

del Pino Rodríguez-Vera, Ainhoa; Rando-Cueto, Dolores; De las Heras-Pedrosa, Carlos

Article

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Administrative Sciences

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Suggested Citation: del Pino Rodríguez-Vera, Ainhoa; Rando-Cueto, Dolores; De las Heras-Pedrosa, Carlos (2025) : Women's entrepreneurship in the tourism industry: A bibliometric study, Administrative Sciences, ISSN 2076-3387, MDPI, Basel, Vol. 15, Iss. 4, pp. 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15040130>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/321274>

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Article

Women's Entrepreneurship in the Tourism Industry: A Bibliometric Study

Ainhoa del Pino Rodríguez-Vera ¹, Dolores Rando-Cueto ^{2,3} and Carlos de las Heras Pedrosa ^{1,*}

¹ Faculty of Communication Sciences, Malaga University, 29010 Malaga, Spain; ainhoarodriguez@uma.es

² Faculty of Marketing and Management, Malaga University, 29010 Malaga, Spain; lrandoCueto@uma.es

³ Valencian International University, 46021 Valencia, Spain

* Correspondence: cheras@uma.es

Abstract: Women's entrepreneurship in the tourism industry plays a vital role in promoting economic growth, advancing gender equality, and encouraging innovation. Female entrepreneurs contribute to the diversification of tourism services, job generation, and the revitalization of local economies. This study employs data from the Web of Science database to examine research on tourism and female entrepreneurship over the past two decades. The primary goals are to explore emerging trends, publishing patterns, and the geographical regions most active in this area of research, as well as to identify the key journals, authors, and keywords shaping the field. The bibliometric analysis uncovers the progression of academic studies and highlights regions with significant research activity. While female entrepreneurship is a driving force for economic development and gender equity in tourism, persistent obstacles, such as limited research in certain areas and barriers to women's participation, remain. This work underscores the increasing significance of women's contributions to tourism and offers a framework for future studies and policies aimed at fostering gender equality and sustainable economic development.

Keywords: gender; tourism sector; gender equality; female innovators; local economic growth; hospitality; research trends; sustainable development



Received: 23 January 2025

Revised: 27 March 2025

Accepted: 28 March 2025

Published: 1 April 2025

Citation: Rodríguez-Vera, A.d.P., Rando-Cueto, D., & de las Heras Pedrosa, C. (2025). Women's Entrepreneurship in the Tourism Industry: A Bibliometric Study. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(4), 130. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15040130>

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a globally significant industry and a key contributor to the world's economies (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022; Lado-Sestayo & Vivel-Búa, 2017). As a sector, it is pivotal in creating jobs and has shown steady growth on a global scale (Ertac & Tanova, 2020). The World Tourism Organization reports that around 96.7 million people are employed in tourism, making it one of the leading sources of national income, job creation, and private sector development in many countries (Ertac & Tanova, 2020). Additionally, the increasing competition among tourist destinations and the rising demand for innovative services and products highlight the critical role of the business sector in meeting these challenges (Butkouskaya et al., 2020).

In Spain, tourism represents a major driver of annual growth in the service industry, accounting for a considerable share of GDP and serving as a cornerstone of the national economy (Butkouskaya et al., 2020). In addition to its economic contributions, the sector generates ample opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment. However, despite its importance, the Spanish tourism industry has largely neglected a critical issue: gender equality. Women play a vital role as both employees and entrepreneurs in tourism, yet their contributions and the gender-related dynamics of the industry remain poorly researched

(Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022; Freund et al., 2024). Bridging this knowledge gap is essential to unlocking the sector's full potential for sustainable growth while ensuring equal opportunities and fair representation for women.

While this study provides a global bibliometric analysis of female entrepreneurship in tourism, particular attention is given to Spain due to its economic reliance on the tourism industry and the existing research gaps in gender-related studies within this field. However, the bibliometric findings also reveal significant academic contributions from countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, which are discussed in the Results Section.

Across Europe, female entrepreneurial activity is relatively low, with just 5.7% of women engaged in entrepreneurship compared to a global average of 11% (Observatorio del Emprendimiento de España, 2023). In Barcelona, only 3 in 10 entrepreneurs are women, reflecting the significant obstacles they encounter when pursuing business ventures (Freund et al., 2024). Nonetheless, highly educated young women are finding promising entrepreneurial opportunities in non-agricultural sectors, including tourism (Xu et al., 2018).

Tourism is a labor-intensive industry, and its workforce is predominantly female (Avcı & Gümüş, 2022). Many entry-level positions in the sector, such as housekeeping and front-of-house roles in hospitality, are traditionally perceived as women's work (Costa et al., 2016; McGehee et al., 2007). Despite making up over 60% of the tourism workforce, women hold less than 40% of management roles and fewer than 20% of executive-level positions in publicly listed hospitality firms (Kimbu et al., 2019). This gender imbalance in leadership positions reveals a structural inequality within the sector (Avcı & Gümüş, 2022; Lin et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the tourism industry offers significant opportunities for women's economic and social inclusion, and entrepreneurship has been identified as a powerful tool for their empowerment (Ertac & Tanova, 2020).

