative and mixed-method studies indicates limitations in methodological diversification, which may result in a lack of strong empirical evidence for generalizing findings. These data also show that the use of statistics, modeling, and experimental approaches have not become mainstream in special interest tourism studies, even though these approaches have the potential to enrich the analysis and strengthen scientific contributions.

The presence of the "unidentified" category indicates weak reporting of methodology in some publications, which can reduce the transparency, reproducibility, and academic quality of the research. This phenomenon reinforces the urgency to improve researchers' capacity in standardized scientific writing, including detailed reporting of methodology.

Overall, these data provide important signals for future research development: the need to encourage more balanced quantitative and mixed-method research, strengthen academic methodological literacy, and ensure transparency in reporting in order to improve the quality, credibility, and utilization of research results for the development of special interest tourism in Indonesia. This part consists of the research results and how they are discussed. The results obtained from the research have to be supported by sufficient data.

Data Collection Instruments

The data in Figure 3 shows that "observation sheets" dominate the most frequently used research instruments (12 studies), followed by triangulation (5), questionnaires (4), and the "not mentioned" category (4). Meanwhile, other instruments such as CRISP–Data Mining, FGD (focus group discussion), and interview sheets only appeared once. Researcher-based and survey instruments were used three times.
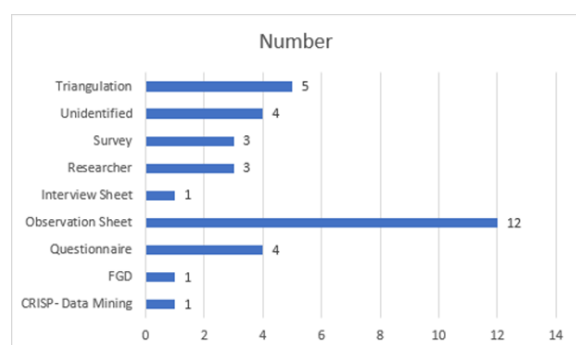

Figure 3. The Distribution of Researches with Special Interest Tourism as the Main Concern based on Research Instruments

The dominance of observations reflects a highly qualitative and explorative approach, where researchers attempt to capture social dynamics, tourist behavior, or interactions at the destination directly. This is in line with previous findings that special interest tourism research in Indonesia is mostly qualitative. The existence of triangulation as the second most common instrument indicates that some researchers are aware of strengthening data validity by combining various sources or methods, although in general the use of this triangulation is not evenly distributed.

The low use of quantitative instruments such as questionnaires and surveys (4 and 3 studies respectively) indicates the limitations of statistical data-based exploration, which should be able to provide a more representative picture of the population. Meanwhile, the use of CRISP–Data Mining which only appeared once is an indicator that the use of technology and progressive analytical approaches in special interest tourism research is still very limited, even though this method has great potential to process large-scale data such as social media, tourist reviews, or destination big data.

The category of "researcher" as an instrument shows that in several studies, researchers play a direct role as the main instrument in collecting and interpreting data, which can be beneficial in terms of depth of understanding but is risky if not done reflectively. The presence of 4 studies that did not mention the instrument highlights the weak reporting of methodology, which has the potential to reduce transparency, reproducibility, and credibility of the research.

In general, these data reveal the need for diversification of research instruments and improvement of methodological literacy of researchers, especially to encourage the use of more innovative instruments that are relevant to contemporary research challenges. These findings also recommend the need for stricter methodological reporting guidelines in journals in Indonesia to ensure the quality of publications in the field of special interest tourism.

Data Analysis Methods

The data in Figure 4 shows that the data analysis method in special interest tourism research during 2020–2024 was dominated by the use of SWOT analysis (8 studies) and qualitative descriptive (5 studies). The dominance of SWOT shows that most of the research is still focused on mapping the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to tourism destinations or products. This reflects a practical tendency in tourism research that is directed at providing strategic recommendations to stakeholders, especially in the context of destination planning and development.
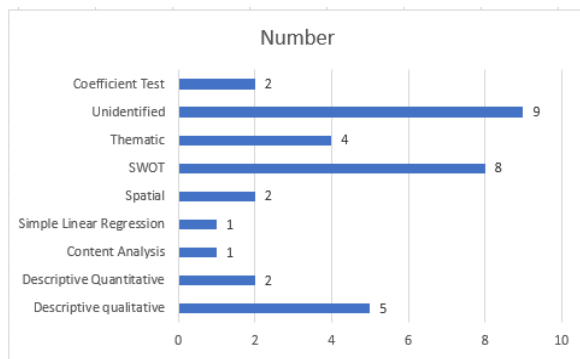
Figure 4. The Distribution of Researches with Special Interest Tourism as the Main Concern based on Research Data Analysis

A fairly large amount of qualitative descriptive analysis also shows that most studies still place narrative and interpretation as the main approach to understanding the phenomenon of special interest tourism. This is consistent with the characteristics of special interest tourism which are often complex and based on subjective experiences of tourists, which are indeed more suitable for qualitative analysis.

