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Article — Published Version

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Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing

Suggested Citation: Asthana, Shekhar (2022) : Twenty-five years of SMEs in tourism and hospitality research: A bibliometric analysis, Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing, ISSN 2529-1947, International Hellenic University, Thessaloniki, Vol. 8, Iss. 2, pp. 35-47, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7358571>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/272310>

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Twenty-five years of SMEs in tourism and hospitality research: A bibliometric analysis

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Abstract:

Purpose: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have been grabbing the attention of tourism and hospitality academicians. However, the fragmented and scattered research makes it difficult for upcoming researchers to identify the major thematic areas. Thus, this study maps the evolution of SME research in tourism and hospitality.

Methods: The study adopts a bibliometric protocol to carry out the desired analysis. The literature is retrieved from the Scopus database using the desired search string and analysis is conducted on 385 documents. The study uses VOSviewer, the Science of Science tool, Gephi, and Inkscape to carry out the bibliometric and network analysis.

Results: The results from network analysis helps in the identification of five major thematic areas such as strengthening SMEs' performance, transformational leadership, building SME resilience, entrepreneurship and sustainability, and building competitiveness in SMEs. The dynamic co-citation analysis helps in identifying the evolution of these themes. The content analysis of the literature provides future research direction and the need for methodological advancement in SMEs' performance and growth.

Implications: The study offers implications for future researchers by summarising the literature, identifying the gaps and suggesting future directions of the research. The study limits itself to data retrieval from a single database.

Keywords: SMEs, tourism, bibliometrics, competitiveness, innovation, resilience.

JEL Classification: L83, Z00, Z30

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1 INTRODUCTION

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have become an important channel in economic development (Fiseha & Oyelana, 2015; Kongolo, 2010). By removing the regional imbalances, SMEs have been able to channelise the market at the 'bottom of the pyramid', fostering economic growth (Varga & Rosca, 2019). The focus on establishing SMEs to empower the local economy has not been limited to a particular country or industry. Since the cost of setting up and running is less, these small businesses often mushroom up in quick succession. However, since the cost of winding up is also less, small businesses do tend to switch in case of hardships in the sector. As SMEs grew globally, academicians also started acknowledging the role of SMEs in their research. Academicians have researched several aspects of small businesses including their role and importance in economic development, their ability in employment generation (Al-Haddad et al., 2019; Dennis et al., 1994), their benefit in socialising the rural areas (Kumar & Shekhar,

2020a), and the need to make SMEs supply chain resilient (Alshahrani & Salam, 2022; Manathunge et al., 2021). There is a vast literature pool that highlights the growing need for SMEs globally. Therefore, there also exist several literature reviews that focus on literature related to SMEs. For instance, Zamani (2022) carried out a systematic review of the literature to understand why small businesses adopt technology and observed that technology adoption is highly influenced by infrastructure, regulations, strategy and resources. Focusing on the innovation aspect in SMEs, de Carvalho et al. (2021) conducted a literature review and observed that innovation builds competitiveness and enhances the sustainability and information exchange mechanism. Smit & Watkins (2012) conducted the review to map the potential risk management abilities of the SMEs in South Africa, while Alkhoraif et al. (2019) reviewed the lean management practices in SMEs. Thus, it is evident that SMEs have been an interesting research topic for academicians. SMEs have a particular likeness to the Tourism and hospitality industry because of the ease of doing business, but their development also encounters several challenges

(Akbaba, 2012; Rogerson, 2008). Since the industry has immense potential for market development, small businesses often try to test their waters before establishing themselves in the industry. These businesses are often found engaged in running food and lodging, acting as tour guides and travel agents, or providing ancillary services in the hospitality industry.

An overview of the literature on SMEs in tourism and hospitality suggests that researchers have studied it from several research domains such as Business, Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, Environmental Science, Computer Science, Energy, Engineering, Decision Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Mathematics. For instance, Pike (2018) focused on the application of global marketing principles for tourism SMEs and criticised academicians and practitioners for often overlooking the importance of small businesses in tourism marketing. Studies also highlighted that there is a need for diverse action plans from the governments to protect the interest of small businesses in the tourism sector (Hu et al., 2021). The literature points out that small business development will play a significant role in helping the tourism industry reach pre pandemic level. However, research on SMEs in tourism and hospitality is still in the infancy stage as compared to other industries such as manufacturing or a few service industries. In addition, like other aspects of SMEs, research on tourism SMEs are scattered. There is an absence of any comprehensive literature review that focuses solely on research on SMEs in the context of tourism and hospitality and groups the study constructs concerning the theme.

Because of the importance of small businesses in redeveloping the tourism industry, there is a need to move beyond what is obvious in tourism research. The upcoming researchers need to focus on developing frameworks for rejuvenating tourism through small business development. The focus should not only be on the short-term development of the industry rather SMEs should be engaged within the industry to create sustainable long-term development. To suggest new research ideas, there is a need to look into what has already happened and what is currently happening in the research.

A literature review on SMEs in the context of tourism and hospitality will help in summarising the past and current literature and suggest new themes, directions, and methodologies for future research. Based on the findings, the review will also help in the identification of research gaps that future studies may study and seek answers to. The identification of thematic areas and gaps using a systematic protocol and software will also help in eliminating any bias that often creeps into systematic review studies. Thus, this study seeks answers to the following research questions that are commonly used in bibliometric studies: RQ1. What are the top contributors, most impactful publications, top publications sources, and leading institutions and countries in SMEs in tourism and hospitality research? RQ2. What are the current and past thematic areas in SMEs in tourism and hospitality research? RQ3. What is the future direction of research in SMEs in tourism and hospitality research?

Answering these research questions would help the upcoming researchers by saving their time in screening and summarising the already existing literature. It will help them

in identifying the probable reputed journals that they could target for publishing their work. It will also help them in identifying the most common themes and avoiding researching these constructs. It will help them in modelling a framework for SME performance enhancement by identifying the basic building blocks in SME operations in tourism and hospitality research. And lastly, future directions in the study will serve as gaps for the new studies which could be undertaken by new researchers.