Since the late 1990s, female entrepreneurship has gained recognition as a defined and respected area of study, as well as a focal point in political debates and media discussions about employment and markets (Tovmasyan, 2022). Governments around the world have prioritized increasing the number of women-led enterprises to address their underrepresentation in the field. However, research often treats gender as a secondary consideration rather than examining its moderating effects, overlooking important gender differences (Butkouskaya et al., 2020).

While research on female entrepreneurship has expanded, its specific role in tourism has been less thoroughly explored (Freund et al., 2024; Lindvert et al., 2024). The topic of women's entrepreneurship in hospitality and tourism is emerging as a critical concern in academic literature. Recent studies aim to better understand the factors that promote or hinder women's entrepreneurial activity within the sector (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2024). Given the growing significance of female entrepreneurs in tourism, the literature increasingly focuses on their motivations, barriers, empowerment, contributions, business strategies, performance, and professional networks (Khoo et al., 2024).

Based on this theoretical framework, the study defines the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the quantity and quality of academic research on female entrepreneurship in the tourism industry.
2. To identify the main themes and emerging trends in this field of study.
3. To highlight gaps and underexplored areas in the existing body of literature.
4. To propose future research directions and approaches informed by bibliometric findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Tourism and Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's tendency to engage in innovative, proactive, and risk-taking activities to establish new ventures. It is a fundamental driver of economic progress and a source of job creation (Avcı & Gümüş, 2022).

Gender disparities continue to be a prominent issue in entrepreneurial outcomes. Women are less likely than men to embark on entrepreneurial ventures and often face greater challenges in achieving success after starting a business (Rosado-Cubero et al., 2024). While men are typically motivated by financial success and innovation, women tend to prioritize independence over monetary goals (Xu et al., 2018). Despite the diversity among female entrepreneurs, they frequently encounter similar hurdles rooted in societal structures, both formal and informal. Limited access to financial resources and discrimination in obtaining bank loans are among the most significant challenges. As a result, women in tourism often finance their businesses independently or rely on support from friends and family (Lindvert et al., 2024).

The tourism sector stands out for its high density of entrepreneurs, with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) forming a cornerstone of the industry (Costa et al., 2016). This is especially true in developing regions (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2024). Tourism SMEs play a crucial role in driving economic activity in tourist destinations. Given that many roles within the industry are linked to hospitality, it is an appealing sector for female entrepreneurs (Avcı & Gümüş, 2022). However, entrepreneurial studies have primarily focused on large companies, which presents a notable gap, as most businesses in emerging and developing markets are micro- or small enterprises, particularly in the tourism sector (Lindvert et al., 2024).

The rise of female entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon in nations across all levels of development—advanced, developing, and underdeveloped (Observatorio del Emprendimiento de España, 2022). This trend is crucial for both communities and countries, as it contributes to income generation, improved living standards, increased employment opportunities, enhanced human capital, and more equitable wealth distribution (Aleshinloye, 2024; Tovmasyan, 2022). Nonetheless, data indicate that women are underrepresented in the realm of social entrepreneurship, with official statistics showing fewer startups led by women (Butkouskaya et al., 2020).

2.2. Tourism, Entrepreneurship, and Gender

Tourism has long been associated with traditionally female roles, such as those in accommodation, cleaning, and cooking, a trend reflected in the sector's high proportion of female employees (Avcı & Gümüş, 2022; Khoo et al., 2024). Women's participation in tourism is substantial, particularly in service roles, and many seek entrepreneurial opportunities within the industry, often supported by government policies encouraging such initiatives (Tovmasyan, 2022). However, gender-based inequalities persist, limiting the potential benefits of tourism entrepreneurship for women compared to men (Costa et al., 2016). Although gender is a key factor in tourism, it has received relatively little academic attention. Globally, female entrepreneurship is emerging as a growing sector, driving economic progress in various countries (Gutiérrez Cruz et al., 2020; Tovmasyan, 2022). For women in tourism, their businesses foster local development and contribute to social change, promoting economic and social independence (Kimbu et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship offers women a pathway to economic empowerment by providing flexibility to balance their work with caregiving responsibilities (Costa et al., 2016). Furthermore, female entrepreneurship is linked to enhancing women's status, improving family welfare, and contributing to community well-being (Vukovic et al., 2023). Policies designed specifi-

cally to support women entrepreneurs are critical for increasing the number of female-led businesses and fostering the growth of women-owned enterprises (Khoo et al., 2024).

Research highlights the dual role of women in tourism as both workers and owner-managers of small tourism enterprises (Kimbu et al., 2019; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016; Ribeiro et al., 2021). A review of 127 studies on female tourism entrepreneurship found a strong focus on rural contexts, with limited attention to governance and policy issues (Kimbu et al., 2019; Ribeiro et al., 2021). In rural contexts, there is limited attention to governance and policy issues (Freund et al., 2024). Studies often underline challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, including gendered cultural expectations, lack of access to resources and institutional support, and psychological barriers (Khoo et al., 2024). According to the UNWTO, while 54% of tourism employees are women, they frequently occupy insecure, low-paying jobs, earning 14.7% less than men (Freund et al., 2024).

