



## Bibliometric Analysis of Research on Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism in Iran

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### Abstract

Using bibliometric techniques, this study maps three decades of scholarship on pilgrimage and religious tourism in Iran. A systematic search of the Noormags, ISC, and GANJ databases yielded 696 scholarly outputs—454 journal articles and 242 theses—which were screened through explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria and analyzed quantitatively. Results reveal an exponential rise in publications from the mid-2000s, with pronounced surges in 2012 and 2015 that coincide with national pilgrimage-development programs and the launch of academic degrees in religious tourism. Bradford's analysis identified ten core journals—led by *Miqāt-i Hajj*, *Farhang-i Riḍavī*, and *Pazhūhishnāmah-yi Hajj va Ziyārat* (Hajj and Ziyārat Research Journal)—that together account for nearly one-quarter of all articles. Among 817 contributing authors, only seven have published more than five papers, reflecting a highly fragmented author landscape dominated by geography and sociology scholars. Co-authorship networks are weak and largely confined to supervisor–student collaborations. Geographically, Tehran Province (38%) and Khorasan-e Razavi (24%) are the principal knowledge hubs, underscoring the research pull of major pilgrimage cities and flagship universities. Disciplinary profiling shows that over 90% of studies cluster in five fields—geographical sciences, management, Islamic theology, social sciences, and communication studies. Despite this concentration, the absence of a comprehensive scientific map and the scarcity of inter-institutional partnerships highlight the need for integrated citation databases and stronger collaborative frameworks to advance interdisciplinary research on pilgrimage in Iran.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage, religious tourism, bibliometric analysis, scholarly mapping, core journals, research trends

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## 1. Introduction

Pilgrimage and religious tourism, as one of the most significant forms of tourism globally and particularly in Iran, has consistently garnered the attention of researchers and scholars. With numerous religious sites, including the Holy Shrine of Imām Riḍā (A.S.) in Mashhad and the Shrine of Haḍrat Ma'ṣūmah (S.A.) in Qom, Iran annually welcomes millions of pilgrims and religious tourists from around the world. Understanding the various dimensions of this phenomenon, including the trends in research conducted in this area, is essential for effective planning and policymaking. This study, employing bibliometric methods, examines and quantitatively analyses the research undertaken on pilgrimage and religious tourism in Iran, seeking to answer the following questions:

1. What has been the quantitative growth of pilgrimage research in recent years?
2. Which are the core journals in the field of pilgrimage?
3. Who are the most active researchers in this area?
4. What is the state of collaboration among scholars in this field?
5. Which are the most important institutions, universities, and research centers active in this area?
6. How can the knowledge structure in the field of pilgrimage be identified and mapped?

## 2. Literature Review

Scholarly research on pilgrimage in English commenced in the 1960s and 1970s, pioneered by historians, followed by social scientists, particularly social anthropologists (Albera and Eade 2015, 2). Researchers in Iran began their research efforts on religious tourism and pilgrimage approximately four decades later, from the beginning of the new millennium. These efforts were spearheaded by disciplines such as social sciences (Muḥammad'pūr 2002), urban planning (Ṣāliḥī'fard 2007), and geography (Mu'minī et al. 2008), with support from institutions such as Āstān Quds Riḍāvī (Bakhtāvar 2012) and the Ḥajj and Ziyārat Organization (Zāri'ī Sabzivārī 2008).

Nevertheless, several English-language articles have performed bibliometric reviews of research on religious tourism and pilgrimage in databases such as Web of Science (Durán-Sánchez et al. 2018a; Yayla 2023) and Scopus (Durán-Sánchez et al. 2018b), either independently or concurrently across both (Das et al. 2024). Furthermore, Persian-language articles have also conducted such reviews using Web of Science data (Ismā'īlī Mahyārī et al. 2023). These articles vary in their search keywords, timeframes, and inclusion/exclusion criteria, resulting in somewhat

differing reported results. However, there is relative agreement on aspects such as the high growth rate of research on pilgrimage and religious tourism over the past three decades, the most cited articles, and the core journals. Aspects such as key research topics, most cited countries and universities, co-word analysis, co-citation analysis, and international collaboration have also been reviewed.

In addition, several articles have employed traditional reviews (Collins-Kreiner 2010; Bălan 2022), literature reviews, and other review types (Iliev 2020) on religious tourism and pilgrimage in databases such as Emerald Insight and Google Scholar (Rashid 2018). Some of these reviews contain sections resembling bibliometric analyses. It is clear that the databases examined in these studies are global, and therefore their analyzed data differ from the scope of this research (Iran).

The only research identified that reviews studies on pilgrimage and religious tourism in Iran was conducted in 2023 (Riḍāvīzādah and Varshoe 2023). Although the authors claim to have adopted a systematic review approach and refer to the reference book for the definition of a systematic review (Aveyard 2010), this research should be considered a traditional review with some overlap with bibliometric reviews. The authors have not adhered to the criteria outlined by Aveyard for systematic reviews. In this study, the research question is unclear. The databases used have not been evaluated, the search process lacks transparency, and their exclusion criteria are general and not described in detail. In this paper, the 'method of undertaking review isn't explicit and repeatable' (Aveyard 2010, 19). The results and recommendations of a review study should stem directly from the research conducted, rather than from preconceived ideas (Aveyard 2010, 4), which, unfortunately, in this study, much of the conclusion is either unrelated to the body of the paper, or at least its connection is not shown, and is therefore neither clear nor explicit.

### **3. Conceptual Framework**

By "research" in this paper, I mean scholarly work that has been published online in databases after peer review by experts, including academic articles and theses.

The most common usage of "ziyārat" (pilgrimage) refers to "visiting a sacred place." In another sense, in the Persian language, "ziyārat" refers to a "ziyāratnāmah," a written supplication or prayer recited during a pilgrimage or visit to a shrine. This sense is often used in compounds, such as "ziyārat 'Āshūrā" (a supplication recited on the tenth day of Muḥarram, the first month of the Islamic calendar), "ziyārat Jāmi'ah Kabīrah," and "ziyārat Amīn Allāh" (two supplications recited in the holy shrine). In a broader sense, "ziyārat" is not limited to visiting the graves of saints but also includes

visits to the graves of thinkers, artists, or even cemeteries. In Persian, “ziyārat” also commonly refers to visiting friends, acquaintances, and the sick. This study adopts a broad definition of “ziyārat,” including all meanings except for the acts of visiting friends, acquaintances, or the sick.

