

# Unveiling the Evolutionary Trajectory of SMEs in the Tourism and Hospitality Domain: A Comprehensive Review and Prospective Insight

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**Abstract** *This study provides a comprehensive analysis of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism and hospitality sectors, drawing insights from 111 publications across 81 journals. The bibliographic coupling analysis reveals nine thematic clusters, including resilience, competitiveness, innovation, marketing, financial dynamics, and crisis management strategies. Additional research identifies key theoretical perspectives, including agency theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and organizational change management, highlighting the complex interplay of financial, environmental, and social factors influencing SME operations. In India, SMEs, particularly in rural areas, face significant challenges related to finance, branding, and digitalisation. Despite these obstacles, they are of considerable economic importance, necessitating targeted government support and capacity-building initiatives for sustainable growth. These findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and industry practitioners, emphasising the need for enhanced infrastructure and strategic interventions to foster competitiveness and long-term sustainability in tourism SMEs.*

**Keywords:** SMEs, Tourism, Hospitality, India, Bibliometric Analysis and Theoretical Perspectives

## INTRODUCTION

In the realm of economic discourse, there is a significant consensus among policymakers, economists, and professionals in the business domain. This consensus centres on the crucial role that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play as effective agents in driving economic growth. SMEs, characterised by their moderate scales of operation and nuanced market presence, have garnered scholarly

attention because of their multifaceted contributions to fostering economic dynamism and development (Fiori & Foroni, 2019; Chand, 2019). Central to this discourse is the recognition of the significance of SMEs across diverse facets of economic advancement. Their pivotal position is underscored by their capacity to yield manifold far-reaching benefits (Rastrollo-Horrillo & Rivero, 2019). Among these is the discernible augmentation of employment opportunities (Holden et al., 2005), a vital factor in ameliorating labour

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market conditions (Hermawati et al., 2022). By engaging a substantial portion of the workforce, SMEs play a crucial role in reducing unemployment rates and fostering a more inclusive labour participation framework (Li et al., 2022).

Previous studies have highlighted that the SME sector increases its production capacity, thereby generating a cascading effect on industrial output (Choudhary et al., 2019; Tambunan, 2007). This, in turn, translates into amplified economic activity and consequently bolsters the overall productivity of the economy (Steinerowska-Streb, 2012). Additionally, the SME ecosystem profoundly affects international trade dynamics, as these enterprises often serve as conduits for augmenting export figures. This not only fortifies the nation's trade balance, but also enhances its global economic integration. Beyond their tangible economic contributions, SMEs exhibit intangible but equally vital virtues: innovation and entrepreneurial acumen (Shwedeh et al., 2022). In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and shifting market paradigms, SMEs have been noted for their agility and adaptability, which are conducive to nurturing innovative solutions and cultivating entrepreneurial competencies (Tajeddini et al., 2023; Zaidan, 2016). This infusion of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit invigorates the economic landscape and ensures resilience in the face of evolving challenges. The role of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises within the tourism and hospitality industry has emerged as a significant factor in fostering local economic development, emphasising their substantial impact on employment generation and overall economic expansion (Rastrollo-Horrillo & Rivero, 2019; Holden et al., 2005). The strategic importance of SMEs is particularly evident during the initial stages of development in the tourism and hospitality sectors, especially within rural or localised communities (Yaja & Kumar, 2021; Kumar et al., 2021). In such contexts, characterised by relatively modest market scales and latent potential, SMEs assume heightened significance due to the limited investment appetite exhibited by international hotels and multinational corporations (Núñez-Ríos et al., 2022). The hospitality industry, noted for its complex integration of service offerings and experiential dimensions, serves as an intricate ecosystem through which SMEs thrive. These enterprises, often characterised by their adaptable and localised nature, are well-positioned to cater to the diverse needs of travellers seeking authentic and personalised experiences (Tajeddini et al., 2023). Their inherent flexibility enables them to effectively navigate the nuances of local cultures and offer bespoke services that might be beyond the scope of larger and more standardised establishments (Lucky & Gemina, 2019).

