Iranda Firiansyah

SMART TOURISM GOVERNANCE: A SCIENTOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT ROLES

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SMART TOURISM GOVERNANCE: A SCIENTOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT ROLES

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Abstract

Smart tourism governance has become increasingly important as digital technologies reshape tourism management, public services, and destination development. However, existing studies have predominantly emphasized technological innovation, destination competitiveness, and tourist experiences, while the evolving administrative roles of government remain fragmented. This study aims to examine the intellectual development of smart tourism governance and map the evolving roles of government through a scientometric analysis. Data were retrieved from the Scopus database for the period 2015–2025 and analyzed using CiteSpace through co-citation, keyword co-occurrence, clustering, burst detection, and timeline visualization. A total of 132 publications were included in the final dataset. The findings identify five interconnected government roles: Regulator, Digital Infrastructure Provider, Network Coordinator, Data Steward, and Innovation Enabler. These roles operate through governance mechanisms involving policy integration, stakeholder collaboration, data governance, digital innovation, and institutional coordination. Based on these findings, the study proposes a Government-Centered Smart Tourism Governance Framework that conceptualizes government as a multidimensional governance actor rather than merely a regulator or stakeholder. The framework integrates insights from Collaborative Governance, Network Governance, Digital Governance, and Meta-Governance and demonstrates how government functions are connected to governance mechanisms and smart tourism outcomes. The study contributes to public administration by providing a conceptualization of how governmental authority and administrative functions are reorganized within technology-driven tourism governance.

Keywords: CiteSpace, Digital Governance, Government Roles, Scientometric Analysis, Smart Tourism Governance

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has triggered a significant transformation in the global tourism sector over the past two decades. The integration of technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, cloud computing, and mobile digital platforms has driven the creation of a tourism ecosystem that is increasingly intelligent, efficient, and responsive to tourist needs (Gretzel et al., 2015). The concept of smart tourism emerged alongside the growing use of technology to maximize the tourist experience, improve destination management effectiveness, and optimize environmental and economic sustainability. Within this framework, technology serves not only as an operational tool but has become an

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integral part of destination governance models, influencing how public and private actors make data-driven decisions. Tourism policy has also shifted toward a more analytical, adaptive, and digital ecosystem-based approach.

These changes place the government in an increasingly strategic position in ensuring the successful implementation of smart tourism. The government no longer plays merely a regulatory role but also a facilitator of digital transformation, a provider of data infrastructure, a bridge for cross-sector collaboration, a curator of interoperability standards, and a guardian of the security and ethical use of tourist data (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). Recent empirical evidence from a community-based tourism destination in Batam shows that digital tourism initiatives can develop through community, university, and private-sector involvement, while institutional support and tourism infrastructure remain important challenges (Firiansyah et al., 2026). This evidence suggests that digitalization alone does not automatically produce effective smart tourism governance, highlighting the importance of institutional coordination and government support. This argument aligns with political science perspectives, which emphasize that government possesses authority and legitimacy to regulate collective life, allocate resources, and formulate public policies in response to societal change (Firiansyah et al., 2025). However, several studies have shown that many local governments in developing countries still face various structural barriers in adopting technology-based tourism systems. These challenges include limited institutional capacity, minimal integration of cross-sector information systems, weak coordination between stakeholders, and low bureaucratic digital literacy (Mohabeer et al., 2019). Furthermore, data security issues, the availability of digital infrastructure, and disparities in access to technology are also factors hindering the equitable implementation of smart tourism. This situation emphasizes that digital transformation in tourism cannot be optimal without strong, adaptive, and inclusive governance.

Although research on smart tourism is growing rapidly globally, its focus remains fragmented. Most studies emphasize technology, tourist preferences, digital marketing, and destination performance, and do not specifically address governance aspects or the government's role in managing the smart tourism ecosystem (Rajasekhar et al., 2020). As a result, scientific understanding of how governments design policies, manage data integration, build collaboration, and organize digital tourism ecosystems remains incomplete. At the national level, a similar phenomenon is also evident in various publications in the reputable SINTA journal. Various studies have focused more on digital platform development, promotional strategies, destination readiness, and tourist behavior, but have not analyzed the government's role in smart tourism governance (Kamalanandhini, 2023; Mega, 2015). For example, studies on Pekanbaru Smart City Madani tend to focus on city branding effectiveness, infrastructure readiness, and community perceptions, while giving limited attention to governance structures, institutional capacity, and intersectoral coordination in digital tourism management (Budi et al., 2021). However, public administration literature indicates that the government's role heavily influences the success of the tourism sector's digital transformation in establishing regulatory frameworks, coordinating cross-sector actors, and ensuring the sustainability of innovation.

From a public administration perspective, the central problem is not merely how technology can be applied to tourism, but how governmental authority, institutional capacity, and inter-organizational coordination are reorganized within a technology-driven tourism ecosystem.

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Smart tourism requires governments to coordinate actors across administrative boundaries, establish regulatory and data governance arrangements, provide enabling digital infrastructure, and ensure that technological innovation remains aligned with public values and collective interests. This creates an administrative challenge because government must simultaneously perform regulatory, coordinating, infrastructural, informational, and innovation-oriented functions. When these functions are fragmented across institutions and sectors, digital transformation may result in disconnected platforms, overlapping responsibilities, weak data interoperability, and uneven access to tourism services. Therefore, understanding the changing role of government is essential for explaining how smart tourism governance can be institutionally coordinated and oriented toward public value.

From this perspective, smart tourism represents not only a technological transformation but also an administrative transformation. The expansion of digital platforms, tourism data, and interconnected service systems requires governments to reorganize administrative capacities across institutions and sectors. Government agencies must establish regulatory arrangements, coordinate inter-organizational relationships, manage shared data resources, provide digital infrastructure, and facilitate innovation while maintaining public accountability and collective interests. These changing responsibilities create a public administration problem because government effectiveness increasingly depends on its ability to combine hierarchical authority with collaborative, networked, and digitally enabled forms of governance. Therefore, examining the changing functions of government is essential for understanding how smart tourism governance can be institutionally coordinated and oriented toward public value.

Over the last decade, smart tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing research domains in tourism studies. The existing literature has predominantly examined technological innovation, destination competitiveness, the tourist experience, and digital service ecosystems. Foundational studies by Gretzel et al., (2015)emphasized the role of information technologies and smart ecosystems in enhancing tourism experiences, while Chan et al., (2019) highlighted the integration of ICTs for destination competitiveness. These studies successfully established the technological foundations of smart tourism, but devoted limited attention to the institutional and governmental dimensions of tourism governance.