There is a discrepancy in the definition of “religious tourism.” Some define it based on the traveler’s motivation, while others based on the destination of the journey. From a religious perspective, pilgrimage differs from religious tourism, as pilgrims have specific goals and purposes. From a tourism industry perspective, the activities of tourists during their journey are the primary criterion for definition, and pilgrimage is considered a type of religious tourism (Timothy and Olsen 2006, 272). Some studies consider religious tourism to encompass pilgrimage, including visits to sacred sites or participation in religious ceremonies (Yaqūb'zādah 2014, 63). Examples include travel to participate in religious festivals (Muḥammadī Yigānah et al. 2014; Rizā'ī et al. 2014; Shaffī 2019; Davīrān 2020), mourning ceremonies (Mīr Katūlī et al. 2015), and local religious rituals, attending religious conferences, attending religious music concerts, and traveling to see religious art, culture, traditions, and architecture (Fīrūzjā'iyān Gālūgāh et al. 2014, 146–147; Ḥaydarī Hurmiz 2022), or to gain religious experiences, learning, and spiritual awareness (Bāghirī et al. 2021, 169), or even accompanying a mystic or ascetic on their journey (Mūla'ī 2022). Additionally, terms such as “pilgrimage tourism” (Jalālī et al. 2021; Nūrallāh'zādah and Asadī 2021) or “Shī'a tourism” (Zārī'īn'rizī 2015) have been used, sometimes interchangeably. In this paper, when searching for research, religious tourism encompasses the concept of pilgrimage and, in addition, includes visits by non-adherents to religious sites and participation in specific religious ceremonies. When filtering, only articles where religious tourism is synonymous with pilgrimage will be selected.

The term “Iran” refers to the geographical region under the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, since the search is based on online databases, the search will only be conducted in databases that index research conducted within this geographical region. Therefore, if a study is produced outside of Iran but is indexed in databases whose servers are located in Iran, it will be included in this review. The implied meaning of the word “Iran” in the title of the research is that only studies conducted in the official language, Persian, will be reviewed. Therefore, studies in other languages such as English, Arabic, Turkish, etc., on the topic of pilgrimage that have been published in Iran, will not be considered. It is clear that the nationality of the researcher is not a criterion. If an Iranian author has published their research in a non-Persian language outside of Iran or even within Iran, their research will not be

considered. However, if a non-Iranian author has published their research in Persian or if their research has been translated into Persian and indexed in Iranian databases, their research will be reviewed.

#### **4. Database Selection and Evaluation**

Bibliometric studies rely heavily on the selection and evaluation of scholarly databases. The choice of databases significantly impacts the accuracy and comprehensiveness of research outcomes (Durán-Sánchez et al. 2018a, 2). This section presents a systematic assessment of prevalent databases within the Iranian humanities and social sciences domain. Evaluation metrics included accuracy, topical coverage, retrieval efficacy, and the feasibility of bibliographic data extraction.

The databases examined comprised: Portal of Humanities<sup>1</sup>, Scientific Information Database (SID), Iranian Scientific Journals System (affiliated with the National Library of Iran)<sup>2</sup>, Ganj (IranDoc)<sup>3</sup>, Civilica, TPbin, Magiran, Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC), and Noormags.

The Portal of Humanities, SID, Iranian Scientific Journals System, and Ganj offered free access to full-text research. However, the lack of standardized bibliographic data export (e.g., Excel, RIS formats) posed a significant limitation. Ganj, notably, served as a valuable resource for accessing academic theses.

Civilica and TPbin, while indexing conference and journal articles, shared similar data export limitations, coupled with less intuitive user interfaces and restricted retrieval capabilities. Magiran facilitated data export, albeit with a 10-record output limit, rendering large-scale data collection time-consuming.

Given the substantial data volume in bibliometric studies, manual searches proved impractical. Based on empirical findings and researcher experience (Shahbāzī and Shahīnī 2016), Noormags emerged as the primary database for article retrieval due to its broader topical coverage and comprehensive search results. Ganj served as the primary repository for theses.

However, Noormags exhibited limitations, including a 1000-record output restriction and the absence of citation data in exported files, a critical component of bibliometric analysis.

It is imperative to note that search engines, such as Elmnet, are unsuitable for bibliometric studies due to their opaque search algorithms and non-replicable results. This is particularly significant in studies requiring precision and reproducibility (this issue is also pertinent to the Google Scholar search engine [Foster and Jewell 2017, 70]).

## 5. Retrieval and Aggregation of Academic Sources on “Ziyārat” and “Religious Tourism”

In order to identify and collect scholarly resources related to ziyārat and religious tourism, a systematic search was conducted across three major databases: Noormags, the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC), and the Iranian Thesis Database (GANJ). The search process was guided by clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and focused on two main keywords: “زیارت” (*ziyārat*) and “گردشگری مذهبی” (*gardishgarī-i mazhabī*; religious tourism).

For the keyword *ziyārat*, an advanced search in Noormags retrieved a total of 1,610 records. Due to the platform’s limitation in exporting only the first 1,000 records, results were retrieved in multiple stages based on journal ranking categories. After excluding unranked journals, a total of 430 valid articles were retained for further review.

Similarly, the ISC database yielded 249 records under the same keyword. Following the exclusion of general, non-academic publications and articles with four or fewer pages, 97 qualified articles remained. After merging results from both databases and eliminating duplicates, a final corpus of 527 scholarly articles was compiled for content analysis.

The same procedure was applied to the keyword “religious tourism.” In Noormags, a multi-date search was conducted due to variation in retrieval outputs. After removing low-quality conference papers and duplicates, 187 valid articles were identified. From ISC, 77 qualifying articles were retained after filtering. The final, de-duplicated set consisted of 199 academic articles on religious tourism.

In the third stage, theses were searched using the same two keywords in the GANJ database. For *ziyārat*, 78 relevant theses were manually reviewed and selected according to the inclusion criteria. Undergraduate-level works were excluded.

For religious tourism, 171 theses were retrieved and similarly screened during the selection process. After removing overlapping entries between the two categories, a total of 242 valid theses remained.

In summary, after the final aggregation and removal of duplicates, the total number of scholarly sources included in the study amounted to 696, consisting of 454 articles and 242 theses, forming the empirical basis for further content analysis.

## 6. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Articles and Theses Related to “Pilgrimage” and “Religious Tourism”

To ensure the accurate selection of data, inclusion and exclusion criteria for articles

and theses were examined across two separate yet parallel thematic axes: “pilgrimage” and “religious tourism.” The screening process involved initially reading the abstracts of the works. In cases where thematic focus could not be determined from the abstract alone, a general review of the content was conducted, and if ambiguity remained, the entire article was read in full.

