

DIASPORA TOURISM FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM A SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORY PERSPECTIVE: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Keywords: Diaspora tourism, cultural and heritage identity, social engagement and social capital, national development, policy, scoping review.</p> <p>Received: November 28, 2025</p> <p>Approved: June 10, 2026</p> <p>Published: June 29, 2026</p>	<p>Diaspora tourism has gained increasing attention in tourism studies. However, its contribution to national development remains fragmented. This study aims to reposition diaspora tourism as a strategic mechanism for national development. Social Practice Theory is used as a lens to examine the relationship between diaspora tourism and national development. A scoping review approach was adopted for analysing 143 abstracts from peer-reviewed journal articles. The study combines text mining and visualisation techniques using Voyant Tools with manual keyword categorisation to identify key research patterns. The findings show three interconnected clusters within diaspora tourism research: (1) heritage and cultural identity connections, (2) destination development potential, and (3) social engagement and social capital formation. Based on these findings, the study proposes a conceptual framework positioning diaspora tourism as a process that links meanings associated with identity and heritage, competences related to social engagement and social capital building, and materials reflected in the enabler of development outcomes, as in infrastructure, accessibility, and connectivity, as well as, governance and policy integration. This study contributes to the literature by reframing diaspora tourism as a strategic resource and highlighting its potential to support sustainable and participatory national development.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

Diaspora communities or populations living outside their ancestral homelands often engage in travel as a means of reconnecting with their origins. Hence, travel and tourism play a central role in how diaspora individuals reconnect with their roots (Mensah, 2015), engage with cultural traditions (Zhu & Airey, 2021), and negotiate their sense of belonging (Filep et al., 2022). This form of travel, commonly termed diaspora tourism or roots tourism, differs fundamentally from mainstream leisure tourism in that it is driven by genealogical motivations, cultural continuity, familial ties, and emotional meaning-making (Mohammed et al., 2023; Otoo et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2021). As a growing niche market shaped by migration history, identity, nostalgia, and cultural reconnection, diaspora tourism has attracted increasing scholarly and policy attention (Adamson, 2025).

The significance of diaspora tourism extends across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Economically, it contributes to national development through financial remittances and investments (Nnabuihe et al., 2024; Vong et al., 2017), as well as support for informal sectors during homeland visits (Karayanni et al., 2019). Socially, diaspora tourism fosters community development and enhances social engagement, particularly in rural areas (Ali et al., 2023; Del Soldato & Massari, 2024; Nnabuihe et al., 2024). Culturally, diaspora tourists serve as ambassadors for their ancestral destinations, encouraging others to visit (Rapoport, 2019; Vong et al., 2017) while simultaneously contributing to the preservation and long-term sustainability of cultural heritage through their desire to reconnect with their roots (Joseph, 2011). Together, these economic, social, and cultural contributions demonstrate the multifaceted role of diaspora tourism in supporting national development.

Given these multifaceted contributions, diaspora tourism has increasingly been recognised as a strategic consideration in national development agendas. Diaspora visits to the homeland carry the potential to strengthen both cultural and national identity over the long term (Joseph, 2011; Wapmuk & Ibonye, 2023). Wapmuk and Ibonye (2023), for instance, specifically examine how diaspora tourism can be integrated into foreign policy frameworks to build sustained, collective commitment to national development. Their findings indicate that sustained interactions between diaspora communities and their ancestral homeland can generate social, cultural, and economic benefits that contribute to national development.

In addition, Marić et al., (2026) underscore the critical role of diaspora investment in economic development, emphasizing that diaspora mobility transcends cultural reconnection and holds significant developmental value. Aryee (2025) explores how diaspora travel contributes to the construction and negotiation of identity, reaffirming the centrality of identity formation within transnational mobility experiences. Despite growing recognition of its contribution to national development, diaspora tourism remains theoretically and practically underdeveloped (Ferdous, 2025). Existing research has primarily focused on identity, heritage, and homeland attachment, with limited attention to development outcomes and policy implications. Moreover, few studies have applied theoretical frameworks to explain how diaspora tourism contributes to national development.

This gap underscores the necessity for further investigations, particularly regarding how diaspora tourism can play a role in governance and national development policies.

The study addresses this gap by applying two perspectives. First, it employs a scoping review methodology. By systematically mapping existing literature, a scoping review allows for the identification of patterns in current research for future direction, particularly in the policy and governance. Second, this study draws on Social Practice Theory (SPT), also known as practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002), as its analytical lens. This theory is used to understand diaspora tourism as a multidimensional practice connected to national development and governance.