Despite extensive research on SMEs in the tourism and hospitality sectors, there is a significant gap in the literature. Specifically, there is a paucity of studies that highlight bibliographic coupling among previous research endeavours

in this domain. Bibliographic coupling analysis, which explores the interconnections and intellectual influence among scholarly works, remains underexplored. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity to investigate the relationships among research articles, identify seminal contributions, and trace the evolution of thought in this field. This study aims to comprehensively elucidate the evolutionary trajectory of SMEs within the tourism and hospitality domains and achieve the following objectives:

- To identify and analyze prominent academic journals within the SMEs in tourism and hospitality domain.
- To conduct a thorough analysis of prevalent keywords in scholarly articles on SMEs in tourism and hospitality.
- To examine bibliographic coupling among prior studies in the field, we reveal major thematic clusters and influential contributions in scholarly literature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review offers a detailed examination of academic studies on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector, revealing a wide range of insights. These studies address circular tourism, mobile payments, government support, disaster recovery, leadership, innovation, sustainability, indigenous entrepreneurship, policy communication, and the impact of competition on learning (Bowen et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022; Rashid et al., 2015; Uwamariya et al., 2022). A key theme is the gap between intention and behaviour in adopting circular practices and the underutilised potential of mobile payments in emerging markets (Elsetouhi et al., 2022). Challenges related to government support are frequently noted, in contrast to SMEs' disaster recovery strategies, which rely on knowledge management, innovation, and complex cultural and economic factors. These studies also highlight SMEs' adaptability to competitive pressures (Imani & Nadalipour, 2016; Tajeddini et al., 2023; Toubes et al., 2021), enhance our understanding of their roles in the dynamic tourism sector, and provide valuable insights for academia, policy, and industry stakeholders.

The impact of globalisation has been analysed in the context of tourism SMEs, with policy recommendations to increase their importance in value chains (Guzmán et al., 2008). Studies on cryptocurrency adoption intentions have revealed a complex relationship between strategic orientation, owner attributes, and perceived utility (Hallak et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2004). The importance of organizational culture, including teamwork and a future-oriented vision, is emphasised in hospitality and tourism SMEs (Hermawati et al., 2022; Kyriakidou & Gore, 2005). Participative leadership has been shown to positively affect employee voice and innovation (Elsetouhi et al., 2022), and intellectual capital and diaspora

marketing significantly influence SME performance and food tourism (Gomezelj & Smolčić, 2016; Khalique et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed SMEs' vulnerabilities to sustainability, highlighting their dynamic capabilities in ecotourism (Bianchi, 2022; Faeni et al., 2023; Kukanja et al., 2022). The research extends to social media adoption, innovation strategies, capital structure, e-strategies, and community-based tourism marketing, revealing SMEs' diverse challenges and contributions to the evolving tourism sector. A comprehensive review of tourism SMEs revealed various insights. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Slovenian tourism SMEs focused on crisis management practices (CMPs) related to labour, liquidity, stakeholder collaboration, and government aid (Burhan et al., 2021; Kukanja et al., 2020; Burhan et al., 2022). Business attributes, managerial demographics, and liquidity levels have limited influence on CMPs. ICT integration within Dubai's tourism SMEs enhances competitiveness (Zaidan 2016; Chand & Sharma, 2020). Leadership styles impact organizational commitment among UK SMEs; autocratic styles decrease commitment, whereas democratic styles increase commitment (Rao & Zaidi, 2020). Market orientation positively affects tourism SME performance in developing economies (Pisicchio & Toaldo, 2021).

The role of social media in business-customer engagement is debated, especially for SMEs. Skill-enhancing HR practices, including training, improve SME performance and customer orientation (Bianchi, 2022; Domi & Domi, 2021). Slovak spa enterprises show varied efficiency levels, whereas Hungarian SMEs aid regional development (Dobrovič et al., 2021). Leadership and organizational climate drive innovation in Vietnamese tourism SMEs (Hoang et al. 2021). Green supply chain management positively affects SME performance despite e-commerce adoption barriers (Syarief, 2021). Innovation boosts the profitability of Andalusian hospitality SMEs (Hoang et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2023). Challenges in implementing the Human Sigma approach affect the EO of SMEs. These insights highlight the importance of exploring these dynamics in tourism SMEs.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

