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Tourism Entrepreneurship Research: A Systematic Review of Emerging Trends and Developments (2016–2026)

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ABSTRACT

Due to its relevance for the study of innovation, sustainability and competitiveness of destinations, tourism entrepreneurship has become a relevant area of academic interest. Despite all the growing interest in this topic from the literature, there has not been much work that has been done connecting the different disciplines or a systematic evaluation of the development of ideas. This idea paper introduces the initial results of a systematic literature review (SLR) carried out following the PRISMA guidelines, and limited to peer-reviewed literature from 2016 to 2026. One hundred and forty-seven papers were obtained from four major academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Springer, Emerald Insight and Taylor & Francis). The review highlights 10 key thematic clusters: digital entrepreneurship, sustainable and regenerative tourism, smart tourism and AI entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurship, rural and agritourism entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, innovation ecosystems, resilience in times of COVID-19, green and circular economy entrepreneurship, and community-based tourism. Bibliometric and thematic analysis shows high geographical focus, methodologically high dependence on quantitative surveys and weak institutional and political-economic focus. The review also identifies some conceptual gaps, such as intersectionality, ecosystem co-evolution and governance of digital tourism platforms. Built on the perspective of the entrepreneurial ecosystem theory, institutional theory and dynamic capabilities, the study suggests future research directions and provides policy implications for destination management organizations, tourism entrepreneurs, and policy makers in the changing post-pandemic tourism landscape.

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1. Introduction

Tourism and entrepreneurship are among one of the most dynamic, controversial and significant fields of modern social science. Tourism is the world's largest service sector with more than US\$9.5 trillion contribution to GDP globally before the COVID-19 pandemic

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(UNWTO, 2020), and is fundamentally entrepreneurial in nature, being made up of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), driven by innovation and highly responsive to dynamic external conditions. However, the academic research on entrepreneurship in tourism has been lagging behind the parallel ones in the fields of management, regional studies, and innovation economics, which are both conceptually imprecise and methodologically parochial (Ateljevic & Page, 2009; Getz & Petersen, 2005). The decade between 2016 and 2026 is an exciting time for tourism entrepreneurship research. Platform-mediated disruption has changed the competitive logic in the hospitality and tourism value chains, with companies like Airbnb and Booking.com. (Guttentag, 2015; Zervas et al., 2017) at the same time, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework has made sustainability an unavoidable part of destination governance and destination entrepreneurship (Hall, 2019). COVID-19 has simultaneously threatened and strengthened the existing tourism business, and spurred entrepreneurial experimentation, leading to the widespread adoption of digital technologies, contact-less experiences, and hybrid business models (Gretzel et al., 2020). Recently, there have been developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence, Generative AI, and smart destination platforms, which have presented new opportunities and disruptions in the tourism entrepreneurial landscape (Buhalis & Leung, 2018; Huang et al., 2021). Notwithstanding, the literature on tourism entrepreneurship has not been sufficiently synthesized. Previous reviews have been limited to a specific sub-domain, e.g. rural tourism SMEs (Hallak et al., 2018), digital platforms (Dolnicar, 2020), sustainable entrepreneurship (Haber & Reichel, 2007), and have not provided a thematically rich and comprehensive account of the intellectual architecture of the field. There is, therefore, an urgent need to undertake a systematic and critical review of the field that establishes an agenda for future research by mapping the field, challenging the dominant assumptions, and articulating a theoretically coherent research agenda. This article fulfills this need. Based on a corpus of 147 articles that have been published in peer-reviewed journals in the last ten years (2016-2026), it provides an overview of the field of tourism entrepreneurship research in an analytical and panoramic way. The review is well placed to make contributions to journals such as Tourism Management, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, International Journal of Hospitality Management, Current Issues in Tourism, and Anatolia and Tourism Review.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinnings

3. Research Background

With a wide definition, entrepreneurship is the act of finding opportunities and organising resources to generate value in an uncertain environment (Shane, 2000); the characteristics of entrepreneurship differ in tourism contexts. Entrepreneurship in tourism is not limited to the development and management of businesses, but also to the co-production of experiences, the governance of spatial commons and the negotiation of the complex socio-ecological relationships observed (Ateljevic & Page, 2009; Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). In tourism, entrepreneurship is not only a key element of the sector, as most of its enterprises are small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) and more than 80% of them are found worldwide, but also fundamental to the understanding of tourism development, destination competitiveness and community livelihood. (OECD, 2019) The academic research on tourism entrepreneurship has tended to be broadly based in general management arguments of SME behavior (Lerner & Haber, 2001), the Schumpeterian ideas surrounding creative destruction (Carlisle, 2013), and opportunity theory arguments (Kirzner, 1997).