### **6-1. Pilgrimage**

The primary inclusion criterion in this section was a clear thematic focus on pilgrimage or closely related concepts. The mere appearance of the word “pilgrimage” in the title or a section of the article was not sufficient for inclusion. Only those studies that centrally addressed pilgrimage and its social, cultural, psychological, or spatial dimensions were retained for review.

For example, the article “Qualitative Study of the Model of Iranian and Iraqi Identity Expression in the Arbaeen Walkway” (Tajbakhsh et al. 2019) was included due to its focus on analyzing pilgrims’ identity-related features and interactions. Similarly, the article “Analysis of the Evaluation of Religious Paths of the Holy Shrine of Masoumeh” (Kumaylī 2019) was reviewed as it examined the spatial aspects of pilgrimage in a shrine context. In contrast, articles such as “The Investigation of Religious Education Parameters in Child Development Journals: A Content Analysis” (Ḥāfiẓī 2017), in which pilgrimage was only a minor or incidental theme, were excluded. Likewise, the article “The View of Imam Reza in Contemporary Poetry of Ilam” (Shuhānī and Ḥātāmī 2020) was removed due to its general focus on religious poetry rather than pilgrimage itself.

With a broader perspective on pilgrimage, articles that discussed cultural heritage, cemetery location planning, or tomb architecture were also included if they made clear reference to pilgrimage culture. For instance, “Recognition of the Principles Governing the Locating and Development of Cemeteries from the Past to the Present” (Tūrānpūr et al. 2019), which focused on historical cemeteries such as Takht-e Foulad and Bagh-e Rezvan in Isfahan, was considered thematically relevant.

In some cases, while the article’s primary focus appeared to be something else, deeper analysis revealed a close relation to pilgrimage. An example is the article “The Foregrounding Strategies in the Discourse of Taṣawwuf; Case Study: The Sufist Legacy of Abu Said Abulkhair” (Bīdilī et al. 2020), which, though focused on Sufi discourse, revolved around the significance of the khanqah and Sufi tombs, making it relevant to pilgrimage studies.

Moreover, articles dealing with management or human resources, whose statistical

population consisted of pilgrims or employees of religious institutions, were also included due to the contextual relevance of their case studies. One such article is “Developing Optimal Conceptual Model for Increasing Employees’ Work Adjustment and Cultural Intelligence” (Kamālī et al. 2021).

## **6-2. Religious Tourism**

Initially, it should be noted that, since it is not possible to distinguish between religious tourism and pilgrimage in Persian-language research, the term “religious tourism” is used in its broader sense and includes pilgrimage. In other words, the keyword “religious tourism” and any research that addresses religious tourism in this context are included in the review.

The main criterion for inclusion is the theme of the article, which must specifically address “religious tourism” or related topics such as religious tourists or religious tourism destinations. Therefore, articles that are broadly related to the topic of “tourism” in general, even if they discuss religious tourism, are excluded from the review. For instance, if the purpose of an article is to analyze tourism activities in urban areas, and it is concluded that tourism in one of the regions is of a religious nature, the article is excluded from the review because its main focus is on tourism activities within a specific geographical area, not religious tourism (Tavakolnīyā et al. 2014). As another example, if the article (Jamshīdī et al. 2018) aims to examine the spatial effects (such as rising housing prices, uneven distribution of housing and employment, traffic and congestion, etc.) of various types of tourism on tourism services (such as retail centers and chain stores, restaurants, hotels, and transportation systems, etc.), and one of the types of tourism discussed is religious tourism, the spatial effects of sacred sites (such as the presence of holy shrines) on tourism services must also be considered. Since the primary subject of the article is the effects of various types of tourism on tourism services, the examination of the impact of religious tourism on tourism services is secondary, and therefore, the article is excluded from the review. Lastly, in the article titled “The Impact of Cultural-Religious Industries on Iran’s Economic Growth” (Ḥanjārī et al. 2019) religious tourism is considered one of the cultural-religious industries, and as a result, this article is also excluded from the review.

According to the above criteria, articles whose primary focus is on halal tourism (Ḥājīnījād et al. 2016b), rural tourism (Ṭavallā’ī et al. 2013), medical tourism (Ḥājīnījād et al. 2016a), cultural tourism (Sharīfī Tīhrānī and Yūsufī 2013), or other forms of tourism (Shujā’ī et al. 2014; Saqā’ī et al. 2012)—while only making incidental

reference to religious tourism—are excluded from the review.

Relying solely on the article title for decision-making can be misleading. Sometimes the title may be broad in scope, yet the content of the article is directly relevant to religious tourism. For example, the objective of the article “Landscape of Tourism in the Scope of Islamic Culture and Economics (Situation, Purposes and Challenges): Case Study of Iran” (Aqājānī et al. 2014) is to demonstrate the significance and status of religious tourism in Iran and the factors influencing it. Such articles are included in the review (see also Ilkhānī et al. 2017).

Despite the aforementioned criteria, if an article does not explicitly address “religious tourism” as its main subject, but the case under study involves religious tourists or a religious tourism destination, the scope of the review will include that article. For instance, the article “Reviewing the Effect of Relationship between Religiosity and Social Capital on the Level of Community Vitality among Iranian Religious Tourists (Case Study of Mashhad)” (Zahabī 2016; see also Ṭavassulī Ḥujjatī and Bījih Kishāvarzī 2015; Bakhshī and Ikhlāqī 2016), although centered on the variables of religiosity and social capital, was included due to its sampling of religious tourists.

An example of a religious tourism destination can be found in the article titled “Identifying Tourism Capabilities and Proposing Optimal Tourism Development Models from the Perspective of Applied Geography” (Istawlājī and Khushnūt'bāyatī 2012). Although the primary objective of the article is to propose development models for tourism, it becomes relevant to religious tourism due to its focus on the city of Rey. The study emphasizes that Rey, with its millennia-old historical background, a wealth of ancient, cultural, religious, and Islamic architectural sites—particularly its numerous pilgrimage attractions—and its status as one of the country’s religious education centers, holds diverse potentials for tourism, including religious and historical tourism (see also Ṣarghām Burūjinī and Tawḥīd'lū 2012).

In addition, other subsidiary topics related to religious tourism—such as religious tourism souvenirs, architecture of religious tourism destinations (Khān Ḥusaynabādī and Ishrāqī 2018), and similar themes—are also included within the scope of the review.