However, it is interesting that the number of quantitative methods used such as simple linear regression (1), coefficient tests (2), and quantitative descriptive analysis (2) is relatively low. This indicates that a more robust statistical approach to understanding the relationship between variables is still not optimally utilized. In fact, this approach is important to strengthen the validity and generalization of findings, especially in efforts to map tourist trends, measure economic impacts, and predict market behavior.

In addition, the use of spatial analysis (2) shows that there are efforts to utilize technology and geographical approaches, although still limited. This is a research opportunity that needs to be expanded considering the importance of the spatial dimension in tourism management, especially for special interest tourism destinations that are closely related to location and spatial planning. The use of content analysis (1) and thematic analysis (4) shows that there are efforts to explore texts or documents as data sources, which are quite relevant especially in studies that explore perceptions or representations of tourism.

The fact that 9 studies did not mention the data analysis method indicates weaknesses in the reporting of the methodology that can affect the transparency and credibility of the research. This is an important note for improving the quality of publications, because clarity of methodology is an important foundation in scientific research.

In general, these data show that although there is a diversity of analytical approaches, special interest tourism research in Indonesia still tends to be biased towards qualitative and descriptive. Strengthening capacity in the use of advanced quantitative methods, integration of spatial methods, and better methodological reporting standards are important strategic directions for future research development.
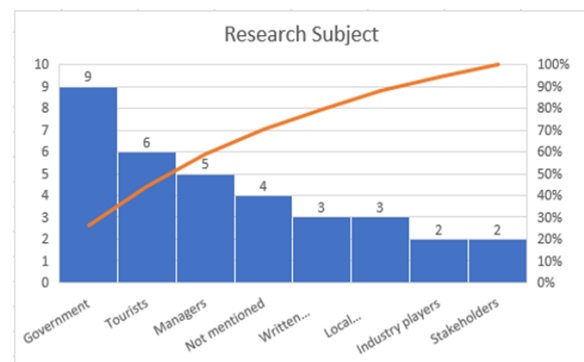
Research Subjects

Figure 5. The Distribution of Researches with Special Interest Tourism as the Main Concern based on Research Instruments

The data in figure 5 shows that the government (9 studies), tourists (6), and managers (5) dominate as research subjects, while other subjects such as local communities (3), written documents (3), industry players (2), and stakeholders (2) receive a much smaller share of attention. In addition, there are 4 studies that do not explicitly mention their research subjects, which reflects weaknesses in methodological reporting.

The large focus on government as a primary subject reflects academic interest in understanding the role of regulation, policy, and planning in the development of special interest tourism. This is understandable because government intervention is often a major determinant of sustainability, infrastructure support, and the success of destination branding.

Tourists as the second largest subject reflects the awareness of the importance of the user or consumer perspective in understanding travel motivations, satisfaction, and behavior in special interest segments. However, this portion still seems limited when compared to the large contribution of tourists to industry dynamics, which should encourage more tourist-based research.

Interestingly, the role of destination managers (5 studies) has begun to receive sufficient attention, reflecting the importance of operational and managerial perspectives in the successful provision of special interest tourism products. However, the very little attention paid to industry players (2) and stakeholders (2) indicates a gap in viewing the dynamics of cross-sector partnerships and collaboration, even though special interest tourism practices often involve these actors.

The use of written documents as research subjects (3 studies) shows that there are efforts to access secondary data, such as reports, policies, or strategic plans, but in terms of quantity it is still limited. This opens up opportunities to maximize document analysis as part of data triangulation.

The "not mentioned" category (4 studies) highlights serious weaknesses in methodological reporting that could impact the transparency, validity,

and replicability of the studies. It also reflects the need for improved editorial quality and academic oversight in the journals where the studies are published.

In general, this subject distribution pattern indicates the dominance of a top-down approach that prioritizes the views of authorities (government) and formal institutions, with a relatively small portion for bottom-up perspectives such as local communities and industry players. In fact, the success of special interest tourism often depends on the co-creation between these actors.