Social Practice Theory examines how activities become embedded in social life, focusing on the interconnections between meanings, materials, and competencies/knowledge that together constitute a social practice (Shove et al., 2012). Applying Social Practice Theory to diaspora tourism is particularly apt in the context of contemporary global dynamics, including accelerating mobility and migration, intensifying globalisation, and the growing commercialisation of tourism (Lamers et al., 2017; Y. Zhu, 2023). Rooted in the foundational works of Durkheim, Giddens, and Bourdieu, the theory positions social practices, rather than individual actors or social structures alone, as the primary unit of analysis (Greene, 2025; Lamers et al., 2017). This perspective provides a useful lens for understanding how diaspora tourism practices are shaped by the interaction of cultural meanings, material resources, and social competences within transnational contexts.

Earlier contributions to this theoretical tradition are also notable. Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, the intense shared emotional experience that generates solidarity and collective identity, provides an important foundation for understanding the social dimensions of diaspora tourism, where shared emotions, memories, and cultural symbols are experienced collectively (Domaneschi, 2025). Giddens later contributed the concept of structuration, arguing that social structures and individual agency are mutually constituted through everyday social practices (Kennedy et al., 2015; Seidman, 2017). Bourdieu extended this by emphasising habitus, the internalised dispositions shaped by social experience, class position, education, and cultural capital, which unconsciously guide how individuals act within social fields (Kennedy et al., 2015; Seidman, 2017). Building on these foundations, Shove et al. (2012) repositioned practice theory at the intersection of materiality, meaning, and practical knowledge, providing the core framework adopted in this study (Ariztía, 2017). Together, these theoretical contributions offer comprehensive foundation for examining diaspora tourism as a socially embedded practice with potential implications for identity formation, cultural preservation, and national development.

This study addresses two objectives. First, it explores how diaspora tourism has been conceptualised in relation to national development within the existing literature. Second, it develops a framework based on Social Practice Theory to explain diaspora tourism practices and inform policy recommendations for diaspora tourism development. By integrating a scoping review and the theoretical lens, the study maps key themes, identifies research gaps, and proposes a conceptual framework that can support future research and evidence-based policy development in diaspora tourism. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by advancing a theoretically informed understanding of how diaspora tourism practices can be linked to broader national development outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This scoping review follows Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework, which is suitable for examining emerging, multidisciplinary research domains. In the context of diaspora tourism, this procedure provides a strong methodological foundation for mapping the landscape of diaspora tourism research. It can also identify the gap and future research direction. The key procedures of a Scoping Review (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005) employed in this study are as follows:

1. **Identifying Research Questions.** This stage establishes the focus of inquiry based on key concepts. The study addresses the following research questions:
 - RQ1.** What are the key themes and patterns in the existing literature on diaspora tourism practice and its connections to national development?
 - RQ2.** What conceptual framework, grounded in social practice theory, can be proposed to guide the development of diaspora tourism in support of national development?
2. **Identifying and Selecting Relevant Studies.** This study adopts a systematic literature review approach to construct the dataset. The search was conducted in the Scopus database, focusing on international peer-reviewed journal articles. A combination of keywords related to diaspora tourism practices, cultural identity, and national development was used to retrieve relevant studies. To ensure the relevance and quality of the dataset, a set of inclusion criteria was established. The selected studies were required to meet the following criteria: (1) published between 2020 and 2024; (2) classified as peer-reviewed journal articles; (3) written in English; and (4) focused on diaspora tourism practices, cultural identity, or national development. The initial search yielded 302 articles. After removing duplicate records and conducting a manual screening of abstracts to assess relevance, a total of 143 articles were retained for analysis. The overall search and selection process is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Search Strategy

No.	Variation	Keywords in Boolean Search	Numbers of article
1	Diaspora tourism concepts	(“diaspora tourism” OR “root tourism”) AND ((culture OR cultural) AND identity)	215
2	Diaspora tourism and social practice theory	(“diaspora tourism” OR “root tourism”) AND (culture OR cultural) AND (tourism OR hospitality OR travel) AND (“social practice theory” OR “practice theory”)	29
3	Diaspora tourism and national development	(“diaspora tourism OR root tourism”) AND (national OR country OR development OR economy OR policy OR culture OR cultural OR identity OR social OR practice)	58
Overall			302
Duplication removed			42
Excluded (data with no abstract, the research does not mention diaspora tourism)			117
Total for analysis			143