2 BACKGROUND LITERATURE

2.1 SMEs and tourism: A mutualism relationship

The tourism business offers people to earn an alternate livelihood by venturing into a small business (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997). Small tourism businesses have played a significant role in poverty alleviation globally (Mshenga & Richardson, 2013; Zhao, 2009). The development of small businesses also pave way for women's empowerment as in developing regions, women entrepreneurs are found to be in plenty running such businesses (Koutsou et al., 2009; Shekhar, 2022). The tourism industry provides small businesses opportunities to innovate and increase their managerial and operational capacities (Rodríguez et al., 2020). These dynamic capabilities enhance their chances of survival in case of adverse events.

The relationship between small businesses and tourism is not commensalism, rather it is mutualism. It means, the tourism industry also benefits from the existence of small businesses. Supporting the argument, Berry & Ladkin (1997) observed that small businesses play a pivotal role in extending the policy effects to the micro level for the tourism industry. Small businesses also act as a source of innovation in the tourism industry (Kumar et al., 2021; Tejada & Moreno, 2013). As the small businesses are run primarily by the locals, they have a sense of attachment to the place and therefore engage in sustainable tourism practices and community development (Hallak et al., 2013). Small businesses often engage in sharing of knowledge between themselves, which generates value for the development of the tourism industry (Kim & Shim, 2018). Thus, small businesses and the tourism industry both complement each other and share a very strong relationship. Since there exists a sizeable amount of literature on SMEs in tourism, there also exists a need for synthesizing the existing knowledge base. Thus, a literature review focusing on the major themes in the SMEs and tourism research will prove to be fruitful for upcoming researchers.

2.2 Bibliometric studies in tourism

The use of bibliometrics as a technique for a systematic review of literature is gaining attraction to researchers in the last few years. The use of bibliometrics in tourism research is not uncommon (Hall, 2011). Few studies limit themselves to a particular region or study source while conducting the analysis. For instance, Benckendorff & Zehrer (2013) applied network analysis and using the co-citation analysis offered insights into the increasing interdisciplinary research in tourism. Omerzel (2016) conducted the bibliometric analysis and uncovered the theoretical foundations of innovation research in tourism and hospitality. Ruhanen et al. (2015) studied the twenty-five years of trends and patterns in

sustainable tourism research through bibliometrics and found that though the publications are increasing, theory and methodology have reached a maturity stage. Comerio & Strozzi (2019) studied tourism and its economic impact using bibliometric analysis and suggested that upcoming researchers can target the emerging themes identified in the study. Similar bibliometric studies were conducted to study tourism crisis and risk management (Jiang et al., 2019), tourism supply chain research (Alkier et al., 2022), and health tourism evolution (Sun et al., 2022). In the latest research, Guan & Huang (2022) conducted a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer and CiteSpace to study the research on rural tourism experience in the last twenty-five years.

Most of the studies applying bibliometrics identify the top contributions and contributors in the studied theme. In addition, they apply network analysis to study the co-authorship between authors and institutions. Keyword co-occurrences and citation analysis are often used in the bibliometrics to study the common research themes. The dynamic co-citation analysis has been applied in the bibliometrics to study evolution of themes and identify future themes. Since a lot of researchers have applied bibliometrics in understanding the thematic evolutions of several tourism aspects, the study justifies the application of bibliometrics in the present study. The research questions framed in our study are coherent with the questions applied by the previous bibliometric studies in tourism industry.

3 METHODOLOGY

There exist several methods to review the literature such as structured review, systematic literature review, meta-analysis, bibliometrics, etc. Bibliometric as a literature view technique has been often used by researchers across domains (Comarú et al., 2021; Rovelli et al., 2021; Shekhar et al., 2021; Small, 1973). It is defined as the statistical analysis of bibliographic data. There exist various protocols for conducting the bibliometrics analysis (Donthu et al., 2021; Khanra et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2021). These protocols are complete in their ways, yet leave scope for improvement. For a long, researchers have used PRISMA as an approach to identify literature as it follows a series of inclusion and exclusion steps.

However, seeking improvement, several scholars developed their scientific approach to conducting bibliometric analysis. Some commonly used analyses carried out in bibliometrics are Keyword co-occurrence, Bibliographic coupling, co-citation (including dynamic analysis), and Prestige analysis. The present study carried out Bibliographic coupling, citation, keyword co-occurrence, and co-citation analysis using the VOSviewer (Version 1.6.18) and Science of Science Tool (Sci2) software packages. The two software have been termed fit-for-purpose as their algorithms are more reliable and accurate than their counterparts (Sci2 Team, 2009; Van Eck & Waltman, 2011). Studies suggest that fractional counting provides more reliable results than full counting in VOSviewer (Perianes-Rodriguez et al., 2016). Thus, the study relies on the fractional counting method. To visualise the network drawn in Sci2, Gephi (Bastian et al., 2009) is used. Statistics such as PageRank (Brin & Page, 1998) and modularity class (Blondel et al., 2008; Lambiotte

et al., 2008) have been calculated using the Gephi software for its suitable algorithms. The networks are modified using Inkscape and data refining, if any, was conducted using the Open Refine software.

The literature published in the Scopus-indexed journals is retrieved and bibliometric analysis is carried out to answer these RQs. Bibliometrics has shown immense potential in summarising the literature and identifying thematic areas (Shekhar, 2022). The study uses a bibliometric protocol developed by Khanra et al. (2020) to answer our RQ1. The descriptive data retrieved from the database are tabulated using Ms Excel to identify the top contributors in terms of author, institute, and organization. Then bibliographic coupling, citation analysis and prestige analysis are applied to the data to identify the top contributors using several approaches, each complementary to the other. Then, to answer RQ2, the keyword co-occurrence and co-citation analysis (including dynamic co-citation) is carried out using VOSviewer, Sci2 and Gephi.