Subsequent studies expanded the discussion by introducing governance-related perspectives. For example, Ivars-Baidal et al., (2023) examined destination governance in smart destinations. In contrast, Femenia-Serra et al., (2019) proposed a conceptual framework for smart tourism governance grounded in stakeholder collaboration and digital transformation. Likewise, Chung et al., (2021) discussed the government's role in facilitating smart tourism ecosystems through digital policies and institutional support. Nevertheless, governance was generally treated as one component within broader smart tourism ecosystems rather than the primary object of investigation.

Review studies have also attempted to synthesize developments in smart tourism governance. Shafiee et al., (2019) conducted a systematic literature review that identified governance, collaboration, and sustainability as emerging themes. However, their review relied on qualitative synthesis and did not quantitatively map the field's intellectual structure. Consequently, the evolution of government roles, thematic clusters, citation networks, and emerging research trends remains insufficiently explored.

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Furthermore, previous studies have rarely compared the evolution of government functions across the expanding field of smart tourism. Government responsibilities— including regulation, digital infrastructure provision, inter-organizational coordination, data governance, and policy innovation—have often appeared as supporting variables rather than as the central analytical focus. A similar tendency can also be observed in the Indonesian public administration literature. Studies published in JPAP highlight the importance of collaborative governance and government coordination in tourism and digital public services. Yet, government roles are generally discussed within specific implementation contexts rather than being conceptualized as an integrated smart tourism governance framework (Mindarti et al., 2024). This fragmented treatment makes it difficult to understand how governmental roles have evolved alongside technological transformation within tourism ecosystems.

Therefore, this study differs from previous research by employing a scientometric approach to systematically map the intellectual development of smart tourism governance while specifically positioning government roles as the primary analytical lens. Through co- citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence, thematic clustering, and CiteSpace timeline visualization, this study provides a comprehensive overview of how government-centered smart tourism governance has evolved over the last decade.

Table 1. Comparative Review of Previous Studies on Smart Tourism Governance

Study	Main Focus	Approach	Treatment of Government	Limitation	Position of This Study
Gretzel et al. (2015)	Smart tourism ecosystem	Conceptual	Government is not the central focus	Emphasizes technological and ecosystem dimensions	Places government functions at the center of analysis
Femenia-Serra et al. (2019)	Smart tourism and destination development	Conceptual	Government appears as a supporting/participatory actor	Does not systematically map government functions	Maps government roles through scientometric analysis
Shafiee et al. (2019)	Sustainable smart tourism destinations	Systematic literature review	Governance is discussed broadly	Does not quantitatively map intellectual structure and thematic evolution	Uses scientometric analysis to map intellectual and thematic development
Ivars-Baidal et al. (2023)	Smart destination governance and sustainability	Destination governance analysis	Government is involved in destination management	Does not develop an integrated configuration of government functions	Identifies interconnected administrative roles of government

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Study	Main Focus	Approach	Treatment of Government	Limitation	Position of This Study
This study	Government-centered smart tourism governance	Scientometric analysis using CiteSpace	Government is the central analytical focus	-	Develops a five-role Government-Centered Smart Tourism Governance Framework

Source: processed by researcher, 2026

The comparison demonstrates that previous studies have substantially contributed to the development of smart tourism research, particularly through perspectives on smart tourism ecosystems, stakeholder participation, destination governance, and sustainability. However, government has generally been treated as a contextual, supporting, or destination-management actor rather than as the central analytical focus. Three important gaps therefore remain. First, existing research continues to prioritize technological innovation and destination development over the multiple functions performed by government. Second, governance perspectives remain fragmented across disciplines, making it difficult to establish an integrated understanding of governmental functions in smart tourism. Third, the intellectual development of governmental roles has not been sufficiently mapped through scientometric analysis. In particular, existing literature does not sufficiently explain how government simultaneously performs regulatory, infrastructural, coordinating, data-related, and innovation-oriented functions within smart tourism governance. This gap is particularly relevant from a public administration perspective because digital transformation in tourism requires governments to combine regulatory authority, institutional capacity, inter-organizational coordination, data governance, and innovation facilitation. This study addresses these gaps by placing government roles at the center of the analysis and systematically examining their intellectual development through scientometric analysis.

To address these gaps, this study employs scientometric analysis to systematically map the development of research on smart tourism governance and the role of government. Scientometric analysis enables the identification of publication patterns, collaboration networks, dominant keywords, citation structures, and thematic developments within a research field(Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017;Donthu et al., 2021). In this study, the method is used not only to describe the development of smart tourism governance research but also to examine how government-related themes have emerged, evolved, and become interconnected within the literature. This approach provides an empirical basis for positioning the role of government within the broader development of smart tourism governance research.

Based on this background, this study aims to provide a comprehensive mapping of the development of smart tourism governance research, with particular attention to the evolving role of government in technology-based tourism management. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the development and intellectual structure of scientific publications on smart tourism governance from 2015 to 2025; and (2) to map the roles and thematic positioning of

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government within the smart tourism literature through keyword co-occurrence, thematic clustering, citation analysis, and temporal analysis using CiteSpace.

This objective was formulated to address the scientific need for comprehensive mapping to support the development of technology-based tourism governance theory and practice. This research is expected to fill existing scientific gaps and provide theoretical contributions to the development of public administration studies, tourism policy, and digital governance. It also provides a reference for the government in designing more effective, inclusive, and sustainable smart tourism strategies.

Accordingly, this study differs from previous research in both its analytical focus and theoretical positioning. Rather than treating government primarily as a contextual, supporting, or enabling actor within smart tourism ecosystems, this study places government roles at the center of the analysis. Scientometric evidence is used not only to identify dominant themes but also to trace how governmental functions have emerged and evolved within the smart tourism governance literature. The study therefore moves beyond viewing government simply as one stakeholder and conceptualizes it as a multidimensional governance actor performing regulatory, infrastructural, coordinating, data-governance, and innovation-enabling functions.