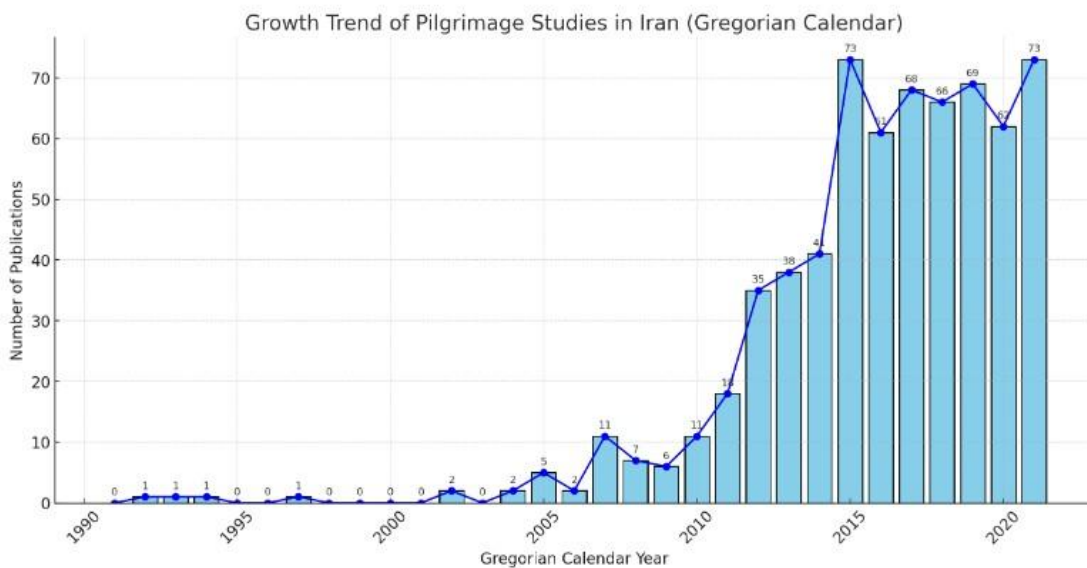
### **6-3. Theses**

The same thematic criteria were applied to the selection of theses. Theses were manually searched through the GANJ database, and screening occurred simultaneously with the selection process. Abstracts were reviewed first; if the

relevance was unclear, key sections were scanned. Theses with a clear content focus on pilgrimage, religious tourism, or closely associated topics were included in the final review. Those in which such concepts were merely secondary or briefly mentioned were excluded.

## 7. Growth Trend

Based on the data presented in previous sections, the growth trend of research on pilgrimage and religious tourism in Iran over the past three decades has followed an exponential trajectory.



### 7-1. Chart Analysis

The chart clearly indicates that the continuous growth of research in this field began in the mid-2000s (corresponding to 2005–2007). Two notable surges in scholarly activity occurred in 2012 and 2015. Naturally, this rapid growth can be attributed to the academic activities of institutions engaged in pilgrimage and religious tourism.

To investigate the reasons behind these research surges, two complementary approaches can be pursued:

1. Internal tracking—through bibliometric analysis of research publications;
2. External tracking—by monitoring the academic activities of institutions involved in pilgrimage and religious tourism, as well as the establishment and expansion of academic programs related to these fields. In this regard, relevant conferences and the development of academic disciplines within the aforementioned timeframe must be examined.

3. For instance, in 2006–2007, the Hajj and Ziyārat Organization, in collaboration with the Endowments Organization, initiated the “Pilgrimage Symposium” and issued a call for papers (Zārī‘ī Sabzivārī 2008). Also the national plan titled “Quantitative and Qualitative Development of Pilgrimage” was implemented by the government in 2010–2011. Furthermore, the Conference on Religious Tourism and the Development of the Culture of Pilgrimage was held by the Āstān Quds Riḍavī in 2012.
4. The impact of these initiatives is clearly reflected in the 2012 research surge, especially the influence of the national pilgrimage development plan (some published articles related to this national plan: Saqā‘ī et al. 2013b; ‘Aẓīmī Hāshimī and Sharī‘atī 2013; Yūsufī et al. 2013; Saqā‘ī et al. 2013a; Farūgh'zād et al. 2013; Saqā‘ī et al. 2012; Qāsimī et al. 2013; Ḥaydarī et al. 2013).
5. According to an inquiry made to the Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology), the University of Science and Culture (affiliated with the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research) admitted its first cohort of students in the Master’s program in Religious Tourism during the academic year 2013–2014, with 11 students. This number increased significantly in subsequent years, reaching 17 students in 2014–2015 and 23 in 2015–2016. Additionally, the first and second international conferences on “Tourism and Spirituality” were organized by this university in 2015 and 2016, respectively.
6. Although these developments support the hypothesis that the university’s activities contributed to the 2015 research surge, internal tracking of the research corpus does not fully corroborate this claim. Therefore, the origin of the 2015 surge requires further investigation.

## 8. Core Journals

According to Bradford’s Law in bibliometrics, when scientific journals are ranked in descending order based on the number of articles published on a specific topic, they can be categorized into a small group of core journals that focus directly on the subject, and several peripheral zones (Uṣārih et al. 2009, 44). Bradford demonstrated that a substantial portion of scholarly output in a field is concentrated in a relatively small number of journals. Generally, it is accepted that core journals comprise about 3–5% of the total number of journals in a given domain.

In this study, a total of 454 articles related to “pilgrimage” and “religious tourism” were analyzed, which were published across 199 different journals. The names of these journals were extracted and ranked by the number of relevant articles

published. The ten top-ranking journals, identified as core journals, are presented in the table below:

Rank	Journal Title	Number of Articles	URL
1	<i>Mīqāt-i Ḥajj</i>	29	<a href="https://miqat.hajj.ir/?lang=en">https://miqat.hajj.ir/?lang=en</a>
2	<i>Farhang-i Riḍavī</i> (Journal of Razavi Culture)	19	<a href="https://www.farhangerazavi.ir/?lang=en">https://www.farhangerazavi.ir/?lang=en</a>
3	<i>Pizhūhishnāmāh-yi Ḥajj va Ziyārat</i> (Ḥajj and Ziyārat Research Journal)	17	<a href="https://journal.hzrc.ac.ir/?lang=en">https://journal.hzrc.ac.ir/?lang=en</a>
4	<i>Tarḥrīzī va Tawsi‘ah-yi Gardishgarī</i> (Tourism Planning and Development)	16	<a href="https://tourismpd.journals.umz.ac.ir/?lang=en">https://tourismpd.journals.umz.ac.ir/?lang=en</a>
5	<i>Journal of Iranian Social Studies</i>	10	<a href="https://www.jss-isa.ir/">https://www.jss-isa.ir/</a>
6	<i>Muṭālī‘āt-i Ijtimā‘ī-yi Gardishgarī</i> (Social Studies in Tourism)	10	<a href="http://journalitor.ir/en">http://journalitor.ir/en</a>
7	<i>‘Ulūm-i Ḥadīth</i> (Hadith Sciences)	8	<a href="https://hadith.riqh.ac.ir/?lang=en">https://hadith.riqh.ac.ir/?lang=en</a>
8	<i>Safīnah Journal</i>	8	<a href="https://safinahmagazine.ir/en">https://safinahmagazine.ir/en</a>
9	<i>Muṭālī‘āt-i Mudīriyyat-i Gardishgarī</i> (Tourism Management Studies)	8	<a href="https://tms.atu.ac.ir/en?lang=en">https://tms.atu.ac.ir/en?lang=en</a>
10	<i>Shahr-i Īrānī-Islāmī</i> (Iranian Islamic City)	7	<a href="https://iic.ihss.ac.ir/en">https://iic.ihss.ac.ir/en</a>

## 9. Key Researchers

Identifying leading researchers in the field of pilgrimage studies is a critical step in scientometric analysis of this domain. Due to the limitations of domestic databases in Iran—which do not systematically provide citation metrics—the criterion for

identifying key researchers in this study is based on the number of published articles related to pilgrimage and religious tourism.

As mentioned earlier, the total number of articles related to pilgrimage and religious tourism amounts to 454. Given the collaborative nature of most of these publications, the total number of contributing authors reaches 817. However, a significant proportion of these authors have only contributed to a single article.

Table 2-7 presents a list of the most active researchers in this field, based on the number of their publications:

No.	Researcher	Field of Expertise	Affiliation	Academic Rank	Number of Articles
1	Aşghar Mülā'ī	Architecture and Urban Planning	Tabriz Islamic Art University	Associate Prof.	9
2	Zahrā Mu'āvin	Sociology - Tourism	Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality, Shiraz University	Assistant Prof.	8
3	Mahdī Saqā'ī	Geography and Tourism Planning	Faculty of Tourism, Hakim Jorjani University, Gorgan	Assistant Prof.	7
4	Zuhrah Javānbakht Qahfārrukhī	Geography - Spatial Planning	Faculty of Tourism, Hakim Jorjani University, Gorgan	Assistant Prof.	6
5	Majīd Muwahhidmajīd	Sociology of Religion	Faculty of Economics, Management and Social Sciences, Shiraz University	Associate Prof.	6

No.	Researcher	Field of Expertise	Affiliation	Academic Rank	Number of Articles
6	‘Alī Riḍā Bīdkhurī	Urban Planning	Motehar Rationalists Institute	Assistant Prof.	5
7	Aṣghar Muntazir al-Qā’im	Islamic History	Department of History, University of Isfahan	Professor	5

The distribution of academic disciplines among these key researchers shows that Geography has the highest representation, with 18 researchers, followed by Sociology with 13. Additionally, the fields of Islamic Theology and Management also show significant engagement, each with 6 leading researchers contributing to the domain of pilgrimage studies.

## 9. Scholarly Collaboration

Scientific collaboration holds a critical role in the advancement of academic development. Major scientific progress and research achievements increasingly rely on cooperation among researchers and scholars. Therefore, collaboration is recognized as a fundamental mechanism for scientific advancement and plays a key role across all fields of knowledge, fostering innovation and scholarly growth.

Pilgrimage, as a multidisciplinary subject, inherently demands cooperation among governmental, private, and civil society institutions. It intersects with a wide array of domains, including transportation (road, rail, and air), security, international relations, housing, health, urban planning, economics, management, and law. Given this breadth, cross-disciplinary research collaboration—whether among academic institutions themselves or between research and operational bodies—appears both necessary and natural.

In scientometric studies, an increase in the number of co-authors on a publication is often seen as an indicator of the complexity of the research topic and the need for diverse expertise. Research projects that are highly resource-intensive, geographically expansive, or of high strategic importance usually demand interdisciplinary cooperation and team-based work. The successful execution of such projects often reflects the capability and institutional strength of the involved researchers and research bodies.

However, a review of pilgrimage-related research in Iran reveals a rather limited

level of scholarly collaboration. Much of the observed co-authorship in this field is associated with university theses, rather than collaborative research initiatives. Moreover, the phenomenon of nominal authorship—where individuals are added to papers to artificially enhance academic resumes—is not uncommon in Iran. As a result, even studies with relatively straightforward research questions are sometimes published with four or five (or more) co-authors, despite the limited need for multiple areas of expertise (e.g., Fūlādīyān et al. 2020; Tūhidī et al. 2016).

This weak culture of scientific collaboration is further corroborated by broader analyses of Iran's academic environment. Studies of co-authorship networks among researchers in the humanities have shown a general preference for individual work or involvement in very small teams (Irfānmanish and Ardakānī 2016). In fact, despite significant thematic overlap among Iran's humanities research institutes, there is virtually no meaningful inter-institutional cooperation (Asadī and Farūniyā Shamīlī 2016). This lack of integration reflects a broader fragmentation within Iran's humanities research landscape. When such fragmentation exists even among institutions with shared focus areas, the situation becomes even more challenging in interdisciplinary fields like pilgrimage studies, which require coordination across a diverse set of institutional and thematic domains.

## **10. Leading Academic Institutions in Pilgrimage Studies**

This section aims to identify which universities, faculties, academic departments, and research institutes across Iran are actively engaged in pilgrimage-related studies, and in which academic disciplines they are involved.

Findings from this research indicate that, among the total number of academic outputs (including theses and peer-reviewed journal articles) related to pilgrimage, Tehran Province accounts for the largest share, contributing 38% of the national total. Khorasan Razavi Province follows with 24%, making these two provinces the primary hubs for pilgrimage research in Iran. Other provinces contribute to a significantly lesser extent, as presented in Table 2-8 and Figure 4.

A noteworthy observation is the relatively uneven geographic distribution of pilgrimage-related research and the general lack of widespread institutional involvement across the country.

As will be discussed, the majority of pilgrimage research is conducted within the academic disciplines of geography, management, Islamic theology and studies, and the social sciences. When examining the contribution of individual universities to research output in these disciplines, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad emerges as a major contributor, particularly in geography and the social sciences.