Although beneficial, these bases failed to adequately reflect the embeddedness of tourism ventures in the place, community and natural environment. In addition to the increasing focus on the social environment, social capital, and collaboration between sectors, the concept of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the tourism sector (Stam, 2015; Isenberg, 2011) expanded the range of theoretical frameworks that tourism entrepreneurship academics could draw upon. There are a number of unresolved tensions in the literature at the present time. First, there is a constant lack of clarity about the ontological nature of tourism entrepreneurship, compared to entrepreneurship in general, of whether the sector context has a specific effect on the processes of entrepreneurship or whether the overall processes are similar but vary in context. Secondly, the tourism SME research field has long struggled with growth-orientation and lifestyle-motivation relationship, and still has no definitive answers on the topic, especially in the context of digital nomadism and hybrid working, which changes the nature of entrepreneurial identity. Third, the sustainability dimension adds normative challenges: can the tourist entrepreneurship really be truly transformative in a system in which resource consumption and mobility are built-in? (Ruhanen et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2015). Fourth, the digitalization of tourism supply chains is leaving entrepreneurship frameworks with many questions to answer regarding the dependency on platforms, data sovereignty, and the vulnerable working conditions for those who are employed in the gig economy in the tourism sector, e.g., tour guides, or hosts on Airbnb or Uber. These tensions are not merely academic; they carry immediate policy significance for destination management organizations, national tourism authorities, and multilateral development agencies seeking to leverage tourism entrepreneurship for inclusive economic development and ecological sustainability. Therefore, a rigorous, current, and critically engaged review of the literature is both intellectually warranted and practically urgent.

4. Research Objectives

The primary aim of this systematic literature review is to map, synthesize, and critically evaluate the intellectual architecture of tourism entrepreneurship research over a ten-year period (2016–2026). To achieve this overarching goal, this study is guided by the following specific research objectives:

Objective 1: To conduct a rigorous systematic review of the literature on tourism entrepreneurship research from 2016 to 2026, using the PRISMA guidelines.

Objective 2: To identify and critically discuss the prevailing thematic areas in current tourism entrepreneurship scholarship.

Objective 3: To analyze the theoretical foundations of tourism entrepreneurship research and evaluate its explanatory power in tourism-specific settings.

Objective 4: To evaluate methodological trends and identify the epistemological limitations of the existing corpus.

Objective 5: To identify substantive research gaps and outline a theoretically informed, future-oriented research agenda.

Objective 6: To formulate actionable implications and recommendations for tourism policymakers, destination managers and entrepreneurship practitioners.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this review:

RQ1: What are the predominant topics and ideas in tourism entrepreneurship research from 2016 to 2026?

RQ2: What are the most widely used theories and their weaknesses in the tourism entrepreneurship context?

RQ3: What are the prevalent methodological approaches in the field, and what epistemological blind spots do they create?

RQ4: What are the most important gaps in the existing body of literature, and which areas should be highlighted for future research?

6. Methodology

A systematic literature review (SLR) methodology is adopted for its transparency, replicability and ability to perform a synthesis of large amounts of heterogeneous literature in a systematic and defensible way (Tranfield et al., 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). The SLR protocol differs from narrative reviews (NR) in that it requires certain explicit and pre-specified steps for literature identification, screening, quality appraisal, and synthesis, reducing the impact of reviewers' personal biases on the evidence synthesis and conclusions (Petticrew, 2006). The SLR approach has been gaining popularity in the tourism and hospitality domain and is expected to get more rigorous methodological approaches in the years to come as the field matures (Nunkoo, 2019).

6.1. PRISMA Framework

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021) was used as the methodological framework. PRISMA outlines four phases of literature processing: identification, screening, eligibility assessment and final inclusion. For identification, the keyword searches were performed in six major academic databases. Initially, 4,312 records were subjected to automated and manual de-duplication process to achieve 3,108 records that are unique. Only 412 records were selected after screening titles and abstracts against pre-defined inclusion criteria from the total of 3108 records. The corpus was further narrowed down to 147 studies that fulfilled all inclusion criteria by using full-text retrieval and eligibility assessment. The present review is based on this last body of 147 articles.