The theoretical innovation of this study lies in reconceptualizing government in smart tourism governance as a multifunctional governance actor rather than merely a regulator or one stakeholder among others. The innovation is not limited to identifying five government roles; rather, it lies in explaining how these roles operate collectively through specific governance mechanisms and contribute to public-sector and smart tourism outcomes. By integrating the identified roles with Collaborative Governance, Network Governance, Digital Governance, and Meta-Governance, the study proposes a Government-Centered Smart Tourism Governance Framework that connects government functions, governance mechanisms, and governance outcomes. This conceptualization extends the public administration perspective on smart tourism by demonstrating how regulatory authority, administrative capacity, inter-organizational coordination, data governance, and innovation functions are combined within a technology-driven governance environment.

2. Methods

This study employs a scientometric research approach to systematically examine the development, intellectual structure, and thematic evolution of research on smart tourism governance and the role of government in technology-based tourism management. Scientometric analysis is appropriate for this study because it enables the systematic mapping of publication patterns, citation structures, research collaborations, keyword relationships, and thematic developments within a research field (Donthu et al., 2021). The method is particularly relevant to the objective of identifying how government-related themes have emerged and evolved within the smart tourism governance literature.

Data Source and Search Strategy

Bibliographic data were retrieved exclusively from the Scopus database. Scopus was selected because it provides standardized bibliographic metadata suitable for scientometric analysis and broad coverage of peer-reviewed international publications. The search was

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conducted using the following query: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("smart tourism") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (governance) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026

The search covered publications published between 2015 and 2025. The retrieved records were exported from Scopus and subsequently processed using CiteSpace for scientometric analysis. The inclusion criteria were established to ensure that the retrieved publications were relevant to the research objectives. Publications were considered eligible when they addressed smart tourism in relation to governance, government, public administration, destination governance, or technology-enabled tourism management and were published within the 2015–2025 period. Records that did not address the governance dimension of smart tourism, were outside the specified publication period, or did not provide sufficient bibliographic information for analysis were excluded. Screening was conducted based on titles, abstracts, keywords, and, where necessary. This scientometric study examined several key variables commonly used in bibliometric analysis, including:

a) Publication productivity by year of publication.
b) Country of origin and institution of authors contributing to the theme of smart tourism governance.
c) Most productive and influential authors, based on the number of citations.
d) Journals that most frequently publish related research.
e) Dominant keywords and research topics, analyzed through co-occurrence analysis.
f) Thematic evolution maps to identify future research directions.

All of these variables were designed to answer the research objective: to uncover the position, contribution, and direction of research on the role of government in technology- based tourism. CiteSpace was used to analyze the bibliographic data and visualize the intellectual and thematic structure of the field. The analysis included document co-citation, keyword co-occurrence, cluster analysis, burst detection, and timeline visualization. Co-citation analysis was used to identify influential and foundational publications; keyword co-occurrence analysis was used to identify dominant research themes; cluster analysis was used to identify thematic groups; burst detection was used to identify rapidly emerging research topics; and timeline visualization was used to examine the temporal development of these themes.

Through document co-citation analysis, CiteSpace helps uncover core references and seminal works that form the conceptual foundation of smart tourism governance. Keyword co-occurrence analysis is used to map the main thematic structure and identify dominant keywords related to the role of government in technology-based tourism. Meanwhile, the burst detection feature identifies research topics that have attracted increased attention over a specific period. Cluster and timeline visualizations are used to understand how these themes developed and transformed over the course of the research period. The methodological procedures follow established practices in scientometric and bibliometric research, particularly the guidelines discussed by Donthu et al., (2021) and Aria & Cuccurullo, (2017).

3. Results and Discussion

Data Collection

The article selection process followed the PRISMA framework to provide a transparent and systematic procedure for identifying, screening, assessing, and selecting publications for the scientometric analysis. Bibliographic records were retrieved exclusively from the Scopus database

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using the predefined search strategy. Scopus was selected because it provides standardized bibliographic metadata suitable for scientometric analysis and broad coverage of peer-reviewed publications.

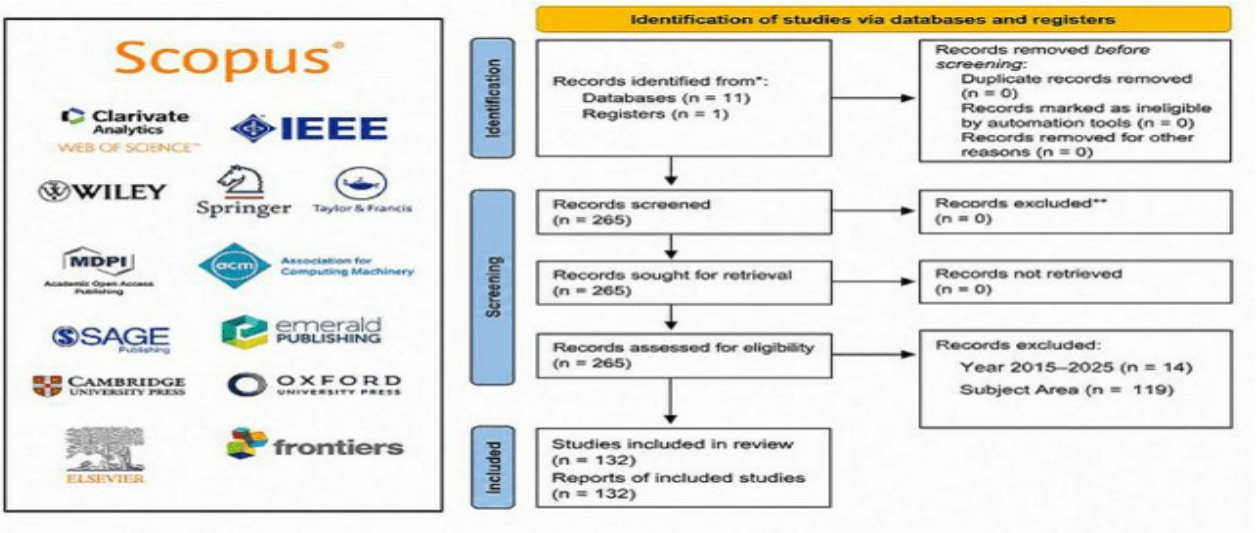

Figure 1. Data Collection by Scopus
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

The Scopus search query was formulated as follows: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("smart tourism") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (governance) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI"). The search was conducted for publications published between 2015 and 2025 and initially retrieved 265 records.

During the eligibility assessment, 14 records were excluded because they did not fully satisfy the predefined inclusion criteria after full-text examination. These records were found to be only marginally related to smart tourism governance, focusing primarily on technological applications without discussing governance dimensions or government roles. The remaining records were then further screened by subject area, resulting in the final dataset used for scientometric analysis.