Province	Share (%)
Tehran	38%
Khorasan Razavi	24%
Isfahan	8%
Qom	8%
Shiraz (Fars)	4%
Gorgan (Golestan)	3%
Mazandaran	2%
Tabriz (East Azerbaijan)	1%
Semnan	1%
Sistan and Baluchestan	1%
Gilan	1%



Figure 1: The contribution of each province in scientific research in the field of pilgrimage

This outcome is unsurprising, given the university's location in Mashhad—the most important pilgrimage city in Iran. As a result, academic work related to urban planning, development, and management in Mashhad is often intrinsically linked to the topic of pilgrimage. The contributions of various universities in each of these disciplines are further illustrated in Figures 3 through 6.

## 11. Scientific Mapping of Pilgrimage-Related Research

The objective of mapping the scientific literature related to pilgrimage is to identify and analyze the knowledge structure of this field. This endeavor helps researchers and policymakers gain a clear understanding of how academic research on pilgrimage is distributed and how it connects with other disciplines. Essentially, the main goal of scientific mapping is to reveal interdisciplinary relationships within pilgrimage studies. These maps demonstrate how various concepts related to pilgrimage interact

and what scholarly resources they commonly rely upon.

Developing such maps typically requires the use of tools like VOSviewer and access to local or specialized academic databases. However, due to the lack of proper infrastructure in Iran, manually conducting this process is often time-consuming, complex, and practically, not feasible.

Defining a clear structure for the scientific field of pilgrimage is not straightforward either. Any disciplinary structure must be backed by consensus or relative agreement among experts in the field. If a researcher proposes a structure or set of research problems without strong theoretical justification and scholarly reasoning, it is unlikely to be widely accepted.

Research activities in this field are not confined to a single organization. In addition to the two main ministries—the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and the Ministry of Health—private institutions and other bodies also play a role. However, knowledge management in Iran is distributed across several different organizations. To analyze the research structure of pilgrimage and to map its scholarly landscape, it is necessary to focus on key institutions, namely:

1. Ministry of Science, Research and Technology
2. Ministry of Health and Medical Education
3. Islamic Seminary Management Centers
4. In practice, accessing data from the latter two sources (Ministry of Health and Islamic Seminaries) is highly challenging. Information systems at the Ministry of Health—such as the Iranian Database of Medical Articles and the thesis registry for medical universities—are not yet fully operational. Additionally, there is no centralized database for research outputs from the seminaries; only limited subject-specific thesis lists are available, and they generally lack bibliometric data. Therefore, this study focuses solely on research affiliated with the Ministry of Science.
5. Within this ministry, the disciplines related to pilgrimage (e.g., geography, social sciences, management, etc.) are formally structured and their subject areas can be derived from curriculum syllabi. Religious tourism serves as a point of intersection between these disciplines and pilgrimage. Tourism itself is an interdisciplinary field encompassing geography, economics, sociology, anthropology, history, and psychology (Saqā'ī 2013).

## **12. Analytical Methods for Identifying Relevant Disciplines**

Two approaches were used to identify disciplines connected with pilgrimage studies within the Ministry of Science:

1. Reviewing the official classification of academic disciplines to identify relevant fields
2. Content analysis of pilgrimage-related research to extract the academic origin of each study

*A) Reviewing the Official Academic Structure*

Relevant fields under the humanities group in the Ministry of Science include:

- Geographical Sciences: Tourism planning, ecotourism
- Social Sciences: Religious tourism specialization
- Management: Marketing in tourism, tourism entrepreneurship, management of religious sites
- Communication Sciences: Pilgrimage and Hajj specialization
- Sports Sciences: Management of sports events and tourism
- In the arts group, disciplines such as urban planning and architecture also overlap with geographical sciences in this domain.

*B) Identifying the Disciplinary Origins of Pilgrimage Research*

Research studies were classified based on the academic discipline of the corresponding author of each article or thesis. The methodology followed these principles:

- Priority was given to the discipline of the corresponding author, rather than the subject of the article or its publication outlet.
- If the author's academic background was not explicitly stated, classification was based on the article's topic.
- In cases of multiple authors, specific rules were used to identify the corresponding author (e.g., student vs. faculty member, order of names, etc.).

*Findings*

Content analysis of domestic journal articles and theses showed that more than 90% of pilgrimage-related studies fall within five primary academic disciplines. The following table illustrates the frequency distribution:

No.	Academic Discipline	Frequency (%)
1	Geographical Sciences	24%
2	Management	21%
3	Islamic Theology and Religious Studies	21%
4	Social Sciences	18%

No.	Academic Discipline	Frequency (%)
5	Communication Studies	6%
6	Education, Psychology, and Counseling	4%
7	Economics	3%
8	Political Science	2%
9	Law	1%

These findings confirm that the majority of research is concentrated within disciplines that are formally linked to religious tourism in the Ministry of Science’s academic structure.

