

SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF HEALTH TOURISM INNOVATION

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Abstract:

Innovation is considered as one of the most important aspects for businesses and this importance is prominently present for both establishing and expanding effective & successful health tourism businesses. Innovation concept allows health tourism establishments to improve themselves and provide differential advantage while competing in marketplace for attracting new customers. Based on this importance of innovation within the context of health tourism establishments, the aim of this study is to reveal the gaps in the literature of innovation in health tourism entrepreneurship field. Furthermore, this paper aims to examine the whole field in a comprehensive manner by also focusing on the related fields and relevant promising areas for research in health tourism innovation. Main significance of this study is two-fold. Firstly, this study aims to provide a short review of the literature within the topic of health tourism innovation. Secondly, study attempts to reveal the prominent research gaps in health tourism innovation. Based on the analysis conducted, results of this study remark that a significant research gap exists in the innovation studies in spa and wellness tourism field. Furthermore, results showed that most of the studies in the field employ qualitative research methods. Most common study topics within the field are found as the measurement and determinants of innovativeness, impact on costs, innovation's relationship with sustainability, drivers of innovation, collaboration, aspects of innovation on success, various innovation types' effectiveness on health tourism establishments and successful innovation applications.

Keywords:

bibliometric analysis, health tourism, medical tourism, spa tourism, innovation.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of innovation is a crucial aspect for health tourism establishment that aims to expand their operations, improve and gain competitive advantage in the market. Innovation in the health tourism field includes various aspects of developing new ideas, creative applications, or improving offerings of health tourism services in order to improve customer satisfaction; maintaining brand loyalty, reducing costs, featuring word of mouth and embracing a more efficient marketing and management strategies. Thus, innovation is considered as a crucial concept not only for practitioners in the sector but also for academics studying the field.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the word itself is gaining notoriety especially in the 21st century, the roots of the word “innovation” comes from Latin, which can be translated as the introduction of something unique and new. According to Szymanska (2015), etymologic root of the innovation comes from “innovatia”, which can be translated as “to renew”. Innovation is related to launching and introducing a new idea, product, service, practice or application that is marketable, unique and trendy. A new product, providing a unique service can be considered as an innovation. Innovations can be introduced in almost every single sector throughout the business environment. According to Pirnar (2020), types of innovation within the tourism industry includes product innovations, process innovation, marketing innovations, business model innovations, organizational innovation etc. Utilizing social media for destination marketing activities to reach masses for example are also considered to be an innovative approach (Altın & Pirnar, 2021). Innovation is imperative for organizations and businesses that aim to expand their operations, gain competitive advantage and be profitable in the market (Pirnar et al., 2019).

Health tourism is one of the sub-sectors of tourism industry and it is related to a person’s desire to live a long, healthy and prosperous life while maintaining their wellness (Szymańska, 2015). Enhancing beauty and being fit are also considered to be the main motivational factors for individuals to engage in health tourism. Within this context, health tourism can be described as a subset of tourism industry that is characterized by high development dynamics. Services provided by health tourism can be provided at various market levels. These levels vary from local markets to global markets (Panasiuk, 2018). Like many other sectors, examples of innovation in health tourism includes the introduction of cold spas, using robots for cleaning services, utilizing digital services such as E-Health or applying total innovation management or co-branding concepts (Pirnar et al., 2012; Smith & Puczkó, 2016; Zsarnoczky, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to reveal the gaps in the innovation in health tourism and entrepreneurship literature by showing the fundamentals of each field in a comprehensive manner. To achieve this purpose, bibliometric analysis method is utilized in this study. Articles indexed in four different databases (WoS, Emerald, Scopus, EBSCO) between 2000 and 2021 are analyzed by conducting a thorough search with two groups of keywords (innovation, innovativeness and innovation management) and health tourism/spa tourism/ wellness tourism medical tourism on the databases title, abstract and keyword parts (TITLE-ABS-KEY) in addition to content. Thus, the content of the studies is examined in detail, in respect to the author numbers, sample, application countries, methodology, results and implications.

RESULTS:

Bibliometric analysis revealed that there are 17 articles in the databases. Among these 17 studies, 7 of them are associated with health tourism, 1 one them is associated with spa tourism, 2 of them are associated with wellness tourism whereas 7 of the studies are associated with medical tourism. Moreover, results showed that 50% of the studies are conducted with qualitative research methods, 35% utilized mixed method approaches whereas only 15% utilized quantitative research methods. Results indicate that all of the articles were published after 2010, which proves that field has gained significant notoriety in 21st century. Based on the publication origins of the articles, it is apparent that most of the studies were conducted in Poland, followed by USA, Lithuania, Australia and Switzerland.



CONCLUSION:

The breakdown of the studies based on the bibliometric analysis indicate that there is a serious research gap in the innovation studies in spa and wellness tourism, where the present studies are concentrated on health and medical studies.

As for the focus of the articles, the areas researched mostly consists of measurement and determinants of innovativeness, impact on costs, innovation's relationship with sustainability, drivers of innovation, collaboration, aspects of innovation on success, various innovation types' effectiveness on health tourism establishments and successful innovation applications.

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