In Catalonia, research indicates that fear of failure and perceived capabilities are the main factors influencing women's entrepreneurial decisions in tourism (Noguera et al., 2012). Women face cultural norms that differ from those applied to men, creating unique needs in tourism development (Costa et al., 2016). In rural tourism, women are often motivated by lifestyle considerations and personal interests, while men typically seek to address dissatisfaction with their current living conditions (Xu et al., 2018). Female entrepreneurs also play a critical role in advancing local development in rural areas (Tulla Pujol et al., 2018). In rural Spain, women have been found to start businesses in areas such as agriculture, food production, tourism, and wellness services (Martini et al., 2020). This highlights the need to promote female entrepreneurship as a key driver of social and economic development (Tovmasyan, 2022).

As Avcı and Gümüş (2022) point out, although women make up 55.9% of the tourism workforce in OECD countries, they still face disparities in wages and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Women's entrepreneurial identity is shaped by their societal position and the constant tension between domestic and professional spheres (Bagheri et al., 2023; Martini et al., 2020). Barriers such as limited managerial experience, insufficient government support, structural discrimination, and difficulty accessing financing continue to hinder their progress (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2024; Ghaderi et al., 2023). Gender roles and cultural biases further limit women's ability to start and manage businesses, often relegating them to caregiving and domestic duties. These constraints contribute to the stereotype that women are less rational in business decisions (Tovmasyan, 2022). Additionally, women's involvement in tourism can disrupt family power dynamics and create stress due to the difficulty of balancing work and family life (Möller, 2012; Xu et al., 2018). Female entrepreneurs frequently carry the dual burden of professional and familial responsibilities, a challenge less commonly faced by men. Research shows that between 70% and 98% of women in tourism encounter challenges such as lack of support, skill gaps, unequal pay, and limited career opportunities, particularly among single mothers (Lindvert et al., 2024).

The absence of female mentors and role models, unequal access to leadership opportunities, and negative workplace perceptions contribute to the persistence of the glass ceiling (Avcı & Gümüş, 2022).

The underrepresentation of women as entrepreneurs not only limits economic growth but also hinders progress toward social equity and justice (Freund et al., 2024). Empowering women in tourism requires dismantling societal and political barriers that restrict their participation, whether as employees or as owners and managers (Kimbu et al., 2019). As Ertac and Tanova (2020) observe, women-driven change has a transformative impact on their surrounding environments.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employs a systematic review of the scientific literature on female entrepreneurship within the tourism industry, complemented by a bibliometric analysis. The systematic review was conducted during the first half of 2024 to ensure the inclusion of the most recent publications available at the time of data collection. While the search retrieved articles published in 2024, their citation impact and bibliometric network integration remain limited due to their recent publication. Consequently, the bibliometric analysis primarily focuses on previous years, where citation and co-occurrence data provide more robust insights.

In bibliometrics, it has been demonstrated that citation accumulation and network integration require a significant period of time. Bornmann and Tekles (2019) highlight that impact metrics only stabilize after at least three years, as articles take time to become embedded within citation networks. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2021) discuss the phenomenon of delayed recognition, where high-quality papers do not receive significant citations until several years after publication. Considering these factors, this study adopts an approach that prioritizes publications with a longer citation trajectory, thereby avoiding biases associated with analyzing articles that have not yet undergone sufficient bibliometric maturation.

Web of Science (WoS) was selected as the search engine because it is one of the most widely accepted and frequently used databases for analyzing scientific publications (Ram, 2018). This database is known for its precision and reliability in indexing high-impact journals, ensuring comprehensive and high-quality bibliometric data (De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2024; Martínez et al., 2015; Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020). By utilizing WoS, this study guarantees that the retrieved publications are from well-established and rigorously peer-reviewed sources, reinforcing the validity of the bibliometric analysis (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1. Result of the WoS search.

| Date | Search | Publications |
|-------------|--|--------------|
| 22 May 2024 | TS: (Tourism AND wom* AND entrepreneurship) Filter: Article | 237 |

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

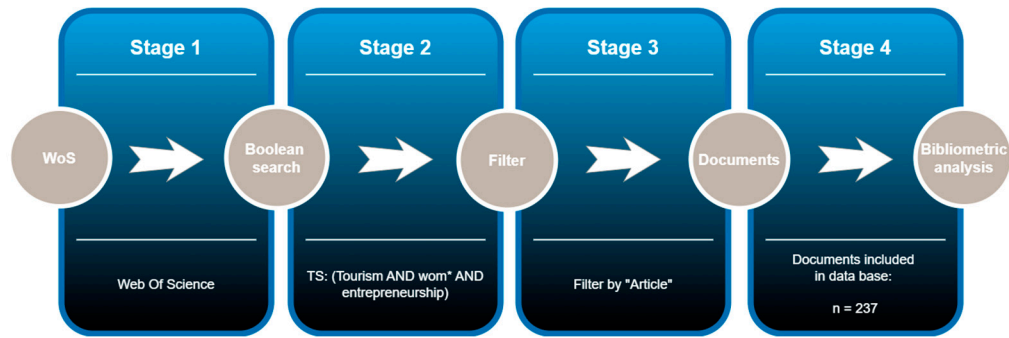


Figure 1. Flow chart of the bibliographic search. Source: Own elaboration (2024).