This stage is followed by an eligibility assessment, in which articles are examined in more depth against the inclusion and exclusion criteria set. At the eligibility stage, 14 articles were eliminated because they fell within the 2015–2025 range and were indeed issued within the research limits. Then, 119 articles were filtered by subject area to meet the researcher's needs, and were later processed using the CiteSpace application. The last stage is the collection of final articles that meet all methodological and thematic requirements. Of the selected articles, 132 met the criteria and were included as the main material in the scientometric analysis using the CiteSpace application.

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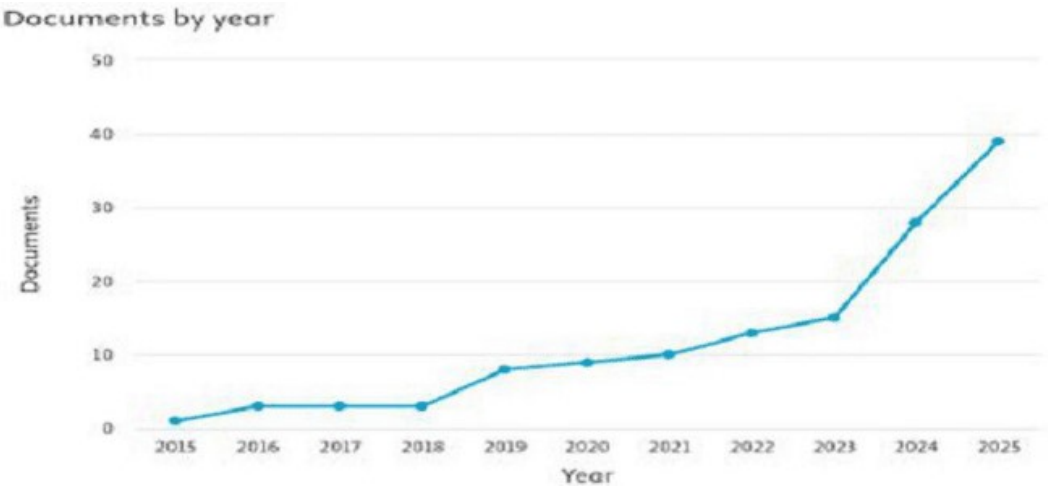

Figure 2. Dokumen by Year
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

Figure 2 shows the annual development of publications on smart tourism governance between 2015 and 2025. Publication output remained limited during the early period, with 1 publication in 2015 and 3 publications annually from 2016 to 2018. The number increased to 8 publications in 2019 and continued to rise gradually, reaching 9 in 2020, 10 in 2021, 13 in 2022, and 15 in 2023. A marked increase occurred in 2024, with 28 publications, followed by the highest annual output of 39 publications in 2025. The 132 publications in the final dataset are therefore concentrated increasingly in the later years of the study period, particularly 2024 and 2025. This temporal pattern indicates that smart tourism governance has become an increasingly established research concern, coinciding with growing scholarly attention to the governance implications of digital transformation, data use, and technology-enabled destination management.

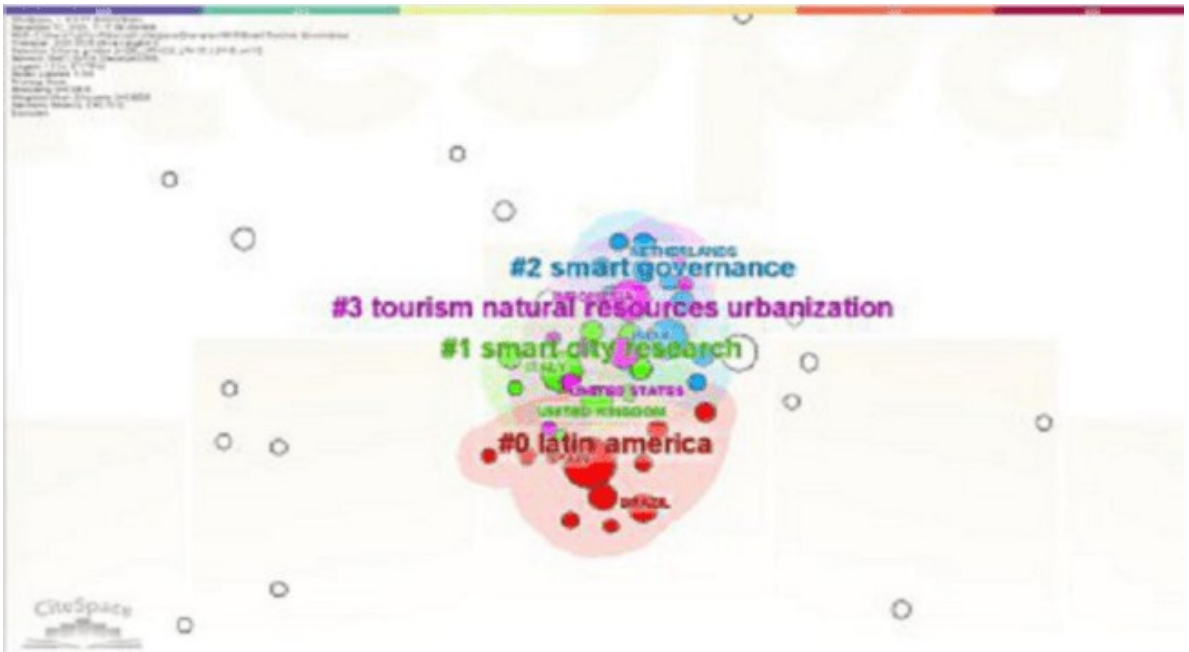

Figure 3. Country-Based Research Clusters in Smart Tourism Governance
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

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Figure 3 presents the country-based research landscape generated using CiteSpace and identifies four major thematic clusters: Cluster #0, Latin America; Cluster #1, Smart City Research; Cluster #2, Smart Governance; and Cluster #3, Tourism, Natural Resources, and Urbanization. The proximity between Cluster #2 (Smart Governance) and Cluster #3 (Tourism, Natural Resources, and Urbanization) indicates an important connection between governance-related research and technology-enabled tourism and destination management. This relationship is relevant to smart tourism governance because it shows how digital governance concerns intersect with tourism planning, sustainability, urban development, and destination management.