Through the co-citation analysis, studies that are related to a common theme are clustered and dynamic co-citation analysis helps in understanding the life-cycle of these themes. The emerging themes are ones that have been studied recently and upcoming researchers could benefit from them. Also, if researching an already well-researched theme, upcoming researchers can identify the gaps in the clusters for their study. Next, RQ3 is answered by content analysis of the identified clusters and themes. Content analysis helps in the identification of gaps related to theory building, concept determination, and methodology used. The identified gaps act as future research actions.

4 LITERATURE SELECTION

This study adopts the bibliometric protocol developed by Khanra et al. (2020) to carry out the desired analysis. As per the adopted protocol, there are three stages in carrying out literature selection; Scanning, Curating and analysing the sample. The study limits to the studies published in the Scopus database because of their stringent quality checks and peer review mechanism. The Title-Abstract-key feature in the Scopus database is used to retrieve the literature using a reliable search string. The Topic searches for the given string in the Title, abstracts, and keywords field and provides results that match the string.

4.1 Scanning

A prior search of the documents suggests that researchers have used the terms small and medium enterprises, SME, SMEs, small business, and tourism and hospitality. Thus, the search string: TITLE-ABS-KEY (SME AND (Tourism OR Hospitality)) was finalised. A search with this string resulted in 592 documents (on 1st May 2022) including articles, conference papers, review articles, book chapters, and editorials published in several research domains including management, computer science, economics, econometrics, and social sciences.

4.2 Curating

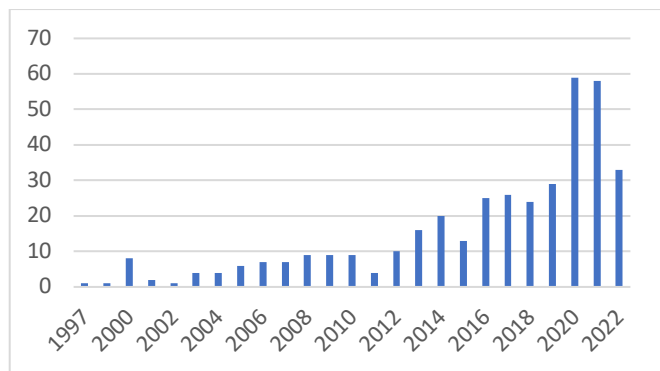
In the next stage, the results obtained in the previous stage are refined using some pre-determined filters. These filters

are existing in the Scopus database. Bibliometrics studies tend to rely only on journal articles while carrying out the analysis because of the quality assurance due to peer review. Thus, the study limits to the articles published in the journals and excluded conference papers, proceeding articles, editorials, and reviews. Then, to ensure that all the articles have consistency, only articles published in the English language are retrieved. Thus, the search string was modified to TITLE-ABS-KEY (SME AND (Tourism or Hospitality) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar"))) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")). The filters resulted in the retrieval of 385 documents which formed our sample for the bibliometric analysis.

4.3 Analysing

The first article in our sample published in 1997 indicates that small and medium enterprises have been researched in tourism and hospitality for the last twenty-five years. The trends in SME and Tourism and hospitality research, as suggested in Figure 1, indicates that the interest of academicians in this field is still growing. There has been a sudden increase in the publication count since 2019. It is because the small tourism businesses were the worst affected and researchers investigated the impact of the pandemic on their businesses. The interest is still growing as there is an argument that small businesses will eventually help in getting the industry back on track. The interest of academicians is visible in the growing publications and an h-index of 41 of the analysed publications. Not only the publication count, but the diversity of publications across the domains has increased in the last two decades.

Figure 1: Trends in papers



The sample of the present study is 385 articles, 953 authors, 81 countries, and 733 organizations. Table 1 lists the top 10 authors, organizations, countries, and Publication Titles based on the number of publications (TP). Among the authors, J. E Núñez-Ríos is the top contributing author followed by J.Y Sánchez-García and G Hoang. Authors from the University of Johannesburg and Universidad Panamericana have the most publications on the topic. Among the countries, the United Kingdom and Indonesian authors have the most publications.

Table 1: Top authors, organizations, countries, and publication titles based on publication count

Author	TP	Organization	TP	Country	TP	Publication Title	TP
Núñez-Ríos, J.E.	7	University of Johannesburg	8	United Kingdom	64	Sustainability (Switzerland)	21
Sánchez-García, J.Y.	6	Universidad Panamericana	7	Indonesia	36	Tourism Management	12
Hoang, G.	4	Victoria University	6	Spain	33	African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	11
Ngo, V.M.	4	University of Surrey	6	Australia	31	International Journal of Hospitality Management	9
Soto-Pérez, M.	4	Universiti Putra Malaysia	6	Italy	27	Tourism	8
Tejada, P.	4	Leeds Beckett University	6	Malaysia	26	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	8
Vu, H.M.	4	Universidad de Sevilla	6	South Africa	18	Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism	8
Awang, K.W.	3	University of Primorska	5	United States	16	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	6
Dom, S.	3	Universität Innsbruck	5	Austria	13	Tourism Economics	6
El-Gohary, H.	3	Griffith University	5	Germany	11	Tourism Management Perspectives	6

5 BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

5.1 Bibliographic coupling (BC)

As per bibliographic coupling, when two or more papers cite a paper, then these papers are related to a common theme (Kessler, 1963). Bibliographic coupling, despite its drawback of neglecting older papers, is a widely used bibliometric analysis method to identify the top contributions to the theme. In our sample, results suggest (Table 2) that J.E. Núñez-Ríos is the most influential author based on the total link strength (TLS), followed by J.Y Sánchez-García, and M. Soto-Pérez. In terms of organizations, Griffith University, the University of Johannesburg, and Victoria University are the top contributors to the theme. In terms of countries, authors from the United Kingdom are the most impactful authors followed by authors from Australia and the United States.