This study includes both open access and paywalled articles, ensuring a comprehensive and unbiased bibliometric analysis. The selection of papers was based solely on their relevance and inclusion in the Web of Science (WoS) database, without restrictions related to their accessibility. By incorporating publications from a variety of journals—both regular and open access—the study provides a representative overview of the academic landscape on female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.

Secondly, a bibliometric analysis was performed, drawing on methodologies from the field of knowledge and library sciences, to statistically analyze bibliographic data from scientific publications (Prakoso et al., 2023; Robertson et al., 2020; Sánchez et al., 2017). This method is vital for evaluating scientific output across parameters such as articles, authors, keywords, journals, institutions, and countries within any area of research. Additionally, bibliometric analysis facilitates the exploration of the intellectual, social, and conceptual development of a research field over time by examining the relationships and interactions among these elements (De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2022; Donthu et al., 2021; Jambrino-Maldonado et al., 2022; Öztürk et al., 2024).

The attributes of the selected publications were analyzed using data from the WoS repository. To conduct a more in-depth analysis of the role of women in the tourism and entrepreneurship sectors, VOSviewer software version 1.6.8 was utilized. This tool enabled the identification of bibliometric networks, including co-occurrence analysis of keywords, co-authorship, and citation relationships. Within VOSviewer, the association strength normalization method was applied, which is the default setting and one of the most widely used approaches in bibliometric research. This method standardizes the co-occurrence relationships between items, ensuring that the connection strength between two keywords reflects their relative association rather than being biased by absolute frequency differences.

Alternative normalization methods, such as fractionalization, modularity, or no normalization, could have been applied. However, association strength was chosen as the most appropriate method to balance term frequency and relational strength, ensuring a more accurate representation of keyword associations within the bibliometric network. This tool enabled detailed examination and extraction of insights, generating data on bibliometric networks. The results were presented in terms of co-authorship, co-citation, citation networks, and keyword co-occurrence among authors, countries, and institutions (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Figure 1 outlines the selection process for the 237 articles included in the bibliometric analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Systematic Review

The analysis of 237 articles retrieved from the WoS repository (as of 22 May 2024) reveals the initial findings. Figure 2 shows a marked exponential increase in scientific publications starting in 2014, with a particularly notable and sustained growth in output. Between 2003 (when the first article was published) and 2023 (the final year included in the analysis, limited to complete years), there is a clear upward trend in publications, reflecting a rising academic interest in female entrepreneurship within the tourism sector. The highest publication count occurred in 2021, with 41 articles, aligning with an increased focus on gender-related academic research during that period.

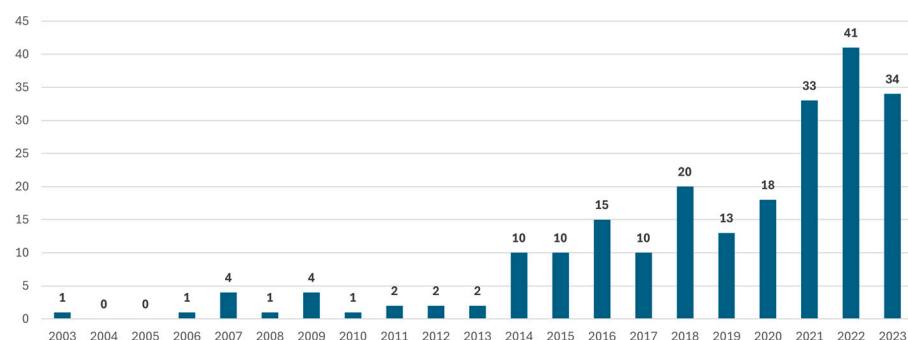


Figure 2. Number of publications over time. Source: Web of Science (WoS).

While the overall trajectory shows growth, certain fluctuations in the annual publication numbers are evident. For example, after reaching a peak in 2018, a decline followed in 2019, with similar decreases seen in 2020. These dips may be attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely influenced research priorities during those years.

The summary provided in Table 2 offers an overview of the current state of research in this area. A total of 237 articles have been published, which points to this being a relatively nascent or underdeveloped field of study. Furthermore, the articles have collectively been cited 2392 times, demonstrating their considerable influence within the academic community. The average of 12.27 citations per article highlights the high quality of the research included. Lastly, an h-index of 18 indicates that a relatively small group of researchers in this field have made a significant contribution to advancing the topic.