Cluster #2, "Smart Governance," is particularly relevant to the focus of this study because it connects governance with digital transformation, data management, and technology-enabled decision-making. The presence of countries such as the Netherlands, Indonesia, and India within this cluster indicates that research on smart tourism is connected to broader discussions of digitally enabled public-sector management. In this context, government is represented not only as a regulatory actor but also as an actor involved in coordinating information, digital systems, and technology-based decision-making. With the presence of technology in tourism management, governments ensure transparency of information for the public (Jiang et al., 2025). Research by Aungkulanon et al., (2025) shows that smart tourism is essential for creating a sustainable ecosystem. With ease and transparency of information, management using technology greatly facilitates government and public access to tourism within a country.

Figure 3 shows the CiteSpace map of the four main clusters of global research in Latin America: smart city research, smart governance, tourism, natural resources, and urbanization. Looking at this pattern, it can be seen that the meeting point is between the smart governance cluster (Cluster #2) and tourism, natural resources, and urbanization (Cluster #3). These two clusters are core components of the concept of smart tourism governance, which is how governments use technology to effectively regulate, develop, and supervise the tourism sector. For example, research conducted by (Yan et al., 2025) illustrates that technology in tourism is very helpful for development, especially for tourists.

Cluster #2 "smart governance" focuses on the role of government in digital transformation, data management, and technology-based decision-making. This emphasizes

The government's role in technology-based tourism management. Countries in this cluster, such as the Netherlands, Indonesia, and India, highlight how governments are building digital systems to improve transparency, coordination, and service quality. With the advent of technology in tourism management, the government ensures public disclosure of information (Jiang et al., 2025). For example, research by Aungkulanon et al., (2025), which shows that smart tourism is essential for creating a sustainable ecosystem. With the convenience and disclosure of information, technology-enabled management makes it very easy for the government and the public to access tourism in a country.

Meanwhile, Cluster #3, "Tourism, Natural Resources, and Urbanization," indicates that smart tourism research is increasingly connected to urbanization, sustainability, and natural-resource management. The cluster therefore extends the discussion of smart tourism beyond tourism promotion toward destination planning, environmental sustainability, natural-resource management, and the use of technology in tourism-related decision-making. Research conducted by (Nieves-Pavón et al., 2025) shows that smart branding in tourism is very necessary, tourism

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that has implemented smart branding is very easy to be seen by domestic and foreign tourists (de Santana Ribeiro & Dos Santos, 2025). These findings reinforce the view of Smart Tourism Governance as an integration of digital governance and adaptive, technology-based tourism management (Bosone & Gravagnuolo, 2025; Psatha, 2025; Sajida, 2025). The concept of electronic-based government can facilitate the achievement of goals in the organization (Ahdarrijal, 2023). Likewise, in tourism governance.

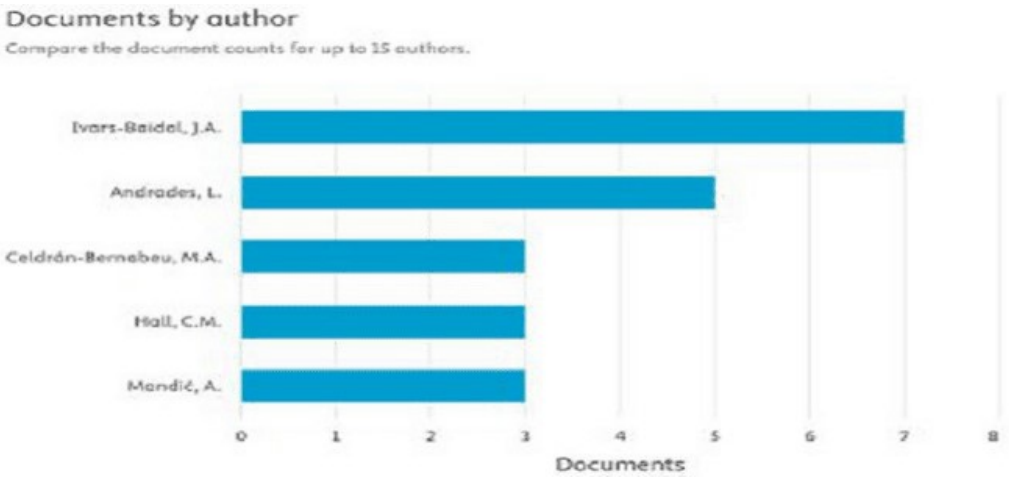

Figure 4. Document by Author
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

Figure 4 presents the productivity of authors contributing to the smart tourism governance literature. Ivars-Baidal, J. A. was the most prolific author in the dataset, with 7 publications, followed by Andrades, L. with 5 publications. Celdrán-Bernabeu, M. A., Hall, C. M., and Mandić, A. each contributed 3 publications. The distribution indicates that publication output is concentrated among a relatively small group of recurring contributors. These authors have contributed to discussions related to smart tourism, smart destinations, tourism governance, and technology-enabled destination management. However, publication productivity should be distinguished from scholarly influence, which requires additional indicators such as citation impact or co-citation analysis.

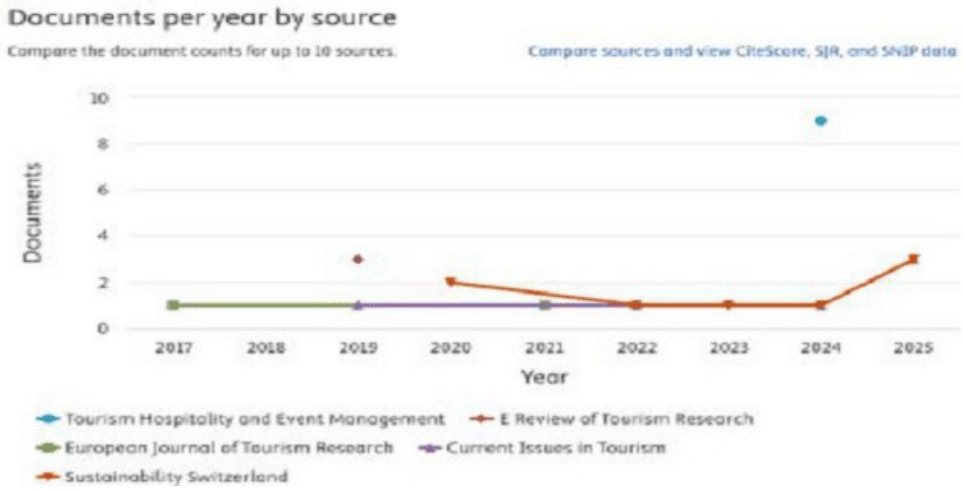

Figure 5. Document by Source
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

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Figure 5 presents the distribution of publications across the main sources represented in the dataset between 2017 and 2025. Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management recorded the highest number of publications among the sources shown, with 9 publications in 2024. Sustainability showed a more continuous presence across the later part of the study period, with publications recorded from 2020 to 2025 and reaching 3 documents in 2025. The European Journal of Tourism Research and Current Issues in Tourism contributed publications mainly during the earlier part of the period, while E-Review of Tourism Research recorded 3 publications in 2019. Overall, the distribution indicates that smart tourism governance research is disseminated across several tourism- and sustainability-oriented publication sources rather than being concentrated in a single outlet.