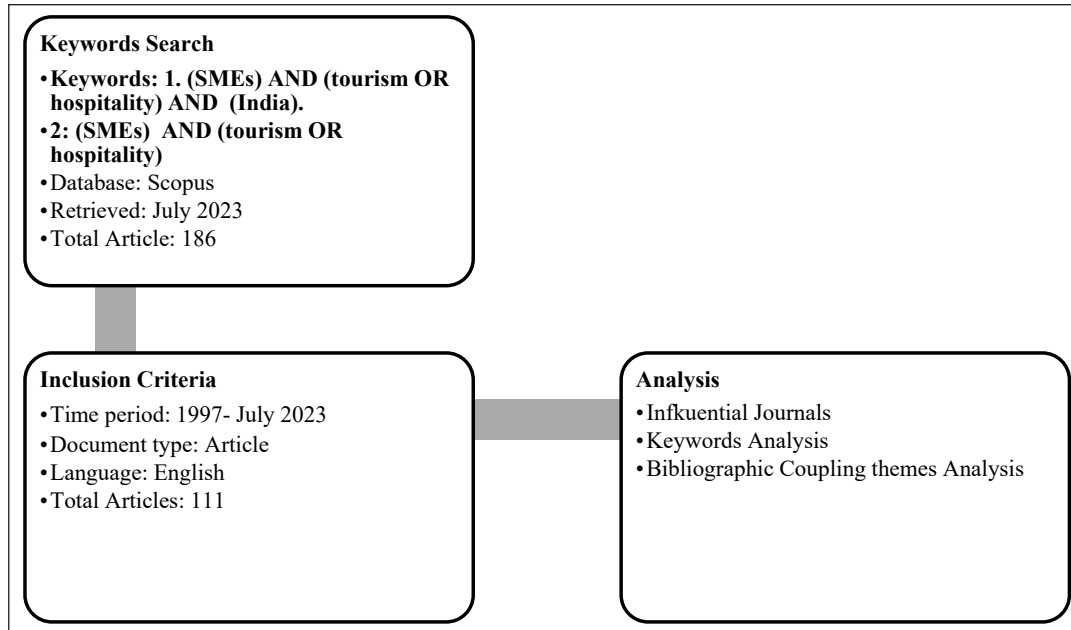
Bibliometric, originating in 1969 via the *Journal of Documentation*, is a research methodology that employs statistical analysis of literature metadata to investigate publications related to specific subject areas. It systematically identifies core research, authors, and interconnections

by rigorously examining publications and their citation patterns. This quantitative approach is particularly suited for handling extensive datasets, enabling the discovery of latent communication patterns and subject evolution. Widely applied in diverse fields, including SMEs, entrepreneurship, tourism, and hospitality, bibliometric provides valuable insights into the intellectual domain structure, emerging research themes, and future research directions (Chand, 2022; Kumar et al., 2022). It utilises techniques, such as keyword co-occurrence and cluster analysis, to elucidate the current scholarly landscape and forecast potential research trajectories within each domain.

Scopus was selected as the primary bibliometric database owing to its credibility and extensive repository of peer-reviewed scholarly research. The methodological process, illustrated in Fig. 1, commenced with a systematic keyword search utilising "SMEs" and "tourism" or "hospitality." This search, conducted within Scopus in July 2023, yielded 186 relevant articles. A rigorous curation process subsequently selected 111 scholarly articles published between 1997 and July 2023, adhering to the criteria of being in English and categorised as "Article." This selection from Scopus encapsulates the landscape of SMEs in tourism and hospitality research. The research methodology is depicted in Fig. 1.

## Data Analysis and Visualization

This study employed data analysis and visualisation as central methodologies. Initially, we conducted a comprehensive examination of the dataset utilising robust bibliometric indicators and intellectual structure analysis, including top journals with their CiteScore values. We exercised meticulous care to present these indicators to ensure accurate representation. Subsequently, our study endeavoured to uncover the knowledge structure within the dataset by employing the visualisation technique of keyword networks. Specifically, we utilised the capabilities of the VOSviewer program. VOSviewer was selected due to its capacity to map and cluster connections among the keywords. A pivotal aspect of our research involves leveraging VOSviewer's capabilities to visually portray intricate bibliographic coupling (Kumar et al., 2023). This selection was made because VOSviewer excels in visualising networks, enabling us to explore complex interrelationships among keywords and concepts in a highly detailed manner.



**Fig. 1: Research Process**

## RESULTS

### Intellectual Structure Analysis

*Influential Journals:* This study evaluated 111 SME-focused publications across 81 tourism and hospitality journals, utilizing Cite score to gauge journal quality. The analysis revealed that 50% of the publications originated from top-tier tourism journals, emphasizing their central role in

SME research. “Sustainability (Switzerland)” leads with 10 publications and 210 citations, highlighting its substantial impact. Journals like “International Journal of Hospitality Management,” “Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism,” and “Tourism Economics” also contribute significantly. These results underscore the influential position of premier journals in shaping innovation in research on tourism and hospitality SMEs, reinforcing the field’s academic foundation. Table 1 outlines the top journals in this specialized area.

**Table 1: Top Ten Prolific Journals**

Source	Documents	Citations	Citescore
Sustainability (Switzerland)	10	210	5.8
International Journal of Hospitality Management	4	81	18.3
Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism	4	23	1.9
Tourism Economics	3	41	7.7
African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	3	11	2.1
Business Process Management Journal	2	18	8.0
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	2	23	18.9
British Food Journal	2	7	5.4
Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity	2	2	7.5

### Knowledge Structure Analysis

*Keywords Analysis:* Table 2 provides an insightful analysis of the most frequently occurring keywords in the context of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) within the tourism and hospitality sector. These keywords offer a glimpse into the prevailing research themes and trends

within this domain along with their respective occurrences and total link strengths.