Table 2. Citation report. Systematic review.

| Citation Report | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Publications | 237 |
| Article Citation | 2392 |
| Average citations per article | 12.27 |
| H-index | 28 |

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

Figure 3 illustrates the key areas of knowledge in which the selected records for this study are categorized. The categories with the largest number of records include *Hospitality, Leisure, and Sport*; *Business*; *Management*; *Green and Sustainable Science and Technology*; *Environmental Studies*; and *Economics*. On the other hand, topics such as *Women's Studies*, *Sociology*, and *Education/Educational Research* are among the least explored in the context of research on tourism and female entrepreneurship.

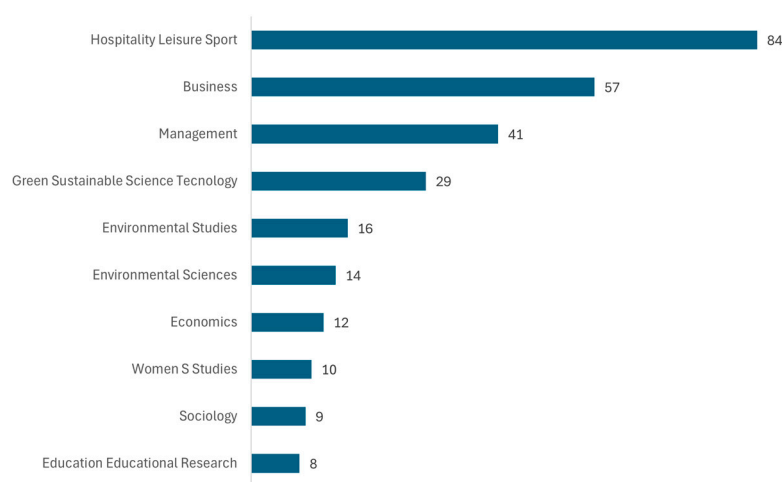


Figure 3. Registers by area of knowledge. Source: Web of Science (WoS).

Figure 4 displays the publishers with the highest number of articles published on female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector. Taylor & Francis and Emerald Group Publishing stand out as the most prominent publishers in this field (Figure 4). Taylor & Francis leads with the highest number of publications, followed closely by Emerald Group Publishing. This indicates that these publishers are leaders in disseminating research on the topic. Elsevier and MDPI also have a strong presence in publishing works related to female entrepreneurship in tourism, suggesting their commitment to advancing research in this area by providing accessible, high-impact platforms for researchers.

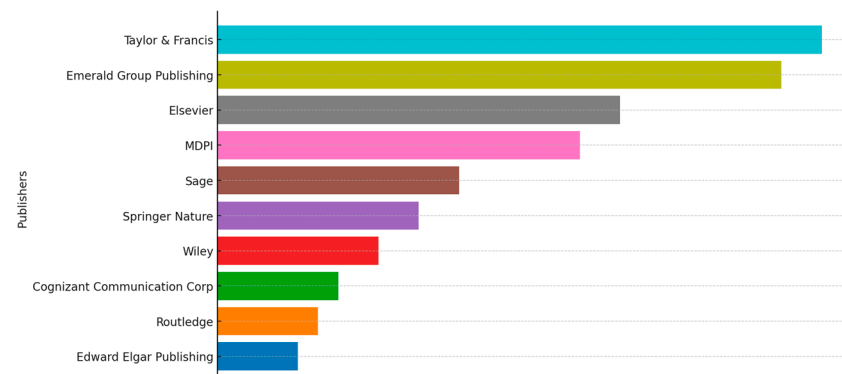


Figure 4. Publishers with the highest number of published records on female entrepreneurship and tourism. Source: Web of Science (WoS).

Although the dominant publishers have been highlighted above, there is notable diversity among other contributors, as shown in Figure 4. Publishers such as Sage, Springer Nature, Wiley, and Routledge also make significant contributions. This diversity reflects the broad acceptance and relevance of the topic across various academic platforms.

The presence of open-access publishers such as MDPI further emphasizes the importance of accessibility and the widespread dissemination of research. Researchers may consider publishing on these platforms to ensure their work reaches a wider and more diverse audience.

4.2. Bibliometric Analysis

4.2.1. Keywords

Following the search for records in the WoS database, a total of 237 articles were identified. Using the VOSviewer software, the primary author keywords from these works were extracted and represented in clusters, as shown in Figure 5. The distribution of these clusters, as well as the size of the circles and connecting lines, indicates the strength of the correlations between terms. In this analysis, a total of 29 keywords were identified, classified into five distinct clusters, with a total link strength of 853 and 277 connections among them.