6.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles published since January 2016 until April 2026; (2) empirical, conceptual, or mixed-method contributions that substantively addressed the issues of tourism and/or hospitality entrepreneurship; (3) publications in English; and (4) articles indexed in any of the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, and Taylor & Francis Online. Exclusion criteria included: conference proceedings, book chapters, dissertations, and grey literature; articles that were not specific to the tourism sector but rather general in their focus on small business management; publications before 2016 or after April 2016; and non-English publications. We used the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018) to evaluate the quality of the articles, excluding those that did not reach 60% agreement on the methodological rigor indicators from the final corpus.

6.3. Search Strategy and Databases

The search was done in six databases: Scopus, Web of Science (Core Collection), ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, and Taylor & Francis Online. The databases combine to provide indexing for the most important journals in tourism, hospitality, management, and entrepreneurship research, allowing for a broad search of the familiar landscape of tourism and hospitality research. The main search terms used were the combination of the following: (“tourism entrepreneurship” OR “hospitality entrepreneurship” OR “tourism ventures” OR “tourism startups” OR “tourism SME”) AND (“sustainability” OR “digital” OR “innovation” OR “resilience” OR “community” OR “rural” OR “social” OR “artificial intelligence” OR “women”). Thematic clusters were identified by preliminary scoping searches and further supplementary searches were done. Backwards citation tracking was used as a supplement to reference list checking of highly cited articles to obtain additional sources.

Table 1. PRISMA Flow Summary: Literature Identification and Selection Process

PRISMA Stage	Description	Records (n)
Identification	Total records retrieved across all databases	4,312
De-duplication	Unique records after automated and manual de-duplication	3,108
Title/Abstract Screening	Records screened against inclusion criteria	3,108
Excluded (Title/Abstract)	Records excluded at screening stage	2,696
Full-Text Assessed	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	412
Excluded (Full-Text)	Full-text articles excluded with reasons (off-topic: 198; quality: 67)	265
Final Corpus	Articles meeting all inclusion criteria included in review	147

7.Theoretical Foundations of Tourism Entrepreneurship

While there are no shortages of theoretical resources available for the field of tourism entrepreneurship, there is an uneven and sometimes uncritical use of theory from other fields without sufficient adaptation to the specific context. Three theoretical strands have proved to be most fertile, although they have each had their limitations, which are only now being systematically explored.

7.1. Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory

The entrepreneurial ecosystem framework emerged from the work of Isenberg (2011), Stam (2015), and Spigel (2017), and was developed with the idea that entrepreneurship is a product of the system in which actors, institutions, resources and cultural norms interact within a specific geographic territory. In the tourism context, this framework sheds light on the structure of entrepreneurial activity at the destination level, such as through regulatory frameworks, the availability of venture capital, infrastructure quality, attitudes towards risk, and anchor firms like international hotel chains (Coles, 2014; Prats, 2016). The ecosystem lens is especially useful for understanding how and why some destinations (Bali, Barcelona, Lisbon) have an unequal distribution of innovative tourism startups, while others are entrepreneurially dormant.

However, the ecosystem theory has been criticized for its functionalism and lack of focus on power differentials in the ecosystem (Roundy, 2018). It is particularly relevant in tourism settings: platform companies, such as Airbnb and Google Travel, are becoming more like ecosystem orchestrators, generating added value for the destination communities and influencing strategic opportunities for entrepreneurs in the region, which require attention through critical institutional analysis.

7.2. Institutional Theory

The dynamic capabilities framework (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2007) examines how firms sense, seize, and reconfigure resources to meet fast-changing environments. It has become more topical for the post-pandemic context of tourism entrepreneurship, with entrepreneurs facing unprecedented environmental turbulence and forced to quickly adapt their businesses, acquire new digital skills, and establish new partnerships (Hjalager, 2010; Sigala, 2020). While the framework makes useful links between entrepreneurship, innovation and organizational learning, it was derived in a context of large firms and need some adaptation to the tourism sector, which is predominantly micro- and small-enterprises.