Source: Research data



3. **Charting Collating, Categorizing, and Reporting the data.** Rather than using conventional data charting techniques, this study transformed the dataset into a word-mapping analytical framework to capture the underlying meanings embedded in prior research. The abstracts of the 143 selected articles were analysed using Voyant Tools, a web-based, open-source platform for computational text analysis. The analysis applied the t-distributed stochastic neighbour embedding (t-SNE) algorithm to visualize the semantic relationships among keywords in a two-dimensional space (Vincenzo, 2026). Keywords that cluster closely together indicate strong co-occurrence patterns, reflecting dominant themes and conceptual linkages within existing research narratives. This stage synthesizes the mapped data to identify thematic clusters. Finally, consultation with research team members was conducted to refine interpretations and enhance practical relevance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In presenting the results, four key aspects are addressed: (1) the number of articles analysed by year, (2) the countries or regions covered in the studies, (3) the mapping of abstracts using Voyant Tools to identify dominant research themes in diaspora-related studies, and (4) keyword analysis to support and validate the themes identified from the abstract mapping within the dataset. The dataset consists of 143 articles published from 2000 to 2024.

In terms of the first aspect, the data shows that the number of publications increased steadily from 2020 to 2023. However, a decrease is observed in 2024. This decline may indicate a potential fluctuation in publication trends, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. The number of articles on diaspora tourism in 2020 – 2024

Year	Number of Abstract
2020	12
2021	21
2022	38
2023	44
2024	28
Total	143

Source: Research Data

Second, based on the geographical scope of diaspora tourism research, the data indicates that a significant number of studies were conducted in the context of the Global South, particularly in Asia and Africa. These include China, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. In addition, the presence of nationality-based terms such as “Chinese-Swedish,” “African American,” and “Korean-American” highlights the importance of hybrid and transnational identities in diaspora tourism research. The detailed distribution of countries and regions is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The context of diaspora tourism found in the abstract

Region (Country)	Example of Author(s)
Africa: Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Senegal, Morocco	Ghana: Dillette (2021), Adu-Ampong & Dillele (2024) Nigeria: Umejei (2023) Ethiopia: Gedecho, et al. (2023)
Asia: China, Japan, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar	China: Liu & Chen (2024); Zeng & Xu (2021); Li & Chan (2020); Liang et al. (2023); Zhu (2023); Huang & Zhang (2024); Cao (2023); Xie et al. (2024) India: Nanjangud & Reijnders (2022); Bhat (2023); du Prez & Govender (2020) Indonesia: Cahyanto et al. (2023); Doombos et al. (2023)
Middle East: Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt	Israel and Palestine: Yohanan (2024); Schneider (2020); Järvi (2024) Iraq and Palestine: Chneider E. (2020) Egypt: Maxwell et al. (2024)
Europe: Hungary, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Netherlands, Portugal, Ukraine, Cyprus	Sweden: Prince (2022); Wackenhut (2022) Hungary: András & Reijnders (2020) Italy: Schneider (2020) Netherlands: Nanjangud & Reijnders (2022)
America: US, Canada, Brazil, Guyana	United States: Darvai (2024); Potter et al. (2024); Gedecho et al. (2024) Brazil: Melville (2024) Canada: (Roberts, 2022)
Oceania: Australia, Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, Cook Islands.	Australia: Kantel & Jooduthir (2023)
Transnational/Hybrid Nationality	Hungarian-Australian: Kantek et al. (2023); Andits (2020) Turkish-German: Kılınç (2023); Çiki (2022) Chinese-Sweden: Licata & Osanami Törngren (2024) Korean-American: Ponting (2022) African-American: Robert & Matos (2022), Gillespie et al. (2024) Swedish-American: Mehtiyeva & Prince (2020)

Source: Research Data

The third aspect of the result is an analysis of the abstracts, which was conducted to identify the main patterns and themes within the dataset. The abstracts were analyzed using Voyant Tools. In total, the research corpus consists of 26,157 words with 4,298 unique word forms. The vocabulary density is 0.164, indicating a moderate level of lexical diversity. The readability index is 17.041, suggesting that the texts are relatively complex and characterized by advanced academic language. In addition, the average sentence length is 26.1 words, reflecting a dense and formal academic writing style. The most frequent terms in the corpus included: *tourism* (312), *diaspora* (242), *study* (150), *research* (109), and *travel* (105).