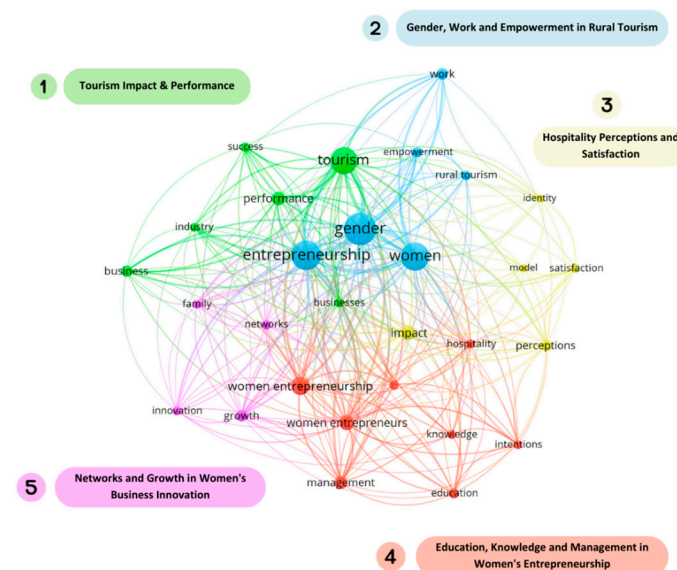


Figure 5. Co-occurrence by keywords. Source: Own elaboration.

To determine the most relevant keywords, a minimum occurrence threshold was established. Only keywords that appeared at least twice in the dataset were included in the analysis. After applying this threshold, 29 keywords met the criteria and were used for clustering and visualization.

The most prominent clusters in this keyword correlation analysis are differentiated by colors:

- The green cluster, Tourism Impact and Performance, focuses on terms related to performance, success, and the tourism industry. It highlights the connection between the tourism sector and business success.
- The light blue cluster, Gender, Work, and Empowerment in Rural Tourism, includes terms associated with gender, work, empowerment, and rural tourism. This cluster reflects the prominence of female empowerment within the context of rural tourism in scientific publications.
- The yellow cluster, Hospitality Perceptions and Satisfaction, encompasses terms such as hospitality, perceptions, satisfaction, and identity. It relates to customer experience and perceptions within the hospitality industry.
- The salmon-colored cluster, Education, Knowledge, and Management in Women's Entrepreneurship, focuses on women entrepreneurs and emphasizes the correlation between terms such as education, management, knowledge, and initiatives within female entrepreneurship.
- Finally, the purple cluster, Networks and Growth in Women's Business Innovation, concentrates on innovation, growth, networks, and family, highlighting the role of networks and innovation in the growth of women-led businesses.

In relation to the main keywords shown in Figure 5, notable terms include *gender*, *entrepreneurship*, *women*, and *tourism*, all of which began to be mentioned much more frequently from 2019 onwards. Furthermore, this visual representation of keywords highlights how female entrepreneurship in tourism is a complex and multifaceted topic that encompasses a wide range of themes.

4.2.2. Authors

The map presented in Figure 6 illustrates a network of authors who have made significant contributions to the field under study. Using VOSviewer, clusters of researchers who collaborate on publications about female entrepreneurship and tourism were identified. Figure 6 highlights several collaboration clusters. The most prominent cluster, represented in red, includes authors such as Albert Nsom Kimbu, Anna De Jong, Ewoenam Afegnyo-Agbe, and Michael Zisuh Ngoasong. This group shows strong interconnections, indicating frequent collaborations and significant productivity in research related to the topic.

Another noteworthy cluster, though less dense, is composed of authors like David Urbano and María Noguera, represented in blue. While this group is less interconnected than the previous one, it has also made important contributions to the field. Smaller and more dispersed clusters, such as those shown in green and yellow, include authors like Zaher Ghaderi or Colin Michael Hall. These clusters point to more specialized or emerging research areas within the main topic.

The isolated representation of some authors, such as Marta Pallares-Blanch, suggests that while they have contributed significantly to the field and are influential, their work is not as closely tied to established collaborative networks. This may indicate more independent lines of research or innovative approaches that have yet to be fully integrated into established research networks.

In terms of international collaboration, visual representation suggests that the field is still developing, with several research groups working relatively independently. However,

the existence of strong collaborative hubs indicates significant potential for future synergies and integrated developments in the study of female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.



Figure 6. Co-occurrence of authors. Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3 presents the top five authors ranked first by the number of documents, followed by the number of citations. Albert Nsom Kimbu occupies the top position as the most prolific author in this field of study, with eight documents and 242 citations, indicating high influence and recognition in the field. In fifth place is Michael Zisuh Ngoasong, who, despite having only three documents, has received 182 citations, demonstrating the high relevance and influence of his research.

Table 3. Main authors.

| Authors | Documents | Citation | University |
|---------------------------|-----------|----------|------------------------------------|
| Kimbu, Albert Nsom | 8 | 242 | University of Surrey |
| Noguera, María | 5 | 100 | University of Navarra |
| De Jong, Anna | 5 | 93 | University of Glasgow |
| Figueroa-domecq, Cristina | 4 | 93 | University of Rey Juan Carlos |
| Urbano, David | 4 | 78 | Autonomous University of Barcelona |
| Ngoasong, Michael Zisuh | 3 | 182 | Open University |

Source: Own elaboration.