Notably, the term “SMEs” emerges as a central theme, underscored by 28 occurrences, indicative of its profound significance in scholarly discourse (see in Fig. 2). Additionally, “tourism,” with 26 mentions and robust link strength, reinforces its pivotal role in SME-related research.



to finance, with many SMEs still turning to informal lending even when government schemes are available, highlighting deeper structural issues (Hussain et al., 2020; Hole, 2019). In rural areas, high staff turnover, skill deficiencies, and seasonal employment exacerbate inefficiencies due to high operational costs.

Additionally, most rural and community-based tourism enterprises lack a formal branding strategy and integrated communication plan, with product development being handled internally rather than through external support mechanisms like government programs or NGOs. While innovation and digitalization have improved operations for many businesses, rural SMEs often cannot fully benefit due to infrastructural bottlenecks and resource limitations. Though environmental sustainability practices are gaining attention, they remain underdeveloped because of these constraints.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed existing vulnerabilities, such as unreliable cash flow and lack of operational flexibility, but it also revealed opportunities for building resilience through adaptive strategies (Chand & Ambardar, 2023). Government policies, including grants, tax incentives, and digitalization efforts, aim to offer support, but these measures are often more suitable for urban than rural or underserved regions, where compliance with systems like GST adds an additional burden. A more comprehensive policy framework is needed to ensure sustainable growth,

focusing on better access to finance, capacity-building programs, improvements in digital transformation, and promotion of sustainable practices. Targeted assistance for rural and community-based enterprises, often overlooked in broader policy discussions, is crucial.

## Bibliographic Coupling Analysis (Content Analysis)

Bibliographic coupling analysis, akin to co-citation analysis, was employed in this study to discern emerging themes and critical research areas within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism and hospitality sector. This approach, falling within the purview of citation analysis, establishes linkages among scholarly documents based on their citation patterns, facilitating the identification of thematic clusters, unveiling evolving research themes, and delineating future research directions. Using the VOSviewer software, we conducted a bibliographic content analysis of 111 academic articles, revealing 57 articles connected in a bibliographic coupling network, forming nine distinct clusters (see Fig. 3). Within this network, 107 connections and 176 links were observed. The significance of bibliographic coupling lies in its adaptability, which serves as a valuable tool across academic fields to aid researchers in discovering pertinent earlier studies related to their research interests (Freire & Veríssimo, 2021).