Table 2: Top authors, organizations, and countries based on bibliographic

Author	TLS	Organization	TLS	Country	TLS
Núñez-Ríos J.E.	485.6	Griffith University	215.65	United Kingdom	1436.5
Sánchez-García J.Y.	428.51	University Of Johannesburg	120.46	Australia	1096.65
Soto-Pérez M.	320.16	Victoria University	112.24	United States	854.11
Rojas O.G.	227.95	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan	88.14	Spain	645.02
Ngo V.M.	178.67	Van Lang University	65.02	Italy	570.22
Vu H.M.	178.67	University Of Ludwigshafen	49.24	South Africa	554.25
Peters M.	141	Rey Juan Carlos University	44.97	Germany	502.01
Zehrer A.	135	Bournemouth University	27.21	Austria	450.59
Romero I.	109.27	University Of Kwazulu-Natal	25.34	Viet Nam	298.67
Tejada P.	106.77	Manchester Metropolitan University	20.06	Canada	272.6

5.2 Citation Analysis

Citation analysis is also one of the commonly used bibliometric approaches where a paper's worth or importance is judged by its ability to generate citations. Despite its limitations of favouring older publications and articles published in journals with high cite scores, citation analysis has been used in previous bibliometric studies. The results (Table 3) suggest that S. Wanhill is the most impactful author followed by P. Tejada and A. Kasim. In terms of organizations, authors from Bournemouth University generate the highest citations followed by authors from the University of Johannesburg and Manchester Metropolitan University. In terms of country, authors from the United

occurrence analysis on the author keywords in VOSviewer, the authors selected only those keywords that had a link strength of more than 4. It resulted in 53 keywords out of 1268. Running the same analysis on indexed keywords with the same parameters, resulted in 41 keywords out of 520. Table 5 lists the frequent author and indexed keywords used in the studies in our sample. Both author and indexed keywords have innovation, sustainability, Covid-19, and entrepreneurship as common words. These keywords have been ranked based on their Total Link Strength (TLS).

Table 3: Top authors, organizations, and countries based on citation analysis

Author	TLS	Organization	TLS	Country	TLS
Wanhill S.	175	Bournemouth University	157	United Kingdom	1916
Tejada P.	119	University Of Johannesburg	72	Australia	496
Kasim A.	100	Manchester Metropolitan University	64	Spain	482
Zehrer A.	77	University Of Surrey	64	Italy	462
Romero I.	71	Victoria University	40	Austria	397
Hallak R.	52	Griffith University	24	Canada	285
Peters M.	52	Rey Juan Carlos University	18	Malaysia	203
Domi S.	36	University Of Ludwigshafen	16	France	191
Núñez-Ríos J.E.	32	University Of Kwazulu-Natal	12	Denmark	189
Sánchez-García I Y	29	Van Lang University	11	United States	182

Table 5: Most frequently used author and indexed keywords

Author keywords	TLS	Index keywords	TLS
Innovation	26	Innovation	20
Covid-19	15	Tourism Development	19
Entrepreneurship	13	Sustainability	17
Sustainability	11	Tourism Management	16
Malaysia	9	Tourism Economics	15
Performance	9	Tourist Destination	14
Corporate Social Responsibility	8	Spain	12
Competitiveness	7	Europe	10
Resilience	7	Sustainable Development	10
Sustainable Tourism	7	Business Development	8
Crisis Management	6	Competitiveness	8
Social Media	6	Ecotourism	8
Sustainable Development	6	Entrepreneur	8
Climate Change	5	Tourism Market	8
Competition	5	Covid-19	7

Figure 2: Network diagram of author keywords

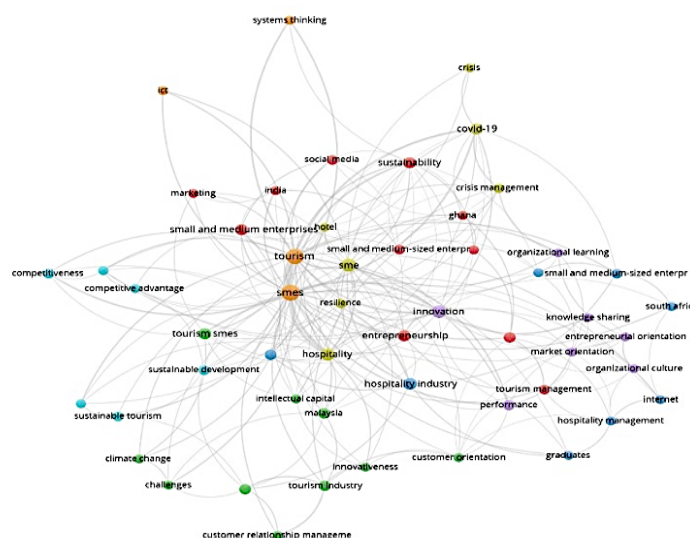


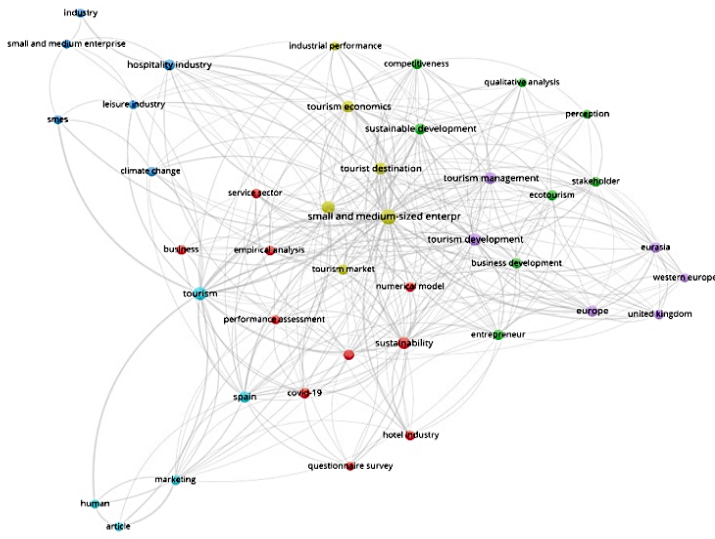
Table 4: Top articles as per PageRank

Article	PageRank	Local Citation Count	Global Citation Count
(Kim & Shim, 2018)	0.01639	95	174
(Rastrollo-Horrillo & Rivero Diaz, 2019)	0.015141	11	23
(Domi & Domi, 2021)	0.014742	2	2
(Nguyen et al., 2021)	0.01445	3	6
(Martínez-Román et al., 2015)	0.012534	74	143
(Seilov, 2015)	0.012379	34	69
(Hallak et al., 2013)	0.012307	29	48
(Tamajón & Aulet, 2013)	0.00994	67	124
(Deku et al., 2022)	0.00981	1	1
(Verrevnne et al., 2019)	0.009691	47	98

Figure 2 represents the co-occurrence network of author-given keywords and figure 3 is the network of journal-indexed keywords. Both the network diagrams highlight that SMEs in tourism and hospitality have been associated with harbouring innovation, entrepreneurship, and corporate social responsibility. They generate sustainable development and create a tourism market.