This distribution confirms that the academic discourse is primarily concentrated on the intersection of research on tourism, diaspora, and travel. To identify deeper thematic structures within the literature, the t-SNE (t-distributed Stochastic Neighbor Embedding) algorithm was employed to visualize semantic clusters, enabling the identification of five distinct thematic groups that reflect the organizational structure of diaspora tourism research. The t-SNE visualization illustrates the semantic structure of the 143 article abstracts analyzed in this study (see Figure 1). The horizontal (X) and vertical (Y) axes do not represent specific quantitative variables; rather, they serve as coordinate markers generated by the t-SNE algorithm to map high-dimensional textual relationships into a three-dimensional space. Articles positioned near one another share similar vocabularies and thematic orientations, while those positioned further apart reflect divergent conceptual emphases.

The scattered plot visualization is explained in Figure 1. It reveals a clear conceptual organization of diaspora tourism research, illustrated by distinct keyword concentrations that correspond to three thematic clusters. Each cluster is anchored by tightly grouped terms that represent dominant conceptual orientations in the literature. The analysis reveals that diaspora tourism is structured around three interrelated dimensions: (1) diaspora tourism: heritage and cultural identity connections, (2) potential for destination development, and (3) social engagement to social capital for development. The mapping result is as follows:

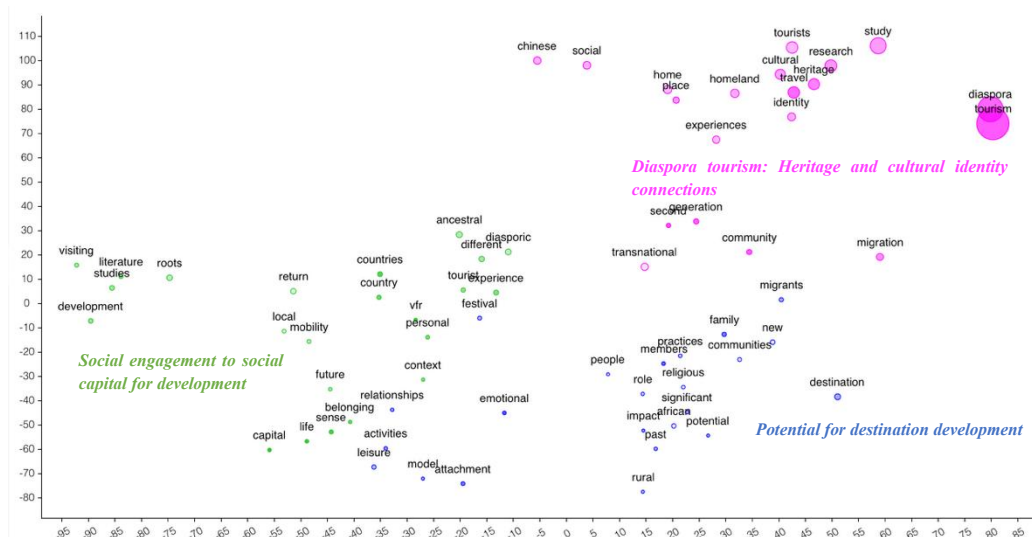


Figure 1. Scatter plot mapping of literature based on t-SNE algorithm by Voyant Tools

Fourth, in addition to the abstract mapping, a manual analysis of keywords was conducted. Similar keywords were grouped into categories and aligned with the identified themes. This process aimed to validate and complement the results obtained from the abstract mapping by providing a more refined thematic classification. The categorized keywords and their corresponding themes are presented in the following table (Table 4).

Table 4. The category of keywords associated with the themes

Themes	Category	Keywords
Diaspora tourism: Heritage and Cultural Identity Connection	Identity, heritage, roots	Diaspora, identity, heritage/cultural heritage, roots tourism, ancestral tourism, homeland, belonging, memory, nostalgia, genealogy, ancestry, ethnic identity
	Global mobility	Migration, transnationalism, diaspora groups, immigrant, return immigrant, second-generation, mobility, Visiting friends and relatives (VFR).
Social engagement for social capital development	Representations	Cultural representations, authenticity, appropriation, media/digital media, film tourism, narrative
	Spiritual journey	Religious tourism, pilgrimage, sacred sites, spirituality, ritual, Christianity, Islam
	Network builder	Social capital, community, relationship, engagement, network, trust
Potential for destination development	Tools of development	Development, economic development, tourism development, diaspora investment, remittance, policy, marketing, sustainability

Source: Research Data

Table 4 presents the categories of keywords associated with the identified themes. The coding was conducted manually on both author keywords and index keywords to provide a deeper interpretation of the meanings embedded within each theme derived from the abstract analysis.