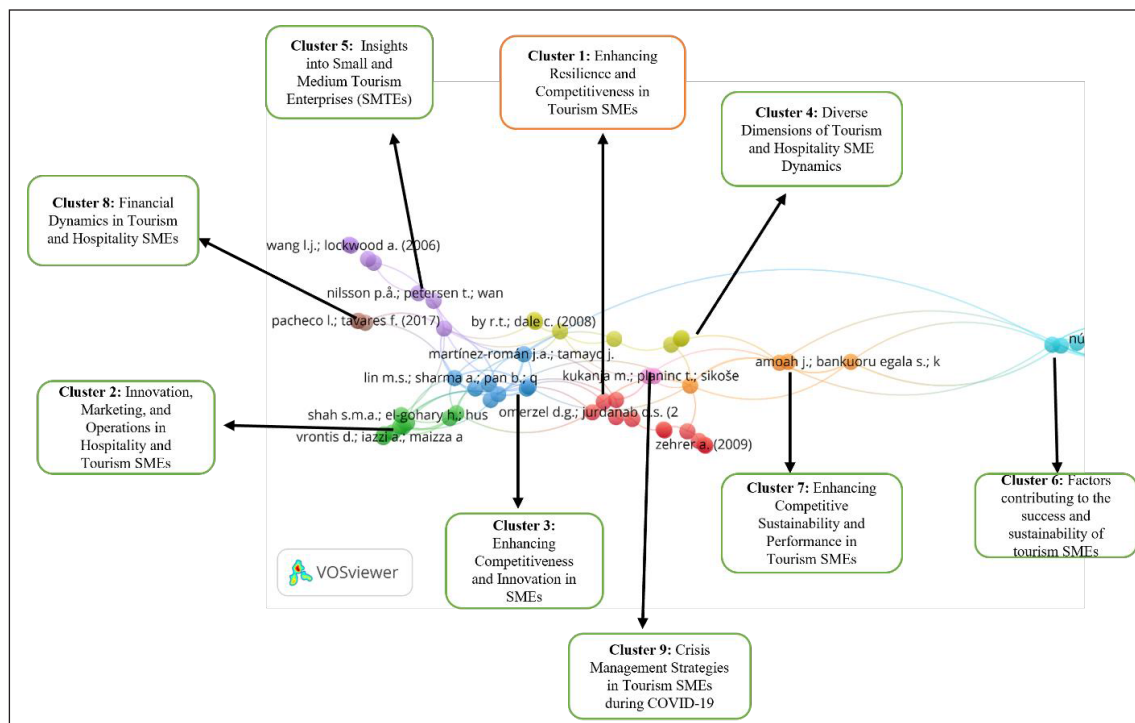


Fig. 3: Major Cluster Identified Through Bibliographic Coupling

## Cluster 1: Enhancing Resilience and Competitiveness in Tourism SMEs

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected tourism SMEs, reducing demand and limiting government support. Nonetheless, some have adapted to innovate and explore new growth opportunities (Bianchi, 2022; Burhan et al., 2021). Cranmer et al. (2021) underscore the importance of an Augmented Reality Business Model (ARBM) for SMEs, focusing on five key dimensions guided by sustainability principles. Knowledge management (KM) enhances SMEs' adaptability and risk mitigation, further aiding recovery (Iqbal et al., 2023). Additionally, intellectual capital components influence innovation and growth in tourism SMEs in Slovenia and Croatia (Gomezelj & Smolčić, 2016).

Saudi Arabian SME hotel performance is more influenced by external environmental factors, highlighting the need for sustainability, customer relations, and technology adaptation (Samad, 2022). In Finland, SME resource dependence on the Finnish Tourist Board varies with enterprise size and marketing planning, with destination marketing and knowledge being crucial (Seppälä-Esser et al., 2009). Awareness of the Human Sigma approach among SMEs is limited, with successful implementation tied to customer-related factors (Sutton, 2015). Work addiction correlates with the intention to quit entrepreneurship, with work enjoyment acting as a mediator (Sánchez-Medina et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurial bricolage in tourism SMEs drives competitive advantage through strategic actions like risk management and differentiation (Tajeddini et al., 2023). Effective management of service experiences in tourism SMEs requires data collection and a holistic service design within organizational culture (Zehrer, 2009). Finally, collaborative learning and synergy among isolated tourism providers are vital for sustained competitiveness in the tourism sector.

## Cluster 2: Innovation, Marketing, and Operations in Hospitality and Tourism SMEs

The second cluster investigates the factors affecting SME performance and strategies in hospitality and tourism. Food tourism, diaspora networks, and reverse diaspora effects are promising for SMEs (Bowen, 2022). Hospitality SMEs are interested in circular economy practices despite the cost constraints (Bowen et al., 2023). Skill-enhancing HR training practices improve performance alignment with customer needs more than recruitment/selection practices do (Domi & Domi, 2021). Innovativeness indirectly enhances SME performance through improved innovation behaviour, ICT, and cooperation (Domi et al., 2019). Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and Innovation Orientation (IO) affect SME marketing performance (Pisicchio & Toaldo,

2021). Firm size moderates the effect of online reviews on customer responses, with smaller companies experiencing weaker effects (Ruiz-Equihua et al., 2023). Market orientation (MO) is a competitive advantage of SMEs in developing countries (Shah et al., 2015).

The cluster also explored SE communication. A scoring model assessed stakeholder engagement (SE) communication in international hotel companies, showing that larger firms allocate more attention to SE through sustainability reports, whereas stakeholders remain informed without active engagement (Vrontis et al., 2020). A knowledge acquisition model for Thai hospitality SMEs highlights the impact of information technology support, teamwork, social networks, and internal communication, with prominent social networks and teamwork (Yoopetch, 2010). These studies provide theoretical insights and practical implications for understanding the factors that influence SME performance and sustainability in hospitality and tourism.

## Cluster 3: Enhancing Competitiveness and Innovation in SMEs

The third cluster examines SMEs in tourism and hospitality, highlighting the impact of government policies, innovation, cooptation, and information asymmetry. These findings are academically important for enhancing SME competitiveness and innovation. Government policies that facilitate credit access aid SME adaptability (Anzules-Falcones et al., 2020). Innovation involves promotion, communication, resources, strategy, marketing, market research, and organizational structure (Dambiski et al., 2020). Cooptation benefits SME innovation through commercial relationships, information and knowledge sharing, and partnerships.