Figure 6. Research by topic with Citespace
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

Figure 6 presents the keyword co-occurrence map generated using CiteSpace. The visualization shows the main topics and their relationships within the smart tourism governance literature. Three prominent topics are visible in the network: "sustainable development," "smart tourism," and "smart city tourism." Their relatively central positions and connections with other keywords indicate that the literature has developed around the intersection of technological transformation, tourism development, urban systems, and sustainability.

The "smart tourism" keyword represents research concerned with the application of digital technologies, data, and innovation in tourism development and destination management. Its connection with other keywords indicates that technological transformation is studied together with broader questions of tourism management and governance.

The "smart city tourism" theme connects tourism research with the broader smart-city context. This connection indicates that technology-enabled tourism is increasingly considered within urban ecosystems involving mobility, public services, infrastructure, and destination management. Like the research by Firiansyah, (2025), which found that the use of technology in the tourism sector greatly facilitates users, this aligns with the concept of a smart city. On the other hand, smart city tourism is a key topic that connects the concept of smart cities with the tourism sector, underscoring that technological integration extends beyond tourist destinations to urban ecosystems that support mobility, public services, and tourist convenience.

From a governance perspective, the co-occurrence structure suggests that smart tourism research extends beyond technological applications and tourist experiences toward questions

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of how destinations are managed within broader urban and sustainability contexts. This provides an important basis for examining the role of government, particularly where tourism development intersects with public infrastructure, digital systems, sustainability, and coordination among actors. However, the keyword map alone does not establish specific government functions; these functions require further interpretation through the thematic, citation, and temporal analyses presented in the following sections.

Table 1. Authors with the Highest Citation Counts in the Analyzed Dataset

Citation Counts	Author
5	Andrades, Lidia
4	Celdrán-Bernabéu, Marco Antonio
4	Ivars-Baidal, Josep Antoni
3	Femenia-Serra, Francisco
3	Varghese, Bindi
3	Hall, C. Michael
2	Hsieh, Tzuhsin
2	Vera-Rebollo, José Fernando
2	Tsai, Peichi
2	Lai, Shihyu

Table 1 presents the authors with the highest citation counts in the analyzed dataset. Andrades, Lidia recorded the highest citation count, with 5 citations, followed by Celdrán-Bernabéu, Marco Antonio and Ivars-Baidal, Josep Antoni, with 4 citations each. Femenia-Serra, Francisco, Varghese, Bindi, and Hall, C. Michael each received 3 citations, while Hsieh, Tzuhsin, Vera-Rebollo, José Fernando, Tsai, Peichi, and Lai, Shihyu who received 2 citations. The distribution identifies authors that receive relatively greater citation attention within the analyzed corpus and indicates the intellectual references represented in the dataset.

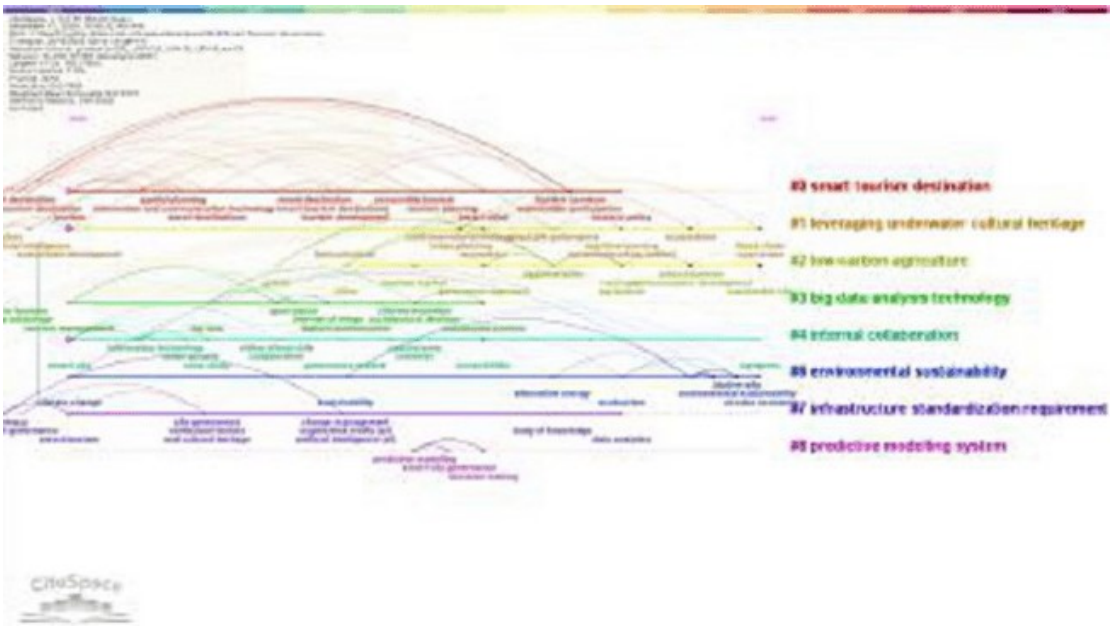

Figure 7. Thematic Evolution of Smart Tourism Governance Research
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

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Figure 7 presents the thematic evolution of smart tourism governance research generated using CiteSpace. The timeline visualization shows how research themes developed across different clusters during the study period. The clusters cover smart tourism destinations, cultural heritage, low-carbon tourism-related development, big data, collaboration, environmental sustainability, infrastructure standardization, and predictive modelling.