A strong emphasis has been placed in the recent research on building resilience and handling crisis management because of the impact of Covid-19. Studies in the European context focus on the challenges for SMEs in the wake of climate change. In a nutshell, both indexed keywords and author keywords highlight similar aspects. Indexed keywords, owing to the journal themes, use keywords that specify the domain of the research article such as tourism management, tourism economics, tourism development, and tourism market.

Figure 3: Network diagram of indexed keywords

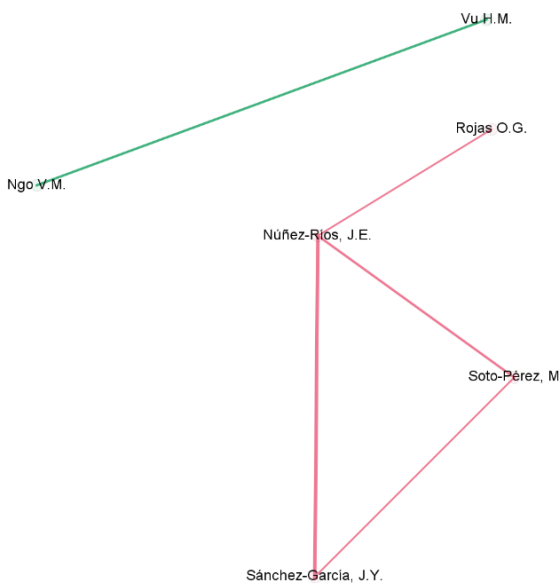


6 NETWORK ANALYSIS

6.1 Co-authorship

Research collaboration is significant for the topic to develop. It helps in moving the research across the globe and helps unearth topics and methodologies that help in the advancement of the tourism industry. In our study, a co-authorship analysis was performed for the authors who have published three or more studies together. The results (Figure 4) suggest that there were only two author groups that collaborated for three or more studies. In the first group there are four authors; Rojas O.G. (3 links), Núñez-Ríos, J.E. (7 links), Sánchez-García, J.Y. (6 links), and Soto-Pérez, M (4 links). In the second group, there are two authors; Vu H.M. (4 links) and Ngo V.M. (4 links).

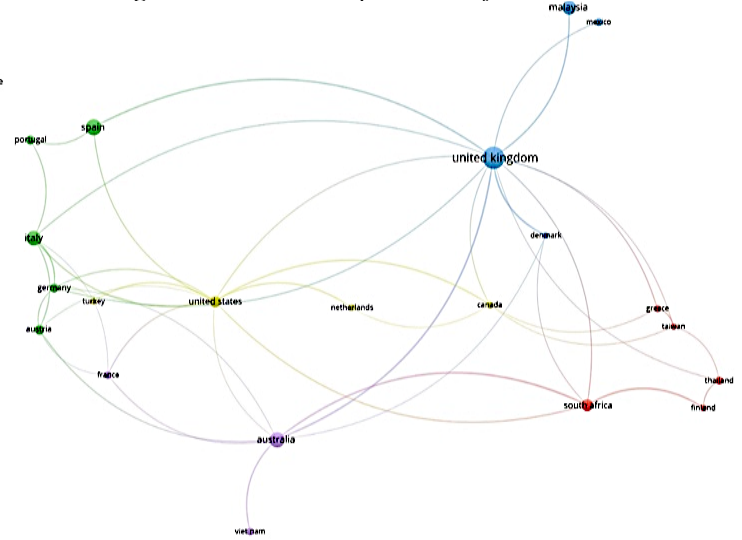
Figure 4: Co-authorship network of authors



The smaller number of authorship collaborations and the presence of limited publications and author count in the

network highlight the scope for collaboration among interdisciplinary researchers. Further, researchers from nations that lag in the studied topic can collaborate with researchers in other institutes and nations for knowledge transfers on concepts and methodologies. Also, authors need to engage with each other more frequently for in-depth study of the topics.

Figure 5: Co-authorship network of countries

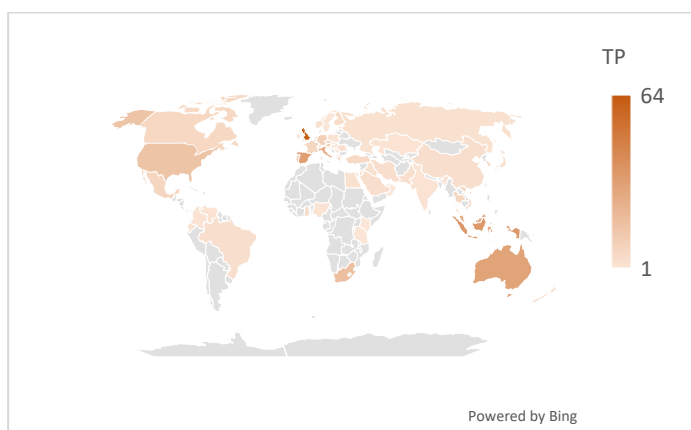


In terms of countries, there are five clusters in co-authorship analysis (Figure 5). In the first group, authors from Finland, Greece, South Africa, Thailand, and Taiwan collaborated on the topic. In the second group, there are authors from Austria, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. In the third group are authors from Denmark, Malaysia, Mexico, and United Kingdom. In the fourth group, authors from Canada, the Netherlands, Turkey, and the United States collaborated. In the last and fifth groups, there are authors from Australia, Vietnam, and France.

