

# Past themes and future trends in medical tourism research: A co-word analysis

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## Highlights

- A co-word analysis was applied to elucidate the thematic evolution of medical tourism (MT) research from 1931 to 2016.
- Research on medical tourism has broadened its focus since 1987.
- Topics such as assisted reproduction and fertility tourism will be of interest for MT research in a near future.

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of medical tourism (MT) research from a longitudinal perspective (period 1931–2016). A co-word analysis was applied to themes found in published research listed in the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus database services.

The results reveal six clusters of themes: a) issues regarding ethical implications, trust and accreditation; b) health, wellness, spa tourism and service quality; c) health-related issues, medical treatments and tourism; d) “sensitive” practices in MT; e) medical tourism destinations and marketing; and f) globalization, policies and the effect on international patients. This study is one of the first attempts to use a bibliometric approach and co-word analysis so as to offer powerful insight into the conceptual structure of MT research from academic literature and to visualize all the underlying and interconnected subfields. It also provides a guide to researchers by improving the understanding of the current state of the art and predicting the direction of future research.

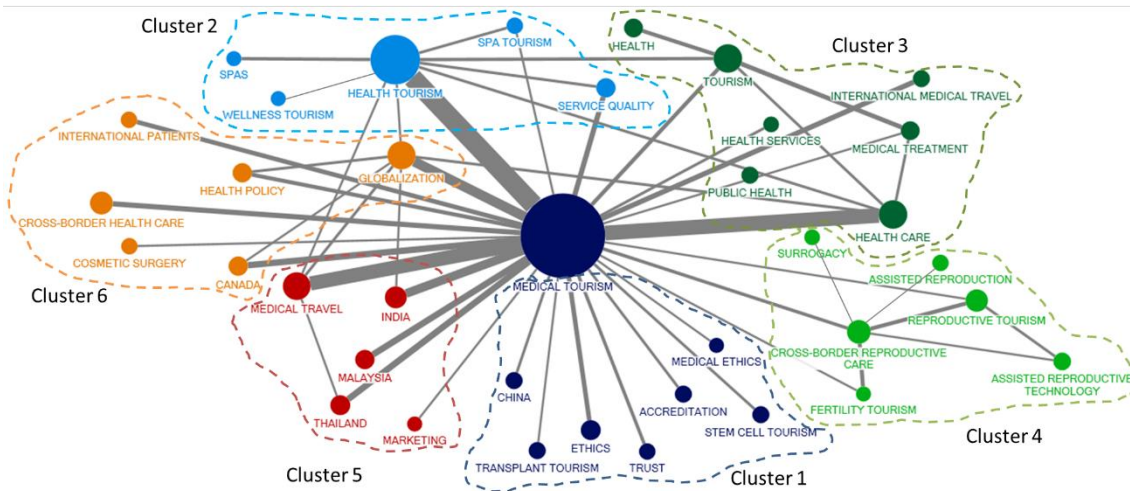
## Keywords

Bibliometric analysis, Co-word analysis, Thematic evolution, Medical tourism, Health tourism

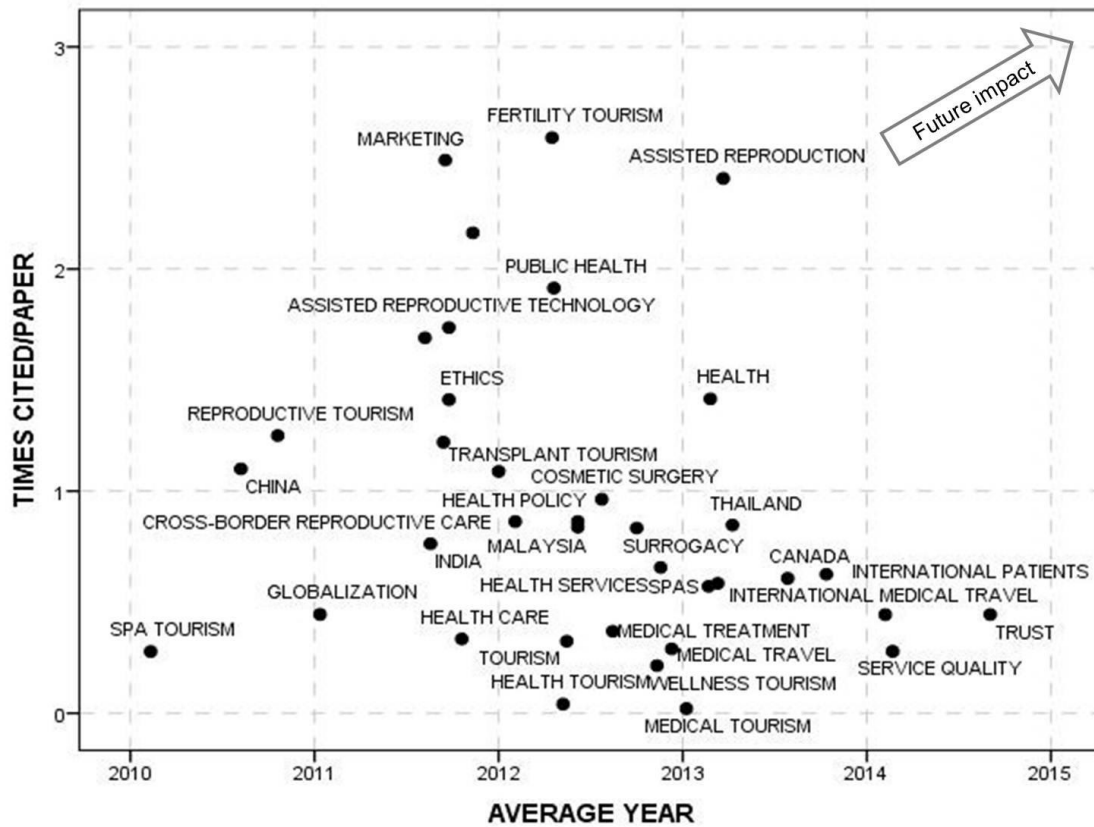
## Query:

TS = “medical tourism” OR “health tourism” OR “medical tourist” OR “health tourist” OR “medical tourists” OR “health tourists” where the TS field is a search based on the “Topic” (title, abstract and keywords).

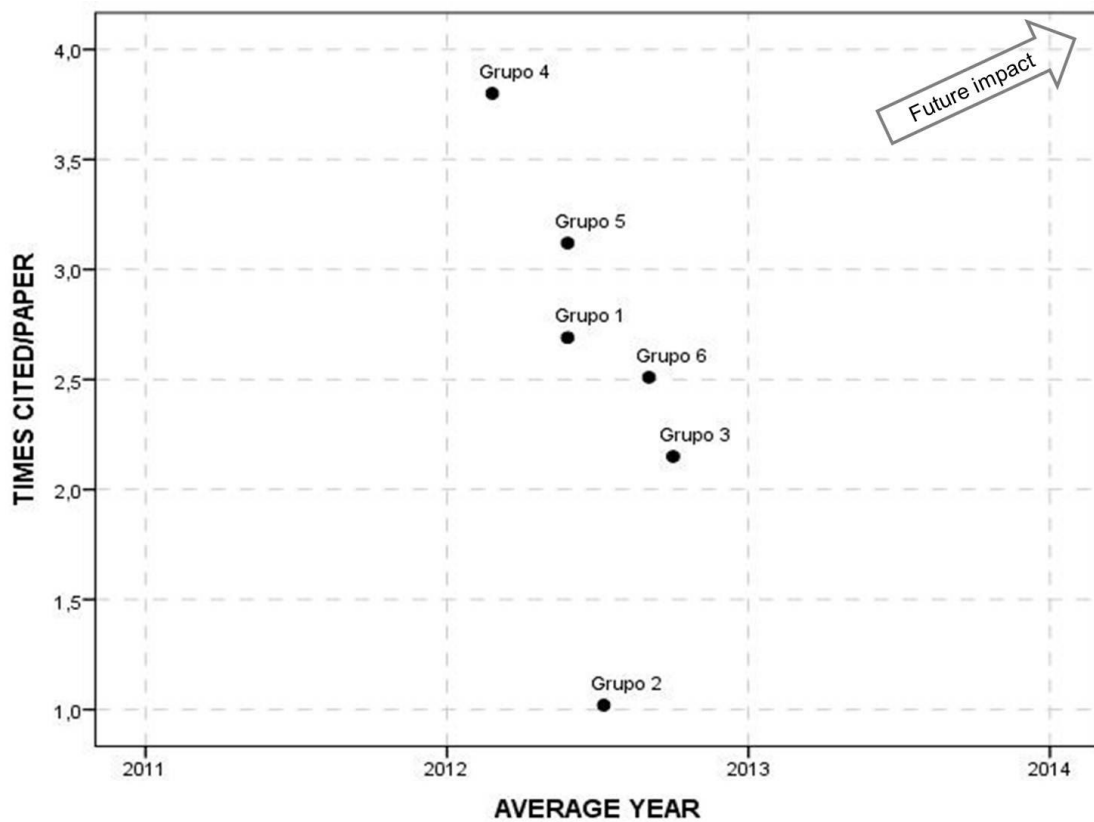
## Results



**Figure 4:** Global thematic network in MT Research (Clauaset-Newman-Moore clustering algorithm). Note: the numbers refer to the six thematic groups or clusters identified in the analysis (Cluster 1: “Studies regarding ethical implications, unethical practices, trust and accreditation;” Cluster 2: “Studies on health, wellness, spa tourism and service quality;” Cluster 3: “Studies on health-related issues (health care, health services, public health), medical treatments, and tourism;” Cluster 4: “Studies on “sensitive” practices in medical tourism;” Cluster 5: “Studies on medical tourism destinations and marketing;” Cluster 6: “Studies on globalization, policies and the effect on international patients”).



**Fig. 5.** Longitudinal analysis of the most significant keywords (Number of citations/paper vs. average year).



**Fig. 6.** Longitudinal analysis of the most significant clusters (Number of citations/paper vs. average year).