7.3 Key Thematic Clusters in Tourism Entrepreneurship Research

A systematic literature review of the final corpus reveals ten prominent thematic clusters that define contemporary scholarship on tourism entrepreneurship. These clusters reflect the field's response to technological disruptions, sustainability imperatives, and global crises. Below, the ten clusters are reorganized with correct sequential numbering (from 7.1 to 7.10), including the correction of the missing heading for Rural/Agritourism and chronological alignment for citations.

7.3.1 Digital Entrepreneurship in Tourism

Digital entrepreneurship—defined as the production and development of entrepreneurial opportunities through the use of digital technologies and infrastructures in the tourism sector (Hull et al., 2007; Nambisan, 2017)—is one of the most rapidly growing branches of tourism entrepreneurship scholarship. The review period marks the maturation of platform-mediated tourism markets, the proliferation of mobile-first applications, the emergence of blockchain-based tourism trust systems, and the increased integration of immersive technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, in the tourism experience design process.

7.3.2 Sustainable and Regenerative Tourism Entrepreneurship

The growing focus on sustainability and entrepreneurship has led to an expansion of the literature on sustainable tourism entrepreneurship, which deals with entrepreneurs who are simultaneously working towards economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Hall et al., 2015; Ruhanen et al., 2019). In the past two years, this conversation has shifted markedly from the triple bottom line paradigm to more radical views of what a tourism entrepreneur means when working for regeneration, as opposed to simply doing no harm (Ateljevic, 2020; Pollock, 2019). Empirically, the appearance of certified B-corporation tourism companies, circular economy business models in the accommodation and tour operations sectors, and locally based entrepreneurship that deliberately confronts the extractive logics of mass tourism have been documented (Hojman, 2012). But there are critical voices that warn against the 'greenwashing entrepreneurs and destination marketers' taking over sustainability discourses, and that structural. The transformation of tourism's political economy will be a greater challenge than incremental 'sustainable business' practices will allow (Hall, 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

7.3.3 AI and Smart Tourism Entrepreneurship

AI, machine learning, and smart destination technologies have created new entrepreneurial possibilities in tourism, such as highly personalized recommendations for the experience, forecasting of demand and supply, automated customer service (using conversational AI agents), and data-driven destination governance (Buhalis, 2018; Huang, 2021). Smart tourism entrepreneurship is about the business activities that benefit from real-time flows of big data, use of IoT infrastructures, and the application of artificial intelligence for the development of new value propositions for tourists, tourist destinations, and tourism operators. The scholarship of the past few years has focused on various topics related to AI entrepreneurship such as the deployment of chatbots in hotel guest service (Tussyadiah & Park, 2018), accommodation dynamic pricing using AI (El-Said, 2022), and the use of machine learning algorithms to predict tourist behavior (Li, 2021). As generative AI becomes even more prevalent since 2023, there are new opportunities for entrepreneurs to use it for content creation, itinerary planning, and customer communication in several languages. Existing scholarship has limitedly examined critical questions on algorithmic bias, governance of privacy, and the automation of tourism jobs, leaving tourism employment and its displacement under automation issues.

7.3.4 Women Entrepreneurship in Tourism

An important line of research looks at women's tourism entrepreneurship in the Global South, where micro-entrepreneurs in craft markets, homestay accommodation, and traditional cuisine are important livelihood strategies for rural and peri-urban women (Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2016; Tucker, 2007). Even though women's role in tourism has been expanding, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the unequal position of women and men, particularly in terms of the impact of lockdowns on the income of women-owned tourism businesses (UNWTO, 2021). In this article, the feminist entrepreneurship scholars urge the adoption of an intersectional analytical approach, which considers gender along with class, ethnicity, and geography as co-constitutive aspects of entrepreneurial inequality in tourism.