The co-authorship network of countries highlights that researchers from developing nations have tried to collaborate with authors from European and developed nations. However, not much progress has been identified as the co-authorship results suggest that cross-country co-authorship is limited to a few papers. There is also generated a heatmap (Figure 6) to identify which countries have the most authors. the data for the map was collected from the Scopus database and the map was generated using the Ms-Excel add-in of the heat map.

The results indicate that most of the research on the theme has been undertaken in the European and Southeast Asian nations. There is limited research in African, South American, and South Asian nations on the theme. The limited research in these nations provides the opportunity for upcoming researchers to collaborate with the giants in their research theme, study their work, identify suitable study regions, collaborate with them, and share new knowledge for the industrial development in their region.

Figure 6: Country count of the corresponding authors



6.2 Dynamic co-citation

The dynamic co-citation analysis in Gephi helps in identifying the evolution of these research themes and clusters. In the co-citation analysis, when two documents are cited together by a third document, they are said to be related as they pertain to a common theme. These studies are then clustered based on their common underlying theme. Extending the co-citation analysis, dynamic co-citation analysis helps in identifying the evolution of these study clusters over their lifetime. It helps to identify which of the topics are emerging and which have matured over the studied period. The emerging topics can act as potential future research topics for upcoming researchers. Also, in the countries where the research is yet to progress, matured topics from other countries can act as future study areas. Table 6 lists the evolutionary phase of these clusters. The total article included in the analysis was 320 (83.11% of the sample). The results suggest that Cluster 2 and Cluster 5 are the largest clusters meaning most of the studies in SMEs in tourism and hospitality focus on these themes. While Cluster 2 is the oldest, Cluster 3 is the latest cluster to evolve in the theme. Results also highlight that all the clusters are still relevant to the theme, which means that there is a lot to explore in each of the themes. The evolution of the clusters along with the content analysis will help us in identifying the research gaps and scope for future research on the theme.

Table 6 Evolution of the themes

Year	Cluster					Total
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	
2008	5					5
2009					5	5
2010					5	5
2011			10			10
2012	5		5			10
2013	5				10	15
2014				5		5
2015	5			5		10
2016	5			10	15	30
2017				5	5	10
2018	10			10	5	25
2019		5	15	5	10	35
2020	35	5	10	20	15	85
2021	10	15		15	10	50
2022	5	5		10		20
Total	85	30	40	85	80	320

7. MAJOR THEMATIC AREAS

The co-citation analysis in VOSviewer helps in clustering the articles that have a similar theme. The results found 320 articles (83.11%) and clustered them into five major themes. The results suggest that the theme of strengthening SME performance is the oldest while recovery and resilience-building is the latest theme to originate in the research. Academicians have paid equal focus to promoting entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism (sustainability and sustainable development) through SMEs in tourism and hospitality and building competitiveness in recent years. The themes are discussed in the following sub-section.

7.1 Conceptualization and strengthening SME's performance

Strengthening financial performance has been the most researched theme in SMEs and tourism and hospitality topics. Since the research was conceptualized, this topic has retained its importance in academia. Post-pandemic and in the recent literature also, researchers have examined how to further boost the performance of SMEs so that they recover from external shocks. Setting up small businesses in the hospitality industry is an interplay of several push and pull factors (Chan & Quah, 2011). The use of IT and allied infrastructure has an impact on the SME's performance. Tourism SMEs have a relative disadvantage in using technology and IT to boost their performance (Brown & Kaewkitipong, 2009).

The tourism and hospitality industry is dominated by strategic alliances between small businesses. The commitment of alliance partners positively influences the performance of SMEs (Pansiri, 2008). A highly skilled workforce led by experienced entrepreneurs makes SMEs profitable (Georgiadis & Pitelis, 2012). Local community support also improves the performance of a tourism SME (Hallak et al., 2013). It has been observed that revenue management through a professional revenue manager is in the best interest of the SME (Foggia & Lazzarotti, 2014). Innovativeness also improves the profitability of tourism SMEs (Martínez-Román et al., 2015). Rekarti & Doktoralina (2017) proposed a theoretical model for SME performance by investigating the relationship between capabilities and performance. Since 2020, the literature evolved to enhance the performance of tourism and allied SMEs. Studies began to assess the importance of building knowledge competencies and innovation in improving performance (Domi et al., 2019; Lita et al., 2020; Wahyuni & Sara, 2020). Digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills also have a significant and positive influence on SME performance (Sariwulan et al., 2020).

7.2 Building SMEs' resilience and recovery

Small businesses at tourist destinations have suffered a lot globally due to the travel restrictions placed by the governments. Most of the businesses closed because they were unable to bear the losses. Those that remained also suffered economically. Thus, since the pandemic, academicians started strategizing recovery strategies for small tourism businesses. More focus was placed on building resilience so that future shocks could be handled better. Suriyankietkaew et al. (2022) studied how sustainable leadership in a community-based enterprise could help in the

development of resilience in tourism SMEs. Tourism operators not only suffer economically, but disasters also impact the mental attitude of SME owners (Lindsay-Smith et al., 2022). Future studies should focus on building a network of SMEs for sharing emotional support during disasters. Innovation and company networks also influence the resilience of the SME (Dias et al., 2022). Núñez-Ríos et al. (2022) suggested that an organization can improve its resilience by incorporating autonomy in its operations and developing a feedback mechanism. government policies have been a major source of building resilience in tourism SMEs. However, the implementation of these policies has always been challenging (Estiri et al., 2022). During adverse conditions, adaptive performance and institutional orientation directly influence entrepreneurial resilience (Elshaer & Saad, 2021). Psychological capital has been found to influence organizational resilience (Fang et al., 2020). Technology has shown positive signs in making SMEs tackle the challenges posed by the pandemic. It helps in better risk management and acts as a catalyst in the recovery process (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020a).