When considering the relationship between the number of documents and citations, the leading author has an average of approximately 30 citations per document, while Michael Zisuh Ngoasong exhibits a greater impact, with an average of around 60 citations per document.

The remaining authors show a very similar number of documents and citations, reflecting significant contributions and consistency in the impact of their work.

4.2.3. Analysis of Countries and Organizations

As shown in Figure 7, most publications on female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector are concentrated in certain countries, with Spain leading with 39 publications, followed by the United Kingdom with 34, and the United States with 32 publications. Other notable contributors to scientific output include Australia (21 records), South Africa (20),

China (18), and Sweden (17). Alongside these countries, there is a clear global interest, although representation is notably higher in regions such as Europe and North America. The absence or low rate of publications in areas such as Latin America may suggest an opportunity to promote future research.

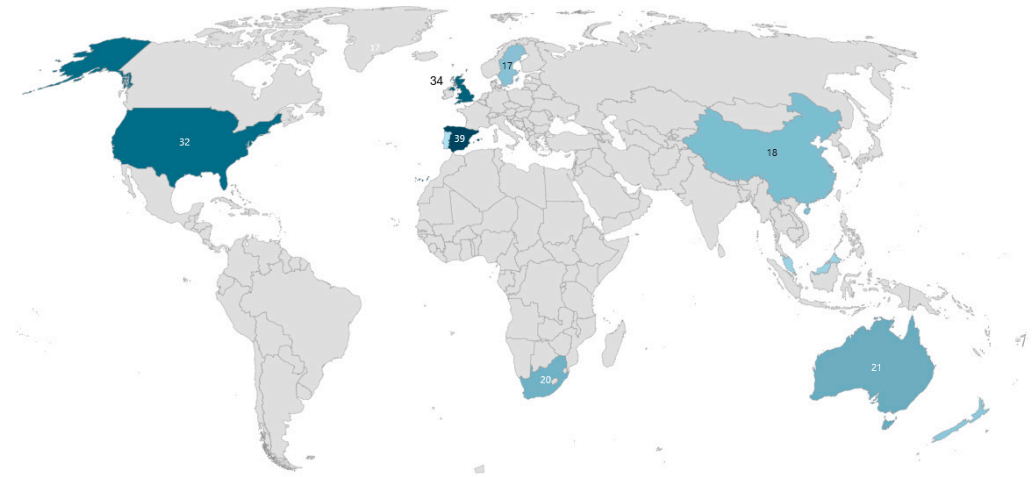


Figure 7. Choropleth map of countries. Source: Own elaboration.

Building on the previous point, it is evident that within Europe there is a much greater level of interest in the subject. This could be linked to supportive policies for female entrepreneurship (Kimbu et al., 2024) as well as the accessibility and collaboration between European academic institutions. In contrast, the lower representation of other countries may reflect disparities in academic resources, access to research funding, and the visibility of female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.

On the other hand, as shown in Figure 8, there are groups of universities that collaborate closely, suggesting the formation of consolidated research networks in this field. The six universities with the strongest connections are divided into three clusters. The blue cluster consists of Griffith University and the University of Canterbury; the green cluster comprises Linnaeus University and the University of Oulu, which, like the previous cluster, shows strong interconnections; and finally, the red cluster includes the University of Johannesburg and the University of Surrey.



Figure 8. Co-occurrence of organizations. Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 8 also highlights links between the different colored groups, indicating the presence of well-defined collaboration hubs, which facilitate knowledge exchange and joint efforts between these clusters. This representation confirms that several universities do not work in isolation but collaborate with other institutions.

In Table 4, the universities highlighted in Figure 8 are presented along with their respective countries, demonstrating the international distribution of research on female entrepreneurship in tourism.

These universities are leaders in research on female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector, publishing a significant number of articles on the topic and collaborating on various studies with one another.

Table 4. Organizations.

| University | Country |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Griffith University | Australia |
| University of Canterbury | New Zealand |
| Linnaeus University | Sweden |
| University of Oulu | Finland |
| University of Johannesburg | South Africa |
| University of Surrey | United Kingdom |

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

The bibliometric analysis of female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector, using data from the WoS repository up to 2023, has uncovered several important findings and trends that warrant detailed discussion. Since 2003, there has been a noticeable increase in scientific output, reflecting a growing interest in the subject of female entrepreneurship within the tourism industry (Costa et al., 2016; McGehee et al., 2007). As Donthu et al. (2021) point out, this trend indicates a heightened recognition of the topic's relevance and a greater focus from the academic community. From 2014 onwards, the number of publications has grown significantly and consistently. This marks a shift from earlier years, highlighting the academic community's increased attention to studying female entrepreneurship in tourism (Donthu et al., 2021; Ertac & Tanova, 2020; Khoo et al., 2024). The fluctuations observed between 2020 and 2021 may be attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reshaped research priorities during this period (De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2022).