Information asymmetry hinders SME product innovation adoption, requiring attention to financial, regulatory, and legal aspects (Lin et al., 2023). A two-stage model links innovation capability and contextual factors to profitability in hospitality SMEs, confirming a positive relationship (Martínez-Román et al., 2015). The marketing mix influences SME empowerment in tourism, emphasizing better accessibility, promotion, and local wisdom integration (Lucky & Gemina, 2019).

External resources, especially business social capital from destination relationships, boost tourism SME innovation through internal intellectual capital (Rastrollo-Horrillo & Rivero, 2019). SME travel agents use the Internet to attract and customize customer experiences, needing government support and training to overcome resource and security challenges (Zaidan, 2016). In summary, these findings underscore the importance of government policies, addressing information asymmetry, fostering innovation, and employing effective marketing strategies to drive SME

competitiveness and sustainability in tourism and hospitality.

#### **Cluster 4: Diverse Dimensions of Tourism and Hospitality SME Dynamics**

The cluster four covers key findings in tourism and hospitality SMEs, emphasizing effective change management with eight success factors: adaptability, commitment, communication, continuous improvement, formal strategies, motivation, pragmatism, and personnel selection (By & Dale, 2008). Interpersonal influence mitigates over qualification's negative impact on social acceptance, affecting intentions to quit, job satisfaction, well-being, and counterproductive behavior, thus shaping organizational attitudes (El-Sawalhy et al., 2022). Participative leadership positively influences employee voice and innovation, with job autonomy enhancing these effects (Elsetouhi et al., 2022). The COVID-19 crisis challenges sustainability efforts in tourism SMEs due to financial strain and revenue decline (Mohammed, 2022). Internet utilization, SME activity, and size positively affect organizational performance in tourism, highlighting its role (Sharifonnasabia et al., 2018). Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) can facilitate knowledge management and crisis preparedness for SMEs (Toubes et al., 2021). Lastly, rural tourism firms need enhanced long-term branding and integrated marketing communication strategies (Yaja & Kumar, 2021). These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the tourism and hospitality SME landscape.

#### **Cluster 5: Insights into Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs)**

The fifth cluster highlighted studies on small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) and their various facets. These studies categorize SMTEs into "Reluctants" and "Community Advocates" based on community support, with the latter showing better business performance due to family involvement and local ties (Hallak et al., 2013). Research in Punjab, India, indicates that SMTEs mostly depend on personal savings, family resources, and informal lenders for financing, consistent with the pecking order approach (Hussain et al., 2020).

There is a consensus on the critical capabilities and barriers affecting best practice adoption among hospitality and tourism SMEs. These include customer focus, planning, partnering, communication, standards, workforce management, and financial management, alongside challenges like changing demand, limited resources, skilled labor shortages, lifestyle, lack of benchmarking, and location (Jessica & Lockwood, 2006; Jones et al., 2004).

Successful SMEs in hospitality, tourism, and leisure prioritize informal, culturally integrated training and development, fostering a positive environment that enhances employee retention (Olympia & Gore, 2005; Olivia & Maroudas,

2010). Additionally, a four-year program in northern Sweden improved business skills in tourism SMEs, aligning with EU regional development goals emphasizing human competencies and indigenous development in sparsely populated areas (Nilsson et al., 2005). These findings collectively illuminate key aspects of SMTEs, offering valuable insights for academia and industry practitioners.

#### **Cluster 6: Factors Contributing to the Success and Sustainability of Tourism SMEs**

This cluster elucidates the diverse landscape of tourism SMEs. Huang et al. (2022) emphasize that cloud-based architecture enhances competitiveness and adaptability, while Núñez-Ríos et al. (2022) highlight effective management styles and human resource investment as crucial for organizational resilience. They also stress the importance of strengthening internal relationships for Sustainable Urban Planning (SUP) in small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises facing complex operational contexts.

Additionally, the cluster highlights the need to bolster organizational sustainability in the tourism sector, emphasizing inter organizational relationships for SMEs (Núñez-Ríos et al., 2020). It advocates for investing in human capital, adopting systemic approaches, and fostering a culture of continuous learning (Núñez-Ríos et al., 2020). Shwede et al. (2022) identify financial strength, technology adoption, and innovation as key factors influencing downsizing decisions during economic distress. Lastly, Sánchez-Medina et al. (2020) reveal that work addiction can lead to entrepreneurial abandonment in the tourism SME sector, with work enjoyment mediating the intention to quit. These insights collectively deepen our understanding of tourism SME dynamics and offer practical implications and research avenues.