The results show that the theme “*diaspora tourism: heritage and cultural identity connection*” is primarily associated with categories such as identity, heritage, and global mobility, highlighting the central role of belonging, memory, and transnational movement in diaspora tourism. Meanwhile, the theme “*potential for destination development*” reflects the economic and policy-oriented dimensions of diaspora tourism, including investment, marketing, and sustainability. Furthermore, the theme “*social engagement for social capital development*” encompasses representations, spiritual journeys, and network-building processes, indicating that diaspora tourism contributes not only to cultural expression but also to the formation of social capital through community interaction, religious practices, sense of belonging, and trust-based networks.

This manual keyword classification complements the abstract mapping by providing a more nuanced understanding of how diaspora tourism is conceptualized across identity, development, and social engagement dimensions. The following section presents the results and interpretation of the clusters identified through the mapping of previous studies.

Cluster 1: Diaspora Tourism, Heritage, and Cultural Identity Connection

The first cluster represents the core conceptual domain of diaspora tourism, emphasizing the central role of heritage and cultural identity in shaping travel motivations and experiences. The scatter plot mapping generated through the t-SNE analysis reveals a dense concentration of keywords such as *diaspora*, *tourism*, *identity*, *heritage*, *cultural*, *homeland*, and *experiences*, indicating that existing research is anchored in heritage and cultural identity-based perspectives. This clustering suggests that diaspora tourism is predominantly conceptualized as a process of reconnecting with ancestral roots and cultural heritage. This interpretation is further reinforced by the manual thematic mapping of keywords, as presented in Table 4. The theme “*diaspora tourism: heritage and cultural*



identity connection” is supported by two main categories: (1) *identity, heritage, and roots*, and (2) *global mobility*.

The first category includes keywords such as *identity, heritage, roots tourism, ancestral tourism, belonging, memory, and nostalgia*, highlighting the symbolic and emotional dimensions of diaspora travel. Meanwhile, the second category, reflected in terms such as *migration, transnationalism, second-generation, and visiting friends and relatives (VFR)*, emphasizes the role of mobility in shaping diasporic experiences. Together, both approaches, scatter plot mapping and manual coding, demonstrate a high level of consistency, confirming that identity and heritage remain the dominant lenses through which diaspora tourism is understood.

The findings further indicate that diaspora tourism plays a significant role in shaping and negotiating identity across diverse contexts. Identity is often reconstructed through engagement with heritage and ancestral homelands, particularly in cases such as the Chinese diaspora (Wang, 2020; Zhang, 2021) and African diaspora roots tourism (Dillette, 2021, 2022). At the same time, identity is deeply intertwined with memory, nostalgia, and emotional belonging, especially in contexts marked by displacement and historical trauma, such as Cyprus and Palestine (Mesaritou, 2023; Järvi, 2024). Furthermore, diaspora identity is increasingly understood as hybrid and transnational, shaped by multi-generational experiences and interactions between home and host societies (Nanjangud & Reijnders, 2022; Doornbos et al., 2023). In addition, identity is not only personal but also socially and politically constructed, as evidenced in studies on cultural appropriation, state-led heritage narratives, and national identity formation (Cho, 2020; Molnár, 2023; Zhu, 2023).

In relation to mobility, diaspora tourism is closely linked to transnational identity, particularly within the context of multigenerational experiences of global travel. Mobility enables diaspora individuals to navigate between home and host countries, resulting in hybrid and fluid identities shaped by cross-border interactions (Nanjangud & Reijnders, 2022; Doornbos et al., 2023). This is especially evident among second-generation diaspora, who often engage in travel as a means of exploring their cultural background and negotiating their sense of belonging. These findings collectively suggest that diaspora tourism is not merely a form of heritage travel, but a dynamic and multidimensional process through which identity is continuously constructed at the intersection of mobility, memory, and socio-cultural context.

Cluster 2: Social engagement to social development for development

The second cluster focuses on the relational and experiential dimensions of diaspora tourism, particularly the role of social engagement in generating social capital. Based on the scatter plot mapping, this cluster is characterized by a grouping of keywords such as *visiting, return, roots, belonging, relationships, activities, life, and leisure*. The proximity of these terms indicates that diaspora tourism is strongly grounded in everyday social practices and lived experiences, emphasizing interaction, participation, and relational engagement rather than purely economic or heritage-based motivations.