The areas of knowledge and the publishing platforms reflect a multidisciplinary focus, addressing business topics (Costa et al., 2016; Lado-Sestayo & Vivel-Búa, 2017; Rosado-Cubero et al., 2024), environmental considerations (Martini et al., 2020), and sustainability (Butkouskaya et al., 2020; Ertac & Tanova, 2020; Xu et al., 2018). The publishers involved demonstrate a strong commitment to advancing research on female entrepreneurship in the tourism industry (Noguera et al., 2012; Öztürk et al., 2024; Prakoso et al., 2023; Robertson et al., 2020). As Martini et al. (2020) argue, this dedication can increase the topic's visibility and attract a wider audience, encouraging additional studies and the development of innovative initiatives. Furthermore, the variety of publishers highlights the broad acceptance and importance of the topic across different academic domains.

The identified keywords and thematic clusters reveal the multifaceted nature of the topic, covering themes such as tourism impact (Martini et al., 2020; McGehee et al., 2007; Vukovic et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2018), gender empowerment (Costa et al., 2016; Ertac & Tanova, 2020, p. 2; Freund et al., 2024; Khoo et al., 2024), and business innovation.

Most of the publications originate from countries like Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom, with significant contributions also from Australia, South Africa, China, and Sweden. This geographical distribution underscores global interest in the topic but also highlights a concentration of research in Europe and North America (Costa et al., 2016; Lindvert et al., 2024; McGehee et al., 2007; Noguera et al., 2012).

The analysis of university collaboration networks indicates a growing consolidation of research efforts. These institutions not only produce a high volume of publications but also collaborate extensively, forming robust knowledge-sharing networks (Kimbu et al., 2024; Robertson et al., 2020).

Additionally, this study contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector, an area that has received limited attention in previous research. The originality of this study lies in its

systematic examination of academic publications over two decades, identifying key trends, research gaps, and collaborative networks that shape this field. However, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on Web of Science data may exclude relevant studies from other databases. Second, the bibliometric approach does not provide qualitative insights into the motivations and barriers faced by female entrepreneurs in tourism. Future research could address these limitations through qualitative studies and regional comparisons.

6. Conclusions

Tourism is among the sectors most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and female entrepreneurship within this industry has long faced unique challenges. Research highlights that women in tourism not only generate employment but also drive sustainability and social inclusion. This socio-economic impact is crucial for post-pandemic recovery and for achieving long-term sustainable development. The diversity of origins in the publications and collaborations between universities across different countries underscores the global interest in female entrepreneurship in tourism. This phenomenon reveals the need for multidisciplinary and multicultural approaches to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities within this field. International collaboration further enables the exchange of best practices and the development of support networks for women entrepreneurs worldwide.

This study has identified emerging areas, such as sustainability, innovation, and gender empowerment, within rural tourism. These trends emphasize the importance of further exploring how women can lead sustainable tourism initiatives and how they can be supported in overcoming the specific barriers they face. Women in tourism do not only create employment opportunities but also promote sustainability and social inclusion—elements that are critical for both post-pandemic recovery and long-term sustainable development.

Despite these advances, there are still important gaps in the literature. Research on policies and governance supporting female entrepreneurs remains limited, as does the study of regional differences. The impact of digitalization on women-led tourism businesses is another underexplored area, despite its growing relevance. Furthermore, most existing studies are cross-sectional, lacking long-term analyses of how female entrepreneurship evolves over time. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing more effective policies and strategies.

Linking the study's findings to emerging trends and future research could involve exploring the differences and similarities in female entrepreneurship across various regions, particularly in underrepresented areas such as Latin America and Africa. Such an approach could help identify specific barriers and effective strategies. Future research may also focus on analyzing the impact of public policies and support programs on female entrepreneurship in tourism, assessing their effectiveness, and providing recommendations to improve their implementation. Moreover, it is essential to examine how technology and digitalization can support women entrepreneurs in tourism, including the use of digital platforms to promote and sell tourism products.

In conclusion, promoting female entrepreneurship in tourism has significant societal implications, contributing to job creation, economic diversification, and women's empowerment. It also fosters innovation and sustainability—critical factors in addressing global challenges such as climate change and post-COVID-19 recovery.

Female entrepreneurship in tourism represents a vital and growing area of research, with substantial impact on both the academic community and society at large. The findings from this bibliometric analysis underline the importance of continuing to support and promote women entrepreneurs in tourism, recognizing their crucial role in sustainable

development and economic recovery. Advancing this field will require international collaboration, diverse perspectives, and effective policy analysis to ensure that women can fully contribute to the tourism sector and society.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; methodology, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; software, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; validation, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; formal analysis, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; investigation, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; resources, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; data curation, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; writing—original draft preparation, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; writing—review and editing, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; visualization, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; supervision, A.d.P.R.-V., D.R.-C. and C.d.I.H.P.; project administration, C.d.I.H.P.; funding acquisition, C.d.I.H.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by “Proyectos de Generación de Conocimiento 2022”, Ministry of Science and Innovation, State Research Agency, Spain (MCIUAEI/10.13039/501100011033/FEDER, UE). Grant number: PID2022-139037OB-I00.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The studies’ original contributions are detailed within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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