Special Interest Tourism Topics Selected when Conducting Studies

Table 1. Research Topics

No	Research Topics	No	Research Topics
1	Arung Jeram	16	Tourist Motivations and Constraints
2	Visitor Behavior	17	Sustainable Tourism Objects
3	Bicycling Package Marketing	18	Chess Sports
4	Impact of Tourism on the Economy and Socio-Cultural Community	19	Utilization of Forest Land
5	Tourism Village	20	Utilization of Sunken Ship Sites and Coral Reef Conservation
6	Tyto Alba Owl (Tourism Village)	21	Bird Watching
7	Labuan Jambu Whale Shark	22	Sunmori
8	Virgin Cuban Cave and Surrounding Areas	23	Tourist Behavior Based on Visit Type
9	Hidden Canyon Beji Guwang	24	Kubu Gadang Traditional Game
10	Performance	25	Pink Tourism
11	Waterfall Area	26	Potential of Purun Wetland-Based Wetland
12	Tourist Satisfaction	27	attractions, access, amenities, and institutions.
13	Conservation of Teluk Cenderawasih National Park	28	Tourism Destinations or Attractions Themselves / Staycation
14	Innovative strategies	29	Urban area
15	Special Interest Tourism and Community Economy in the Perspective of Sustainable Livelihoods		

The data in table 1. shows the extraordinary diversity of topics in special interest tourism studies, ranging from nature-based activities (e.g. rafting, sunmori, bird watching, forest land utilization), conservation (e.g. conservation of Teluk Cenderawasih National Park, coral reef conservation, Tyto Alba owl), to social and cultural issues (e.g. traditional Kubu Gadang games, pink tourism, performances). The diversity of these topics reflects the broad scope of the special interest tourism concept which not only focuses on destinations and activities, but also includes ecological, social, cultural,

economic aspects, and even minority issues such as pink tourism.

Local-specific themes were also found such as Labuan Jambu Whale Shark, Beji Guwang Hidden Canyon, Virgin Cuban Cave, and Tourism Village, which reflect the tendency to explore local potential and local wisdom as special interest tourism attractions. This is in line with the global trend in tourism which increasingly appreciates local uniqueness, authenticity, and sustainability.

Meanwhile, there are more conceptual or macro themes such as "innovative strategies," "attractions, access, amenities, and institutions," and "the impact of tourism on the economy and socio-culture of the community," which show attention at the policy and destination management levels. This is important as a supporting framework so that the development of special interest tourism is not solely oriented towards physical attractions, but also pays attention to governance aspects.

Themes related to tourist behavior (e.g. visitor behavior, tourist motivations and constraints, tourist satisfaction, tourist behavior based on visit type) show a fairly strong focus on the demand-side dimension, which is important for understanding market preferences and designing appropriate tourism products. However, this data also shows the need to strengthen research from the supply side, for example related to industry innovation, the role of local communities, and destination readiness.

In addition, the emergence of topics such as urban areas and staycations shows that special interest tourism is not always identical to rural or natural destinations, but is also starting to penetrate the urban context and more flexible domestic tourist patterns, especially post-COVID-19 pandemic.

However, this list also indicates an uneven focus of research: issues such as sustainability, conservation, and community-based tourism still seem to be disproportionately low compared to their popularity in global discourse. This is an interesting research gap to be explored further. Methodologically, the diversity of these themes requires a cross-disciplinary approach that not only uses qualitative methods, but also strengthens the use of quantitative and mixed-method methods to produce more comprehensive findings.

D. CONCLUSION

Overall, the special interest tourism research map over the past five years shows progressive dynamics with a tendency towards the dominance of qualitative and descriptive approaches. There have been quite good efforts in mapping phenomena and providing strategic recommendations, but research still tends to be exploratory and practical. To increase the depth and quality of research, it is necessary to strengthen quantitative methodology, use more sophisticated instruments and analysis techniques, and report more transparent methodologies. On the

other hand, the broad diversification of topics shows the potential for rich research development, but still requires strategic direction hence future research can be more focused, integrative, and provide more real policy impacts.

The practical implication of this finding is the need for closer collaboration between academics, practitioners, and policy-makers in developing research-based special interest tourism. Tourism practitioners can utilize existing research results to identify new market opportunities, strengthen the tourism experience offered, and improve service quality through a more evidence-based approach. In addition, the government and other stakeholders can use the results of this research to formulate more targeted policies, especially in terms of destination development, environmental and social impact management, and increasing the competitiveness of the special interest tourism sector.

For future researchers, the identified trends suggest the need for a more multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to capture the complexity of special interest tourism more comprehensively. The gap in the use of quantitative methods and more advanced analytical techniques opens up space for more robust and generalizable research. In addition, researchers can take advantage of the diversity of topics that have been mapped by deepening aspects that are still rarely explored, such as the long-term impact of special interest tourism on sustainable development, the dynamics of tourist behavior in a digital context, or the integration of technology in creating a more personalized tourism experience. Thus, future research will not only be able to enrich the academic repertoire but also contribute significantly to industry practice and public policy.

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