#### **Cluster 7: Enhancing Competitive Sustainability and Performance in Tourism SMEs**

Competitive sustainability factors are pivotal for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector. Amoah et al. (2023) demonstrate that price sensitivity, site maintenance, and entrepreneurial competency exert a positive and significant impact on the competitive sustainability of SMEs in tourism. Khalique et al. (2020) explore the influence of intellectual capital components on the organizational performance of tourism SMEs. Customer capital has emerged as a critical element of intellectual capital.

Moreover, Khan et al. (2023) reveal that decision-makers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control positively shape the intention of tourism SMEs to adopt circular economy (CE) practices. These findings contribute to the understanding of the factors driving sustainability and

performance in this sector.

### Cluster 8: Financial Dynamics in Tourism and Hospitality SMEs

This cluster examines financial dynamics in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the service and hospitality sectors. In this context, the study by Motta (2017) investigates financial constraints within the hospitality SMEs, revealing that combining certain financial requirements reduces credit constraints. Motta and Sharma (2020) underscore the significance of lending technologies in enhancing SMEs' access to financing with a preference for fixed asset lending technology. Moreover, Pacheco and Tavares (2015) explore the factors influencing the capital structure of hospitality SMEs. It identifies key determinants, including profitability, asset tangibility, firm size, total liquidity, and risk, while suggesting that traditional capital structure theories, such as the Trade-off and Pecking Order theories, may not fully explain capital structure decisions in this sector.

### Cluster 9: Crisis Management Strategies in Tourism SMEs during COVID-19

The ninth cluster assess COVID-19's impact on tourism SMEs. The first emphasizes reliance on labor-related crisis management, liquidity, and external aid (Kukanja et al., 2022). Business traits and demographics have minimal influence, whereas government aid positively impacts expected support. The second study by Kukanja et al. (2020) identified a focus on workforce, cost control, organizational support, and promotional strategies in crisis response. Varied CMP utilization among SME types offers insights to enhance tourism sector crisis management. This study provides valuable insights for advancing crisis management in the tourism sector from a research perspective.

### Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives highlighted in the analysis of SMEs in the tourism/hospitality sector elucidate various dynamics within this field. Agency theory, initially grounded in economics, focuses on principal-agent relationships and the financial and informational constraints faced by SMEs, especially in hospitality (Lin et al., 2023; Motta, 2017). The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory argues that a company's competitive advantage stems from its unique, inimitable resources, closely linked to entrepreneurial bricolage literature and HRM practices (Tajeddini et al., 2023; Urbano & Yordanova, 2008). The shift towards renewable practices among tourism SMEs is supported by sustainable energy theory (Jaroszewska et al., 2019), while the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains their efforts to adopt CE practices despite significant obstacles (Khan et al., 2023). Organizational Change Management principles emphasize

that agility and strategic implementation are vital for SME success in a dynamic market (By & Dale, 2008).

Argumentation theory addresses how persuasion and logical reasoning influence consumer behavior, particularly in branding, sustainability, and crisis communication (Kyriakidou & Gore, 2005). Entrepreneurial bricolage theory highlights resource creativity as a method to overcome financial constraints and rally communities around sustainable practices (Bowen et al., 2023). Social influence underscores the impact of external perceptions and trends on SME decision-making in addressing customer needs and optimizing industrial relations (El-Sawalhy et al., 2022). Finally, the Theory of Change (TOC) provides SMEs with a framework to achieve long-term sustainability goals through strategic planning and resource allocation (Amoah et al., 2023). Collectively, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies of SMEs in the tourism and hospitality industry, guiding their strategic processes for long-term competitiveness, survival, and adaptability to uncertainty.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This comprehensive analysis of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in tourism and hospitality research provides key insights into the intellectual structure, influential journals, keywords, and thematic clusters. SMEs in tourism and hospitality are extensively studied in 111 publications across 81 journals, with notable contributions from top-tier journals like "Sustainability (Switzerland)," underscoring the significance of this research area. Keyword analysis highlights crucial research areas such as SMEs, tourism, innovation, COVID-19, and sustainability, reflecting current sector interests and concerns. SMEs in India's tourism sector face challenges in finance, branding, and digitalisation, especially in rural areas, despite their economic importance. Addressing these issues through targeted government support, capacity building, and infrastructure improvements is crucial for sustainable growth. Bibliographic coupling analysis identified nine thematic clusters covering resilience, competitiveness, innovation, marketing, financial dynamics, and crisis management strategies, offering a comprehensive view of SMEs in tourism and hospitality. Theoretical analysis reveals diverse perspectives, including agency theory, sustainable energy theory, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Resource-Based View (RBV) theory. These findings highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of SMEs in the tourism and hospitality sectors, providing valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and industry practitioners.