7.3 Leadership and innovative behaviour in SMEs

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the long-run survival of small and medium enterprises. Leaders (or managers in some cases) promote a work culture and influence the behaviour of their team in achieving organizational goals. It is very important that a leader promotes a culture of intrapreneurship within the organization and encourage workers to use innovative practices. Leaders promote a climate of innovation by influencing workers' tasks, interpersonal relations and role-related processes (Hoang et al., 2019). A suitable reward system also helps in developing an innovative climate in SMEs (Hoang et al., 2021).

Studies suggest that ethical leadership and entrepreneurial leadership also influence the service innovative behaviour of the employees (Hoang et al., 2022). A leader must strive for the trust of their workforce. The studies highlight that trust in leadership also stimulates innovative service behaviour in employees (Hoang et al., 2022). Leaders in SMEs should integrate value-based practices and competencies in business. Improving stakeholder relationship, fostering social responsibility, and developing human capital also promotes an innovative work climate in the SME (Suriyankietkaew et al., 2022). Studies argue that leadership development programs are a must for SMEs and support agencies have failed to provide market-driven leadership models (Morrison, 2003). Thus, researchers must try to build a leadership program using the modelling that keeps on updating as per the market needs. Researchers must implement advance statistical analysis to develop and measure the leadership extent in their SMEs. One such scale has been developed by Idris et al. (2022) to measure blue ocean leadership in hotels.

7.4 Entrepreneurship through SMEs and sustainability

One of the most sought benefits from SMEs is the promotion of an entrepreneurship attitude. Since they are easier to start, budding and young entrepreneurs find it easier to taste the fruits of entrepreneurship. SMEs not only generate value, but through their responsible business models, they can share the value with their stakeholders (Dubruc et al., 2017). Not only at the individual level, but tourism SMEs have also been

found to promote collective entrepreneurship (Gundolf et al., 2009). Entrepreneurship supported by the government will also help SMEs become more creative and better tackle the challenges posed by the covid-19 (Thukral, 2021). Entrepreneurship through SMEs has also been studied critically. For instance, work addition in tourism SMEs has been linked to the abandonment of entrepreneurship (Sánchez-Medina et al., 2020).

Small and medium business entrepreneurs have concerns over sustainability and business development. For instance, high investment costs and uncertainty of recovery prohibit small businesses from adopting sustainable tourism behaviour (Fotiadis et al., 2013). In addition, Foley (2014) suggested that SMEs have to sacrifice economic gains to achieve environmental goals. Linking sustainability and entrepreneurship in their framework, Crnogaj et al. (2014) suggested evidence-based policymaking that aimed at promoting holistic behaviour and innovation in the organization. Studies also suggest that tourism SMEs implement sustainable practices, but do include sustainability in their vision (Vrenegoor et al., 2020).

7.5 Competitiveness building for SMEs

By making SMEs competitive, it is believed that they would be able to tackle the environment dynamics with more strength. Studies suggest that sustainable competitive advantages not only help in differentiating from competitors but also provide a basis for enhanced customer satisfaction and long-run survival (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020b). Organizational learning capacities will also influence the development of its competitiveness. Service innovation and government support are also important sources for building competitiveness (Ounarat et al., 2019). The Internet has also shown potential for strategic positioning for SMEs (Favre-Bonté & Tran, 2015). SMEs are found to have underused social media to their advantage (Nakara et al., 2012).

It is advisable that SME managers must promote themselves on SME and help in developing a brand for themselves. The SMEs need to strategically follow and monitor the changing customer needs and competition (Seilov, 2015). Coopetition has shown promise in building the competitiveness of SMEs. But to do so, there is a need for enhanced trust between the involved partners (Corte & Aria, 2016). Studies suggest that an increase in competition promotes learning throughout the organization (Khoshkhoo & Nadalipour, 2016). SMEs must evolve into learning organizations where competition is seen as an opportunity to learn and grow together.

In addition, SMEs should also identify ways in which they could outperform their competitors. For instance, Iraldo et al. (2017) investigated how pro-environment strategies could be utilised to outperform the competition. In a nutshell, to build their competitiveness, tourism SMEs must implement organizational strategies to support open innovation (Musiello-Neto et al., 2021).

8. DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH GAPS

8.1 Advances in methodologies and study regions

Around 65% of the total studies in our sample have adopted a qualitative analysis in their study. The keyword analysis

highlights that questionnaire-based data collection is the primary method for collecting data and numeric modelling is used to analyse the data. Thus, the study suggests that more qualitative analysis is required for the theme. The case study method is the most used study methodology adopted by the researchers. The researchers must broaden the scope of qualitative and quantitative methodology in the theme.

More review studies for literature on themes published in other databases could be conducted to provide insights into the themes and methodologies. Advanced statistical tools to predict the crisis pattern for SMEs could be developed by the researchers that track real-time crisis and resilience patterns. Similarly, 51% of the studies in our sample had SMEs from Europe or the western hemisphere. Even in the eastern hemisphere, the studies from Australia take a lead. The researchers from developing nations of Africa and South Asia must research how SMEs contribute to the development of the tourism and hospitality industry in their region. By borrowing the knowledge concepts and methodological advancement from the already researching regions, the studies from here could help in uncovering learnings for SME performance enhancement. More focus of the researchers should be on collaborating with researchers from such nations. It will further boost the theoretical framework on the role of SMEs in the tourism and hospitality industry.

8.2 Future research themes in SME and tourism research

SMEs in tourism and hospitality has been studied mostly through economic and business management lenses. In the present study, the results highlighted five themes in the literature on SMEs in tourism and hospitality. The first theme focused on improving the performance of SMEs. The second theme focused on developing SMEs' resilience and crisis management. The third theme highlights the leadership aspects of SMEs. In the fourth theme, the focus shifts to entrepreneurship and sustainability. The fifth theme focuses on competitiveness building of SMEs.