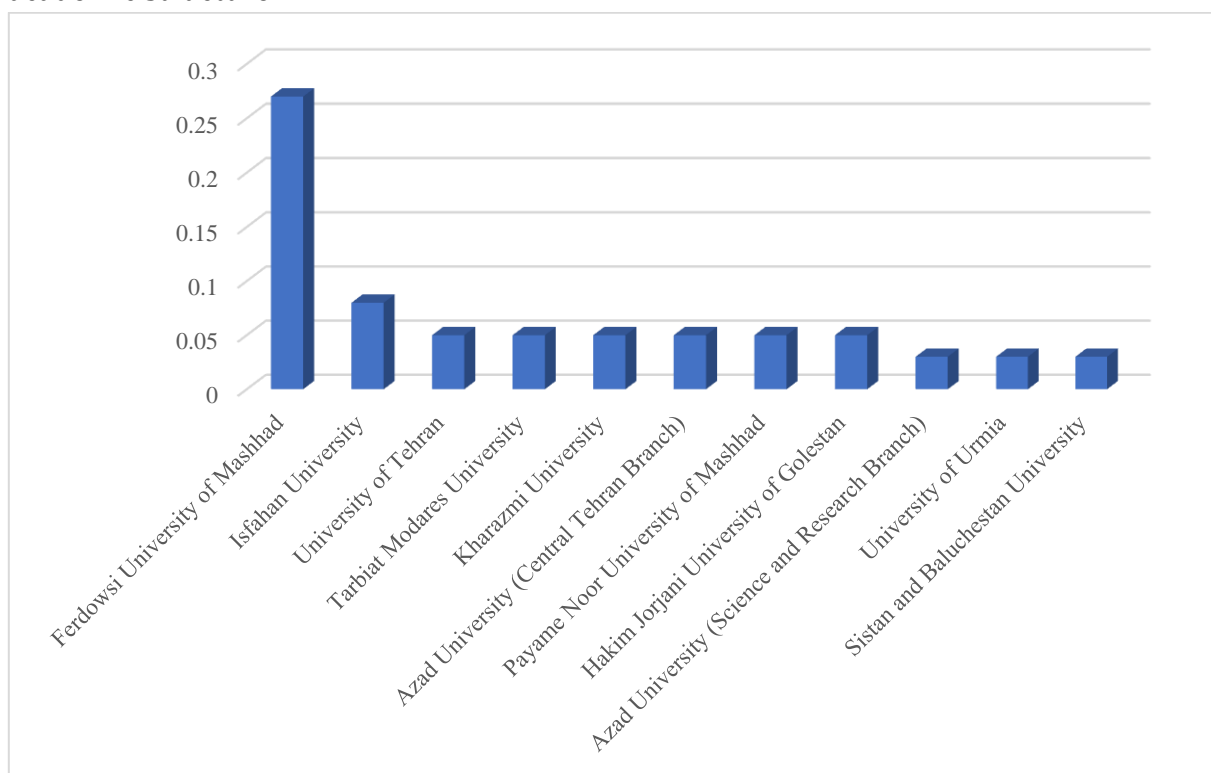


Figure 2: The amount of scientific research in the field of geography related to pilgrimage, broken down by universities (as a percentage)

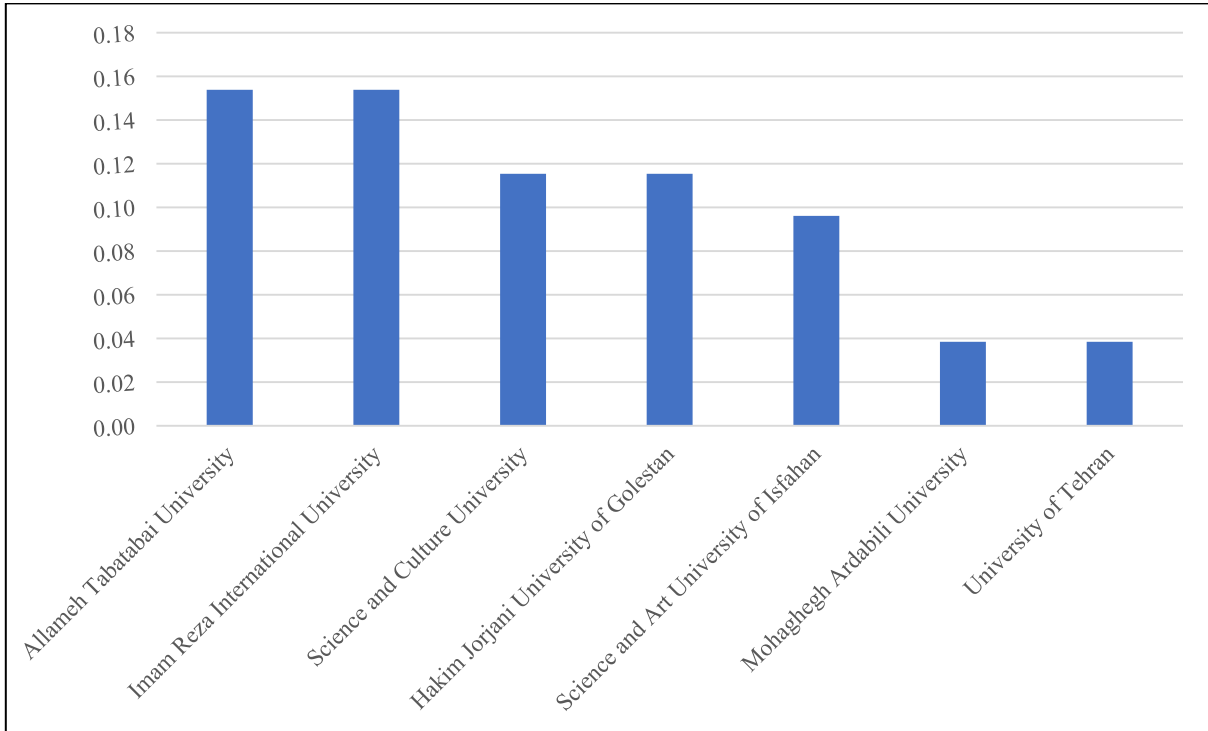


Figure 3: Percentage of Scientific Research in Management on the Topic of Pilgrimage by University