### Managerial Implications

An in-depth analysis of SMEs in tourism and hospitality

provides crucial managerial insight. SMEs must emphasise adaptability and innovation to manage disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Bianchi, 2022). Rapid pivoting and innovation during crises are essential to resilience. Technology integration, especially Augmented Reality Business Models (ARBM), enhances customer experiences and supports sustainable growth (Cranmer et al., 2021). Knowledge-management practices strengthen adaptability and risk mitigation (Núñez-Ríos et al., 2020). Investments in human capital and organizational knowledge drive innovation and growth (Khalique et al., 2020). Sustainability initiatives and strong customer relations underpinned by integrated marketing communication and innovation are vital (Khan et al., 2023).

A market-oriented approach helps SMEs understand customer needs and gain a competitive edge, especially in developing countries (Zaidan, 2016). Collaboration, including coopetition, promotes innovation and market positioning. Addressing information asymmetry is crucial when introducing product innovation. Human resource development, which includes skill-enhancing HR training and employee development, is essential. Job autonomy encourages employee voice and innovation (Chand & Ambardar, 2020; Domi & Domi, 2021). Collaborative learning and synergy among tourism providers sustain competitiveness. Destination management organisations (DMOs) aid in knowledge management and crisis preparedness (Toubes et al., 2021). Financial strategies and access to financing are critical in pushing SMEs to explore alternative financial strategies and lending technologies. Circular economy practices depend on shaping decision makers' attitudes (Bowen et al., 2023). Change management, participative leadership, and cultural integration all enhance adaptability and innovation. Investing in human capital, systemic approaches, and continuous learning cultures

fosters sustainability.

The adoption of cloud-based architecture boosts competitiveness and adaptability, especially in crises. Prioritising work-life balance and enjoyment reduces the intention to quit entrepreneurship, supporting long-term success. Competitive sustainability focuses on price sensitivity, site maintenance and entrepreneurial competency in the tourism sector. Financial strategies should consider profitability, asset tangibility, firm size, total liquidity, and risk when making capital structure decisions. Traditional capital structure theories may not fully explain these decisions in the hospitality and tourism sector. These insights provide SMEs, policymakers, and industry stakeholders with an academically substantiated roadmap to tackle challenges, foster innovation, and promote sustainable growth in dynamic tourism and hospitality sectors.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the data exclusively drawn from the Scopus database may not encompass all relevant literature in the SMEs, tourism, and hospitality domains. Additionally, the study's focus on articles published in English and classified as "Article" type might introduce language and publication bias. Furthermore, the bibliometric approach relies on the accuracy and completeness of metadata, potentially leading to omissions or misclassification. While keyword co-occurrence and bibliographic coupling analyses offer valuable insights, they do not capture the full depth of qualitative nuances within the included articles. Finally, the study's findings are context specific and may not be universally applicable to all SMEs in tourism and hospitality.

## Future Research Direction Based on Cluster Analysis

**Table 3: Future Research Directions**

Cluster	Future Research Directions
Resilience & Competitiveness in Tourism SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate COVID-19's long-term effects on SME recovery and resilience.</li> <li>Explore the role of augmented reality in enhancing SME competitiveness.</li> </ul>
Innovation, Marketing & Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study barriers to adopting circular economy practices in hospitality SMEs.</li> <li>Analyze IMC and OI's impact on SME marketing performance.</li> </ul>
Competitiveness & Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess government policy effectiveness in post-pandemic SME competitiveness.</li> <li>Examine strategies to overcome information asymmetry in SME innovation.</li> </ul>
Tourism & Hospitality SME Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore change management's impact on SME performance across cultural contexts.</li> <li>Investigate leadership's role in fostering innovation and employee voice.</li> </ul>
SMTE Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct comparative studies on regional financing patterns and their effects.</li> <li>Analyze informal, culturally integrated training for employee retention.</li> </ul>

Cluster	Future Research Directions
Success & Sustainability Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine cloud-based architecture's influence on SME competitiveness.</li> <li>Investigate relationship-building for sustainable urban planning in tourism SMEs.</li> </ul>
Competitive Sustainability & Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore entrepreneurial competency's role in SME sustainability.</li> <li>Investigate factors driving circular economy adoption in tourism SMEs.</li> </ul>
Financial Dynamics in SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze lending technologies and their impact on financing SMEs.</li> <li>Examine capital structure determinants in hospitality SMEs.</li> </ul>
Crisis Management During COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate long-term effects of SME crisis management strategies during COVID-19.</li> <li>Analyze government support's role in SME crisis response.</li> </ul>

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