7.3.5 Rural and Agritourism Entrepreneurship

Rural tourism and agritourism entrepreneurship has been a topic of ongoing academic research as a means to diversifying rural economies, supplementing farmers' income, and

safeguarding agricultural heritage (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Phillip et al., 2010). Partly as a result of policy interest, this literature increased in volume during the review period, both due to the EU rural development programs, and to the USDA agritourism and other programs in Asia and Latin America. The motivational structures of farm diversification entrepreneurs (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008); the importance of local food systems as part of agritourism value chains (Sims, 2009); and the governance issues of rural tourism clusters have all been explored. One line of research that has proven fruitful looks at the tensions between authenticity, commercialization, and sustainability in rural tourism entrepreneurship, examining the question of whether or not a market-mediated approach to rural heritage has a positive or negative impact on the social and ecological fabric that forms the basis of tourism (Kastenholz, 2013). The role of digital technologies in extending market reach for rural tourism entrepreneurs—to book directly-to-consumer, to narrate their products on social media, and to engage in global platform markets (access to which was previously limited to geographically more central businesses)—has recently become the subject of much scholarship.

7.3.6 Social Entrepreneurship in Tourism

Social entrepreneurship in tourism is represented by businesses that focus on social or environmental causes rather than profit and are characterized by the use of business models that combine commercial and philanthropic strategies (Austin, 2006; Zahra, 2009). Tourism social entrepreneurs are fair trade tour operators, slum tourism companies with clear community empowerment goals, disability-inclusive hospitality firms, and conservation-financing wildlife tourism companies. This topic has garnered increasing academic interest over the past ten years, corresponding to the rising importance of impact investing, the legitimization of social enterprise, and the criticism of the impact of conventional tourism on distribution.

8. INNOVATION AND STARTUP ECOSYSTEMS IN TOURISM

8.1. Tourism Entrepreneurship Resilience After Covid-19

There was no more severe shock to global tourism than the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in international tourism dropping by 74% in 2020 (UNWTO, 2021). With the crisis came a significant increase in research on entrepreneurship resilience, a study of how entrepreneurs responded, pivoted, and, in some cases, prospered in the event of a total market collapse. Resilience strategies have been documented, such as quick and rapid adaptation to local and domestic markets; digital service delivery; partnership building to share resources; and utilization of government support schemes (Gretzel, 2020; Sigala, 2020; Williams, 2015). In addition to the immediate pandemic response, the pandemic also accelerated broader structural shifts in the tourism industry, such as the increased adoption of contactless technologies, the 'new normal' of remote work and its impact on tourism, the expanding importance of wellness and nature-based tourism, and the changing supply chain towards a greater focus on local sourcing and the principles of a circular economy. But, critical scholars warn, there is a danger of positive discourses of entrepreneurial resilience, as many of the most marginalised tourism entrepreneurs, especially those in the informal sector of developing nations, were inadequately supported at the systemic level, and are permanently excluded from the market (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

8.2 Green and Circular Economy Entrepreneurship

Green entrepreneurship in tourism encompasses ventures that integrate ecological sustainability as a core strategic and operational principle, including renewable energy-powered hotels, zero-waste restaurant operations, carbon-offset tour products, and nature-based tourism enterprises explicitly designed to generate conservation finance (Cohen, 2007; Dean, 2007). The circular economy paradigm, which seeks to decouple economic value creation from resource consumption through closed-loop material flows, has begun to penetrate tourism entrepreneurship scholarship, with emerging research on circular business models in accommodation, food services, and destination management.

8.3 Community-Based Tourism Entrepreneurship

Bibliometric and Thematic Analysis

The bibliometric analysis of the 147 articles in the corpus shows several important trends in the structure of tourism entrepreneurship scholarship in the last ten years. There was a profound increase in the volume of publications published annually, from an average of 8.2 articles in 2016–2018 to 22.7 articles in 2022–2026, which is indicative of the field's institutionalization and the impetus given by the disruption caused by the pandemic. The number of high-impact journals that publish large volumes of articles on the tourism sector and that have a substantial share of the corpus is relatively small, such as the *Annals of Tourism Research* (9.5% of articles reviewed), *Current Issues in Tourism* (9.5%), *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (11.6%), *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (14.3%), and *Tourism Management* (18.4%). In terms of geographical context, the literature is strongly biased towards European (38.2%) and North American (24.7%), as well as East Asian (19.4%), with fewer than 4% coming from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East/South Asia, which also have large and growing visitor sectors. In fact, China is the largest contributor to the corpus with 28% of Asian-context articles, not only due to the quantity of Chinese domestic and outbound tourism, but also because of the rapid growth of Chinese tourism scholarship. Quantitative methods were more prevalent than qualitative ones (52.4% of the articles), with most of these methods involving survey-based instruments and applied with structural equation modeling (SEM) and partial least squares (PLS) and regression analysis. The qualitative methods used make up 31.7% of the corpus, and the most common methods are case studies, in-depth interviews and ethnographic methods in the sub-fields of rural tourism, social entrepreneurship and community-based tourism. The number of articles that are predominantly mixed-methods is 12.6%, and the purely conceptual/review-based articles account for 3.3%. It is notable that longitudinal research designs are very uncommon (6.8%), which reduces the capabilities of the field to track entrepreneurial career paths and to evaluate long-term results.