In the first theme, it is suggested that future researchers should focus on the role of technology in enhancing SME performance. Technology and its related aspects were not observed in either author-provided or journal-indexed keywords. Digitalization and technology can improve the operational efficiencies of small and medium enterprises. In the second theme, it is suggested using social media to tackle crisis management. To better mitigate the crisis, the study suggests that researchers could look for business diversification opportunities for SMEs. Researchers can also test how more dimensions of psychological capital can help SMEs in building organizational resilience and coping post-disaster. For the third theme, it is recommended that researchers can explore the role of managers and leaders in improving SME performance and develop a leadership style or theory for the SME leader.

The development of organizational culture can also be an area of academic interest. The role of vision and mission and the leadership style in SMEs could further be studied through psychological and behavioural sciences. To promote entrepreneurship in SMEs, researchers could explore the role of the source of financing and branding options for the entrepreneurship culture in SMEs. To ensure that SMEs could survive in the long run and engage in sustainable behaviour, researchers could identify the enablers of

sustainability in SMEs and model a framework for future reference. To improve the competitiveness of SMEs it is recommended that researchers must look at matching the resources of SMEs to their vision and mission. Future research could be undertaken in balancing the economic, social, and environmental objectives of tourism SMEs.

8.3 Future directions in SME and tourism research

The evolution of the clusters indicates that there is a lot yet to be explored in each of the identified themes. Future researchers could borrow the concepts from other management domains to have an understanding of the issues of SMEs in tourism and hospitality. For instance, the 'sustainable competitive advantage' required to sustain SME's business and build its resilience could be explored from the operations and strategic management domain. This would pave way for efficient leadership and management strategies for SMEs. Using blockchain and big data analytics in predicting the upcoming crisis and developing resilience strategies for SMEs can be the direction of future research on the theme. Studies can also explore the impact of the pandemic on the learning of SMEs and their future journey using the experience. The impact of the pandemic on SMEs' performance and the need to recover and further strengthen the business will continue to be studied by researchers in the near future. The study also recommends that future studies could study ways to make work more enjoyable in tourism SMEs, to reduce tourism entrepreneurship abandonment.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The vast literature scattered geographically on SMEs' role in tourism and hospitality makes it necessary that it is summarised and suggest future research actions. The current study contributes to the literature in the following ways.

9.1 Identifying top contributions and prestigious articles

To answer RQ1, which aimed at identifying the top contributions to the research on SMEs' role in tourism and hospitality, the study applied bibliometric analysis using a robust protocol. Tables 1-3 suggest that Núñez-Ríos, J.E., Sánchez-García, J.Y., Hoang, G., and Wanhill S. are the top contributing authors to the researched theme. In terms of organizations, the University of Johannesburg, Universidad Panamericana, and Victoria University have made top contributions to the theme. In terms of countries, authors from the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, and Spain have made a top contribution to research on the theme. Table 4 lists the prestigious articles in the theme. It is observed that these articles are published in the last ten years. It means that there is a positive intent of researchers towards novel ideas being tested by the researchers and published in reputed journals.

9.2 Identifying major thematic areas

The RQ2 aimed at identifying the major thematic areas present in the existing literature. This question is answered by performing a keyword co-occurrence and co-citation analysis. It is observed that the literature can be categorized into five major themes. Theme 1 focused on strengthening and improving SMEs' performance through innovation. Studies in theme 2 focused on improving the resilience of the

SMEs and making them able in handling the crisis because of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. Theme 3 had a focus on the role of transformational leadership in the development of SME performance. Theme 4 had a focus on entrepreneurship opportunities because of the advent of SMEs and their role in promoting sustainability. Studies in theme 6 had a focus on developing destination competitiveness through SMEs and Theme 6 was concerned with the learning orientation of the SMEs.

9.3 Suggesting future research avenues

The RQ3 in the study aimed at suggesting future research directions for the role of SMEs in the tourism and hospitality industry. Through the dynamic co-citation analysis the evolution of these clusters and their importance is identified. The results suggested that all the identified themes are still relevant in academia since there have been increasing publication trends and the studies are being cited by the recent studies in the cluster. However, the cluster on building resilience and crisis management is gaining traction in the last few years. Based on the findings it is suggested that SMEs in tourism and hospitality must be viewed from a more multidisciplinary angle by incorporating strategies and operations management domain in the research. Second, studies must focus on developing a rare, relevant, and valuable competitive advantage for the SME. Third, the organizational culture must foster intrapreneurship within the organization to strengthen its capabilities. In addition, the study stresses that researchers must identify several new tourism avenues where SMEs could play a pivotal role. Further, stakeholder engagement must be promoted in the SMEs as it could be a value-generating point for the tourism industry. The study also recommends the use of novel methodologies in identifying the building blocks for the performance of small and medium enterprises.

The study aimed to map the twenty-five years of research on small and medium enterprises in tourism and hospitality. The study retrieved the articles published in the Scopus database and performed a bibliometric analysis using a structured and scientific protocol developed by scholars. The study answered three questions: the top contributing authors, organizations, countries, and journals in theme; the most prestigious articles and major thematic areas; and, suggested future research actions based on research gaps. The keyword co-occurrence and co-citation analysis helped in unearthing six research themes and dynamic co-citation helped in tracing the evolution of these themes. The study observes that recent literature heaps focus on building SMEs' resilience in the wake of climate change and Covid-19. The trend analysis shows positive signs for the researchers as all the clusters are still relevant in the literature.

The study recommends the use of advanced methodological techniques in developing frameworks and for future research recommends exploring the SME's performance in developing countries. The study also suggests employing a more multidisciplinary approach while studying the role of SMEs in tourism and hospitality. The study limits itself to a single database for data retrieval. It also suffers from the inherent limitations of bibliometrics. The interpretation of the clusters and future directions have been the viewpoint of the authors and may differ from others. Despite the limitations, the

author's believe that the current study will help future researchers in their work.

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SUBMITTED: NOV 2021

REVISION SUBMITTED: JAN 2022

2nd REVISION SUBMITTED: APR 2022

3rd REVISION SUBMITTED: JUL 2022

ACCEPTED: AUG 2022

REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

PUBLISHED ONLINE: 14 NOV 2022