Cluster #0, “Smart Tourism Destination,” represents the largest thematic cluster and reflects research on the development of technology-enabled tourism destinations. Its position in the thematic structure indicates that smart destination development constitutes a central area of research within the literature. From a governance perspective, this cluster provides a basis for examining the government's role in enabling and regulating digital transformation at the destination level.

Clusters #1, “Leveraging Underwater Cultural Heritage,” and #2, “Low-Carbon Agriculture,” extend the smart tourism research agenda toward cultural heritage preservation and environmentally sustainable development. These clusters indicate that technology-enabled tourism research is connected not only to destination services but also to broader concerns of heritage conservation and sustainability. In relation to government, these themes provide a basis for considering regulatory and policy functions associated with cultural-resource protection and sustainable tourism development.

Cluster #3, “Big Data Analysis Technology,” highlights the growing importance of big-data technologies in smart tourism research. The cluster is particularly relevant to the government's Data Steward role because data analysis can support evidence-based decision-making, monitoring, and destination management. However, this interpretation represents a conceptual linkage between the thematic cluster and the government role rather than a direct measurement of government practice.

Cluster #4, “Internal Collaboration,” highlights the importance of collaboration within the smart tourism governance ecosystem. The theme is relevant to the Network Coordinator role because smart tourism involves interactions among public institutions, tourism businesses, communities, and other stakeholders. Government can therefore be interpreted as a coordinating actor within these governance networks rather than as the sole decision-maker.

Cluster #6, “Environmental Sustainability,” connects smart tourism research with environmental management and sustainable destination development. The cluster is relevant to the government's regulatory and policy functions because sustainability requires institutional rules, standards, monitoring, and policy coordination across tourism activities.

The “Infrastructure Standardization Requirement” cluster highlights the importance of standards and infrastructure requirements in technology-enabled tourism. This theme is directly relevant to two government functions identified in this study: the Regulator role, through the establishment of standards and regulatory requirements, and the Digital Infrastructure Provider role, through the development and support of infrastructure necessary for digital tourism systems.

The “Predictive Modeling System” cluster highlights the use of predictive technologies for anticipating tourism patterns, risks, and destination dynamics. This theme is relevant to both the Data Steward and Innovation Enabler roles because predictive applications depend on the

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availability and management of data while also encouraging the adoption of advanced digital technologies for tourism planning and management.

Taken together, the thematic evolution indicates that smart tourism governance research has expanded from destination-oriented and technology-focused themes toward broader concerns involving data, collaboration, infrastructure, sustainability, and predictive technologies. These thematic developments provide the empirical basis for interpreting government as a multidimensional governance actor rather than solely as a regulator.

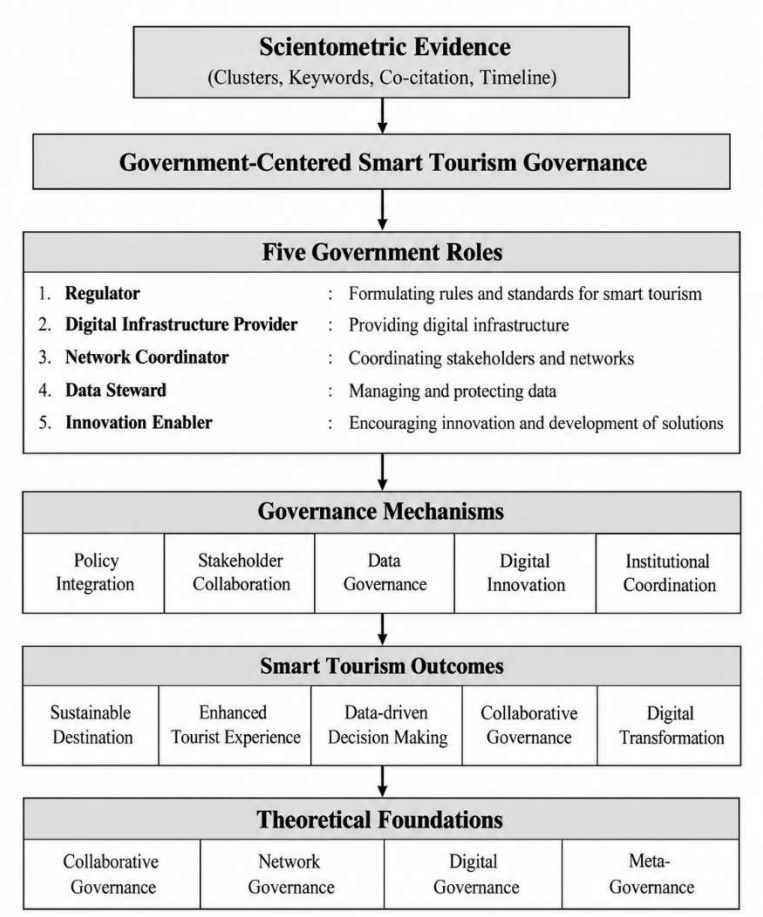

Figure 8. A Government-Centered Smart Tourism Governance Framework
Source: processed by researcher, 2026

Based on the combined scientometric findings, this study proposes a Government-Centered Smart Tourism Governance Framework as a conceptual synthesis of the patterns identified in the literature. The framework integrates evidence from keyword co-occurrence, co-citation analysis, cluster analysis, and timeline visualization. These analyses identify recurring themes related to digital transformation, smart destinations, sustainability, data, collaboration, infrastructure, and predictive technologies. The five government roles in the framework are therefore interpreted as a conceptual synthesis of these thematic patterns rather than as directly measured variables in the scientometric dataset.

The framework positions government as a central governance actor within the smart tourism ecosystem, while recognizing the involvement of public institutions, private tourism businesses, local communities, and technology actors. First, government acts as a Regulator by

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establishing policies, standards, and regulatory requirements for smart tourism development. Second, government acts as a Digital Infrastructure Provider by supporting the infrastructure and digital systems required for smart tourism services. Third, government acts as a Network Coordinator by facilitating coordination among public institutions, tourism businesses, communities, and other stakeholders. Fourth, government acts as a Data Steward by supporting the management, integration, and responsible use of tourism data for evidence-based decision-making. Finally, government acts as an Innovation Enabler by creating institutional conditions that support digital innovation and technology adoption in tourism.

These five government roles operate through interconnected governance mechanisms, including policy integration, stakeholder collaboration, data governance, digital innovation, and institutional coordination. These mechanisms explain how the government roles are implemented within the smart tourism governance ecosystem rather than treating the five roles as isolated administrative functions.