This pattern is further supported by the manual categorisation of keywords presented in Table 4. The theme “*social engagement for social capital development*” is associated with three key categories: (1) *representations*, (2) *spiritual journey*, and (3) *network builder*. The first category includes keywords such as *cultural representation*,

authenticity, media, and narrative, highlighting how diaspora identities are expressed and constructed through symbolic and mediated forms. The second category, *spiritual journey*, encompasses *religious tourism, pilgrimage, sacred sites, and ritual*, reflecting the importance of faith-based and spiritual practices in shaping diaspora experiences. The third category, *network builder*, includes *social capital, community, relationships, engagement, network, and trust*, emphasizing the role of social interaction in forming and sustaining connections across transnational spaces.

Diaspora tourism facilitates various forms of social engagement that strengthen emotional bonds, sense of belonging, and transnational relationships. Through activities such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR), ancestral return journeys, and participation in cultural or religious events, diaspora tourists actively engage with both family networks and local communities (Li & Chan, 2020; Kelly, 2022; Gedecho et al., 2023). These interactions generate both bonding social capital within diaspora communities and bridging social capital with local stakeholders (Roberts & Matos, 2022; Licata & Törngren, 2024). Moreover, social engagement in diaspora tourism extends beyond interpersonal relationships to broader socio-cultural and developmental outcomes. Diaspora individuals often act as cultural intermediaries and connectors, facilitating knowledge exchange, cultural transmission, and cross-cultural understanding (Davari & Jang, 2024; Bhamidipati, 2024). In addition, engagement-driven activities such as festivals, religious gatherings, and community events contribute to collective identity formation and community cohesion, which are essential components of social sustainability.

These findings suggest that diaspora tourism operates as a mechanism through which everyday social interactions are transformed into social capital. This process links micro-level experiences, such as emotional attachment and belonging to macro-level outcomes, including community resilience, network formation, and sustainable development. Therefore, social engagement can be understood not merely as an experiential outcome of diaspora tourism, but as a critical pathway through which diaspora tourism contributes to broader social and developmental processes (Adinolfi, 2018).

Cluster 3: Potential for Destination Development

The third cluster highlights the socio-economic and spatial dimensions of diaspora tourism, particularly its potential for destination development. Based on the scatter plot mapping, a distinct grouping of keywords emerges around terms such as *development, destination, community, family, religious, rural, migration, and impact*. The proximity of these terms suggests that diaspora tourism is closely associated with local socio-economic structures and place-based interactions, indicating that it extends beyond individual travel motivations toward broader developmental implications.

The theme “*potential for destination development*” is primarily associated with the category *tools of development*, which includes keywords such as *economic development, tourism development, diaspora investment, remittance, policy, marketing, and sustainability*. A significant body of research highlights the economic contributions of diaspora through remittances, investments, and the consumption of local products, which directly stimulate local economies and tourism revenues (Seraphin et al., 2020; Dana et al., 2021). In addition, diaspora tourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic tool for destination marketing and business development, particularly through diaspora networks, food tourism, and digital engagement (Arasli et al., 2021; Bowen, 2022; Zengeya et al.,

2023). Several studies also emphasize the role of diaspora as social capital in tourism recovery and crisis management, where diasporic communities contribute through knowledge transfer, advocacy, and transnational connections (Cahyanto et al., 2023). Beyond economic contributions, diaspora tourism also supports broader development processes through policy integration and institutional engagement, as governments seek to harness diaspora potential for national development and tourism planning (Kessy & Shayo, 2022; Aleksanyan, 2022). Moreover, the literature highlights the importance of diaspora in sustaining rural and community-based tourism through partnerships, cultural preservation, and local engagement (Žabčić et al., 2024; Nigro et al., 2024).

An important insight emerging from both analytical approaches is the positioning of *spiritual journey*. While manually categorized under *social engagement for social capital development* (Cluster 2), the abstract mapping reveals that spiritual and religious elements are also closely linked to development-related terms. This suggests that spiritual journey in diaspora tourism is inherently multidimensional. It functions not only as a form of cultural and emotional engagement but also as a potential niche market within diaspora tourism. For many diaspora travellers, return journeys are motivated not only by the desire to reconnect with cultural roots and identity but also by spiritual and religious purposes, which contribute to their sense of well-being (Anderson, 2019).

Taken together, these findings suggest that diaspora tourism should be understood as a multidimensional development mechanism that connects economic activities, cultural practices, and transnational networks to support sustainable destination development.