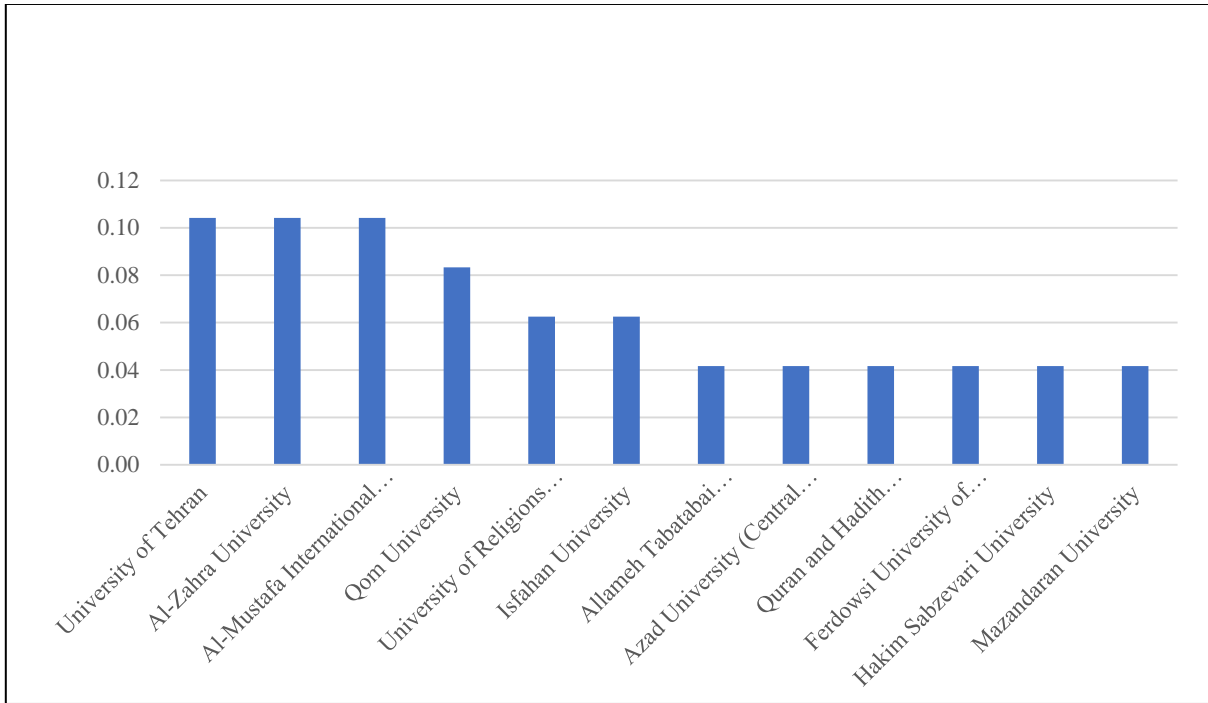


Figure 4: Percentage of Scientific Research in Theology and Islamic Studies on the Topic of Pilgrimage by University

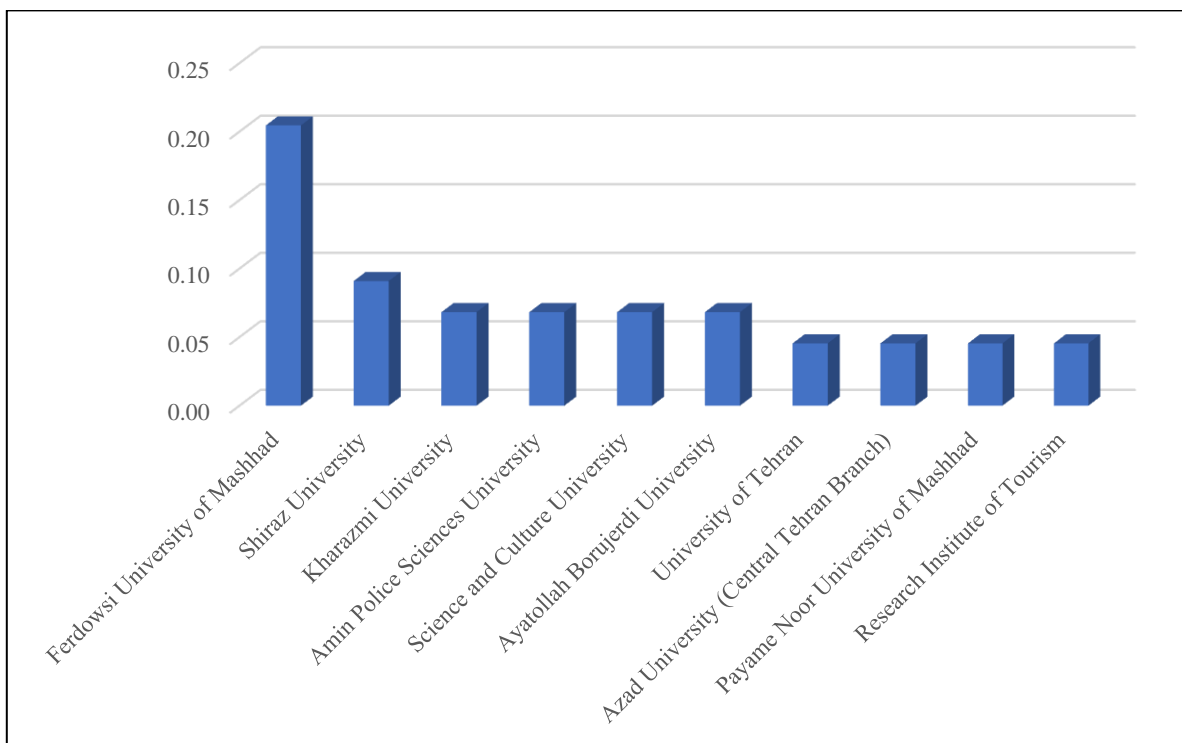


Figure 5: Percentage of Scientific Research in Social Sciences on the Topic of Pilgrimage by University

### 13. Summary

This article presents a bibliometric analysis of research on pilgrimage and religious tourism in Iran. The study aims to quantitatively analyze the growth of research, identify core journals, key researchers, scholarly collaboration patterns, leading academic institutions, and map the knowledge structure within this field.

The research defines “research” as peer-reviewed academic articles and theses published online. “Ziyārat” (pilgrimage) is broadly interpreted to include visits to sacred sites, graves of various figures, or cemeteries, while excluding general social visits. Religious tourism is considered to encompass pilgrimage, and the study focuses on Persian-language research indexed in Iranian databases.

A systematic search was conducted across Noormags, the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC), and the Iranian Thesis Database (GANJ) using the keywords “زیارت” (*ziyārat*) and “گردشگری مذهبی” (*gardishgarī-i mazhabī*; religious tourism). After applying defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study compiled a corpus of 696 scholarly sources, including 454 articles and 242 theses.

Key findings from the analysis include:

- **Growth Trend:** Research in this field has experienced exponential growth over the last three decades, with notable surges in 2012 and 2015, influenced by

academic initiatives and national plans.

- **Core Journals:** Out of 199 journals, *Mīqāt-i Ḥajj* was identified as the leading core journal.
- **Key Researchers:** Aṣghar Mūlā'ī from Architecture and Urban Planning was the most prolific researcher. Geography and Sociology emerged as the most represented academic disciplines among leading researchers.
- **Scholarly Collaboration:** The study indicates limited scholarly collaboration in pilgrimage research in Iran, often confined to university theses rather than broader collaborative initiatives, reflecting a fragmented academic environment.
- **Leading Academic Institutions:** Tehran Province and Khorasan Razavi Province are the main centers for pilgrimage research, contributing 38% and 24% respectively. Ferdowsi University of Mashhad is a significant contributor, particularly in geography and social sciences, attributed to its location in a major pilgrimage city.
- **Scientific Mapping:** Mapping the knowledge structure faces challenges due to a lack of suitable infrastructure and centralized databases for research outputs from certain ministries and seminaries in Iran. The study primarily focused on research affiliated with the Ministry of Science.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ihcs.ac.ir/en/page/2069/comprehensive-portal-of-the-humanities>

<sup>2</sup> <https://iranjournals.nlai.ir/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ganj.irandoc.ac.ir/>