Through these governance mechanisms, the framework connects government roles with broader smart tourism outcomes, including sustainable destinations, enhanced tourist experiences, data-driven decision-making, collaborative governance, and digital transformation. These outcomes represent the broader objectives associated with smart tourism governance rather than empirically tested causal effects in this study.

The framework is further interpreted through four complementary public administration perspectives. Collaborative Governance explains stakeholder participation and shared decision-making. Network Governance emphasizes coordination among interdependent organizations. Digital Governance provides a basis for understanding government functions related to digital infrastructure, data, and technology-enabled public management. Meta-Governance explains the government's capacity to steer and coordinate governance networks without directly controlling all participating actors.

The theoretical innovation of the framework lies in reconceptualizing government in smart tourism governance as a multidimensional governance actor rather than merely a regulator or one stakeholder among others. The framework integrates regulatory authority with infrastructural, coordinating, data-governance, and innovation-enabling functions, while situating these roles within collaborative and network-based governance arrangements. This formulation connects the technological orientation of smart tourism research with the institutional and administrative functions of government and provides a government-centered perspective on smart tourism governance.

The findings suggest that smart tourism governance should be understood as a multidimensional form of public governance rather than as a purely technological or regulatory process. The five government roles identified in the framework extend the conventional understanding of government in tourism governance by connecting regulatory authority with digital infrastructure, inter-organizational coordination, data management, and innovation support. This interpretation is consistent with the broader transformation of public governance in digitally mediated environments, where government functions increasingly involve coordination, information management, and institutional facilitation.

From the perspective of Collaborative Governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008) governments facilitate collaboration among public institutions, private businesses, local communities, and other

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tourism stakeholders. Smart tourism involves public institutions, tourism businesses, communities, technology providers, and other stakeholders whose resources and knowledge are interdependent. The government therefore performs a coordinating function by creating conditions for stakeholder participation, information exchange, and joint problem-solving. This finding extends the application of Collaborative Governance to the smart tourism context by showing how coordination is increasingly mediated by digital systems and data.

The roles of Digital Infrastructure Provider and Data Steward are closely related to Digital Governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006). The findings indicate that digital transformation in tourism requires more than the adoption of technology by tourism organizations. It also depends on public institutional capacity to support digital infrastructure, integrate information, manage data, and facilitate evidence-based decision-making. In this sense, government becomes part of the digital architecture of tourism governance rather than remaining external to technological transformation.

Furthermore, Network Governance (Looman et al., 2021) explains the importance of coordination among multiple organizations. Rather than exercising authority exclusively through hierarchical structures, government must coordinate actors that possess different resources, responsibilities, and technological capabilities. The Network Coordinator role therefore reflects a shift from direct control toward network-based coordination. This does not mean that government authority disappears; rather, regulatory and institutional authority is exercised through relationships with other actors within the governance network.

Meta-Governance helps explain how the five government roles can operate simultaneously within a multi-actor governance environment (Cristofoli et al., 2022). Government does not need to control every activity directly; instead, it can establish rules, coordinate networks, provide strategic direction, facilitate digital infrastructure, manage public data, and create conditions for innovation. The Innovation Enabler and Regulator roles are particularly relevant to this perspective because they illustrate how government can steer the development of smart tourism while allowing other actors to participate in implementation.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives indicate that the contribution of the framework is not simply the identification of five government functions. Its theoretical contribution lies in integrating these functions into a single government-centered governance configuration. Regulatory authority, digital infrastructure provision, network coordination, data stewardship, and innovation enablement are treated as interconnected rather than independent administrative tasks. This configuration provides a bridge between the literature on smart tourism and the literature on public governance by showing how technological transformation changes the institutional functions through which government participates in tourism governance.

Overall, the findings indicate that smart tourism governance involves a reconfiguration of government functions in response to digitalization, data-driven management, and multi-actor collaboration. The government-centered framework therefore does not imply that government governs tourism independently. Instead, it highlights how governmental authority and administrative capacity are combined with network coordination, digital capabilities, and innovation-oriented functions within a broader governance ecosystem.

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4. Conclusion

This study examined the intellectual development of smart tourism governance and the evolving role of government through a scientometric analysis of publications indexed in the Scopus database from 2015 to 2025. Based on 132 publications analyzed using CiteSpace, the findings indicate that smart tourism governance has developed beyond a primarily technology-oriented perspective toward a broader governance perspective involving digital transformation, sustainability, data, infrastructure, and multi-actor collaboration. The combined scientometric findings provide the basis for synthesizing five interconnected government roles: Regulator, Digital Infrastructure Provider, Network Coordinator, Data Steward, and Innovation Enabler. These roles are conceptually derived from recurring thematic patterns in the literature rather than treated as directly measured variables in the scientometric analysis.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the Government-Centered Smart Tourism Governance Framework, which synthesizes fragmented themes in the smart tourism literature into a coherent conceptual model. The framework conceptualizes government as a multidimensional governance actor whose functions extend beyond regulation to include digital infrastructure provision, network coordination, data stewardship, and innovation enablement. These functions operate through interconnected governance mechanisms, including policy integration, stakeholder collaboration, data governance, digital innovation, and institutional coordination. By integrating perspectives from Collaborative Governance, Network Governance, Digital Governance, and Meta-Governance, the framework connects the technological orientation of smart tourism with the institutional and administrative functions of government.

From a practical perspective, the framework indicates that smart tourism governance requires government capacity across multiple and interconnected functions. Public authorities need to support appropriate regulatory arrangements, strengthen digital infrastructure, facilitate coordination among tourism stakeholders, establish effective data governance, and create institutional conditions that enable digital innovation. These functions are intended to support broader smart tourism governance objectives, including sustainable destination development, enhanced tourist experiences, data-driven decision-making, collaborative governance, and digital transformation. These outcomes should be understood as governance objectives associated with the proposed framework rather than empirically tested causal effects.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to publications indexed in the Scopus database and therefore may not capture relevant studies indexed in other databases. Second, the study uses a scientometric approach, meaning that the five government roles represent a conceptual synthesis of patterns identified in the literature rather than empirically validated government functions. Future research should therefore incorporate additional databases, such as Web of Science or Dimensions, and employ empirical approaches including case studies, surveys, interviews, or comparative research to validate, refine, and contextualize the proposed Government-Centered Smart Tourism Governance Framework across different tourism destinations and institutional settings.

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