Discussion

These findings are discussed through Social Practice Theory, which conceptualizes human activities as the integration of meanings, materials, and competences (Shove et al., 2012). The practice of diaspora tourism is shaped by the *meaning* embedded in diaspora tourism experiences, which include identity, heritage, culture, and spirituality. These dimensions reflect the motivations and symbolic significance of travel, where diaspora individuals engage in journeys not only to reconnect with their cultural roots but also to negotiate their sense of belonging within transnational contexts (Graf, 2017; Kantek et al., 2023). The dominance of identity-related themes confirms that diaspora tourism is deeply embedded in symbolic and emotional meanings, particularly in relation to memory, belonging, and cultural continuity (Fu et al., 2025; Marschall, 2017). However, recent findings suggest that different generations may perceive diaspora tourism differently, particularly in relation to the meaning of heritage and cultural identity. For example, second-generation diaspora communities may experience identity confusion as they navigate dual cultural identities and negotiate their sense of belonging between their ancestral homeland and host society (Tran, 2025; Zheng et al., 2025). In this context, diaspora tourism serves not only as a form of mobility but also as an intergenerational cultural transmission mechanism, enabling second- and third-generation diaspora communities to reconnect with their ancestral homeland (Chattoraj & Basu, 2025; Ferdous, 2025; Graf, 2017; Huang et al., 2016).

The second dimension is the *competence* that can be reflected in the social engagement and social capital formation. Within Social Practice Theory, competence may include the social and cultural capacities that enable diaspora communities to engage with relatives, local communities, and cultural practices. These engagements may subsequently



foster the formation of social capital through trust-building, emotional connection, and social networks (Adinolfi, 2018; Li, 2020). Activities such as visiting friends and relatives (Capistrano & Bernardo, 2018; Kwon, 2024), participating in cultural and religious practices (Anderson, 2019; Joseph, 2011; Umejei, 2023), and interacting with local communities foster emotional connections and relational networks (Gedecho et al., 2024; Zou et al., 2021). These interactions generate both bonding and bridging social capital, as well as transnational networks characterized by trust and reciprocity. However, this competence, the social engagement, may vary across generation. The first generation may maintain strong ties to the homeland, while the second and third generations may experience weaker connections. However, the diaspora tourism provides opportunity to reconnect with their roots. For example, second-generation immigrants often engage in homeland visits to explore cultural identity and heritage, which can redefine their sense of belonging and identity (Ferdous, 2025; Huang et al., 2013; Pelliccia, 2018). Such engagement is not always experienced through direct physical visits alone. Increasingly, social media and digital technologies enable diaspora communities to remain connected with their cultural roots, heritage, and transnational networks. In some cases, these platforms also facilitate reconnection beyond immediate kinship ties, allowing individuals to engage with broader diaspora communities and shared cultural identities.

The third dimension, diaspora tourism contributes to *materials*, which are reflected in development outcomes. These include economic development (e.g., remittances, investment, and local business support) (Betancourt, 2024; Ferdous & Das, 2025; Law et al., 2013), destination development (e.g., rural tourism, cultural tourism, and niche markets such as spiritual tourism) (Bowen, 2022; Nnabuihe et al., 2024), and social and cultural development (e.g., community cohesion and cultural sustainability) (Davari & Jang, 2024; Wang et al., 2024; Wang & Witte, 2023). These outcomes highlight the tangible contributions of diaspora tourism to local and national economies. However, several economic challenges remain in the development of diaspora tourism. These include the risk of overdependence on diaspora remittances and tourism-related income (Hartmann & Krueger, 2024), as well as the uneven distribution of economic benefits, where certain regions may benefit more significantly while others remain underdeveloped (Iliev, 2018). In addition, diaspora tourism marketing remains relatively limited, as diaspora communities are often overlooked as a distinct tourism market segment. Consequently, destinations may risk losing valuable socio-economic opportunities that could otherwise be generated through diaspora tourism development (Zengeya et al., 2023). Furthermore, another important aspect within the material dimension is the presence of enabling factors that support the achievement of the development outcomes discussed above. These include both tangible and intangible forms of infrastructure and accessibility, such as transportation connectivity, visa facilitation, and digital infrastructure (Mahieu, 2019; Varelas & Papageorgiou, 2026; Yuli et al., 2023). Although these enabling factors may not be explicitly reflected in the thematic mapping, they are implicitly essential in facilitating diaspora mobility, engagement, and the broader developmental outcomes of diaspora tourism.

These development outcomes are not achieved in isolation but are shaped by governance and policy integration. Tourism policies, migration policies, and institutional support play a crucial role in enabling diaspora engagement and maximizing its

developmental impact. The proposed recommendation, based on the social practice theory lens, is presented in the following table.

Table 5. The policy recommendations based on the social practice theory

No	Factors	Aims	Policy Focus (The Materials)	Example and Recommendations
1.	The Meaning	Strengthening the meaning of diaspora tourism through cultural and heritage conservation, as well as prevention over commercialisation on the cultural and heritage performance.	Cultural and heritage management and governance.	Include heritage tours, ceremonies, and cultural re-enactments (Mensah, 2015; Sommario et al., 2026).
2.	The Competence	Enhancing the competence through activate social engagement to build the social capital.	Social capital building	Foster diaspora-local partnerships and transnational networks (Li, 2020; Van Leeuwen, 2020)
			Local welfare	Promote job creation, equitable benefits, and cultural sustainability (Ferrari et al., 2022; Tobing et al., 2024)
3.	The Materials	Improving the infrastructure, accessibility, and connectivity.	Infrastructure and travel accessibility development	Simplify visas, offer subsidies, and improve infrastructure (Mahieu, 2019; Yuli et al., 2023).
			Digital tools & data	Use digital platform and data driven strategies to engage diaspora (Varelas & Papageorgiou, 2026b).

Source: Research Data

The table outlines policy recommendations grounded in Social Practice Theory, organised around three core factors shaping diaspora tourism. The first factor, **meaning**, centres on preserving cultural and heritage values as the primary agenda for diaspora tourists visiting their homeland, while also guarding against the over-commercialisation of cultural and heritage resources. The recommended policy direction therefore emphasises robust management and governance of cultural and heritage assets. The second factor, **competence**, seeks to strengthen social engagement and foster social capital through two interrelated policy areas: social capital building and local welfare enhancement. The third factor, **materials**, addresses the need to improve infrastructure, accessibility, and connectivity as essential enablers of diaspora tourism. The policy also functions as tangible materials that shape diaspora tourism practices and drive their broader contribution to local and national development.

Hence, this framework highlights that diaspora cannot be viewed merely as a segment of tourists, but as a strategic resource that contributes to national development. By linking identity-driven experiences, social engagement, and development outcomes, diaspora tourism can function as a transformative mechanism that bridges transnational connections with local development agendas.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the thematic structure of diaspora tourism research and proposes policy recommendations for diaspora tourism development through the lens of Social Practice Theory. The findings indicate three interconnected themes that shape diaspora tourism practices: (1) diaspora tourism related to cultural and heritage identity; (2) social engagement which can lead to social capital formation; and (3) the potential contribution of diaspora tourism to destination and national development. Together, these themes demonstrate that diaspora tourism extends beyond a simple return-to-roots journey and should instead be understood as a multidimensional social practice embedded within cultural, social, and developmental processes.

Drawing on Social Practice Theory, the proposed framework illustrates how meanings associated with heritage and cultural identity interact with competences such as social engagement and social capital formation. These practices are further enabled by material conditions, including infrastructure, accessibility, digital connectivity, and governance support. Through the interaction of these dimensions, diaspora tourism has the potential to contribute to social, economic, and cultural development of a nation. The study therefore argues that diaspora tourism should be positioned as a strategic component of tourism governance and national development policy rather than being treated solely as a niche heritage tourism activity.

In addition, this study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it reconceptualizes diaspora tourism as a social practice that links heritage and identity with social engagement and broader development outcomes. Second, it extends the application of Social Practice Theory into tourism governance and policy discussions, offering a more integrative perspective on how diaspora tourism can support sustainable and participatory development agendas. Third, from a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates the value of combining text mining techniques with qualitative coding to generate a more comprehensive understanding of thematic patterns within diaspora tourism research.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The analysis relies primarily on abstract-level data, which may not fully capture the complexity and depth of empirical findings presented in individual studies. In addition, the proposed framework remains conceptual and requires further empirical validation. Future research may therefore investigate the relationships between diaspora tourism, social capital, governance, and development outcomes through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches. Further studies may also explore generational differences among diaspora communities, particularly regarding identity negotiation, emotional attachment, and patterns of engagement with the homeland. Such research would provide deeper insight into the evolving and increasingly dynamic nature of diaspora tourism in contemporary transnational societies.

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APPENDIX

Dataset of the 143 articles can be access in this link: <http://bit.ly/47Gc7uO>.

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