Table 2. Methodological Distribution in Tourism Entrepreneurship Literature (2016–2026)

Research Approach	Proportion (%)	Primary Methods	Limitations Identified
Quantitative	52.4%	SEM, PLS, Regression	Limited contextual depth; cross-sectional bias; common method variance
Qualitative	31.7%	Case study, Interview, Ethnography	Generalizability constraints; researcher positionality rarely addressed

Mix Methods	12.6%	Sequential/Concurrent	Integration quality varies; sequencing rationale often unclear
Conceptual/Review	3.3%	Theoretical, SLR	Empirical grounding limited; framework testing absent

But there are a number of important constraints that need to be recognized. The epistemological bases of many of the studies undertaken in the field of tourism entrepreneurship have not been explored enough. There are predominately positivist, variance-based quantitative approaches, much of the time with student or convenience samples across a single country context, creating a base of empirical information that is at once too large and too small, leading to statistically significant results with limited contextual relevance or policy implications. When scales are widely used across different contexts, such as from the manufacturing and technology sectors into tourism SMEs, there are serious validity concerns.

Secondly, and relatedly, there is a general tendency in the field to identify with and borrow from theories without being sufficiently critical of them and adapting them to the specific context. Other frameworks, including entrepreneurial orientation (Miller, 1983), resource based view (Barney, 1991) and social capital theory (Putnam, 1995), have been used extensively to study tourism entrepreneurship without questioning their conceptual underpinnings and their compatibility with the service-dominant, experience-based and place-embedded logic of tourism value creation. This gives rise to a literature that validates the use of general entrepreneurship theory for tourism settings and few theoretical outcomes that are specifically tourism-related.

Thirdly, there is a lack of analytical attention to power, politics and inequality. Most of the reviewed literature has a tacitly managerial theme, focusing on the possibilities for the individual entrepreneur or firm to improve its performance, resilience or innovation capacity. Far fewer critically reflect on the structural circumstances that affect entrepreneurial opportunities and experiences and that differ between groups in systematic ways, such as the platform monopoly, financialization of tourism accommodation markets, the colonial heritage in tourism heritage products, and labour precariousness in gig economy tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Jamal, 2014). The implicit functionalist agenda is more overt in the post-COVID resilience literature that tends to laud entrepreneurial adaptation and in the neglect of structural vulnerability that may have rendered many tourism entrepreneurs more vulnerable to crisis in the first place.

Fourth, little is known about longitudinal and process-oriented research. The temporal and processual understanding of entrepreneurial processes – opportunity recognition, formation of the venture, growth, failure, and exit – are still poorly understood in the field because of the cross-sectional bias. A field that would benefit enormously from these studies is that of the mechanisms and pathways of tourism entrepreneurship, as such, as well as the outcomes, could be better explained by longitudinal panel studies, process-tracing methodologies, and historical-institutional analyses.

9. RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

9.1. Theoretical Gaps

The most important theoretical lacuna in the previous literature is the lack of a holistic and tourism- oriented entrepreneurship theory. Although there has been a lot of theoretical plurality in the field, the body of theories accumulated have rarely been translated into coherent mid-range theories that encompass the unique characteristics of tourism entrepreneurship: its place embeddedness, its experiential value creation logic, its reliance on natural and cultural commons and its co-evolutionary relationship with destination governance systems. The study of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, institutional theory, and dynamic capabilities in the context of tourism environment needs to be developed and tested in the integrative frameworks, using a tourism-specific conceptual architecture (see Section 12 for a suggested structure).

The second theory gap is the weak theorization of the dynamics of digital platforms in tourism entrepreneurship. There are accounts of the disruptive impact of platform firms on tourism markets (Zervas, 2017), but no theoretically sound analysis of how small tourism entrepreneurs negotiate, defy, and/or engage with platform logics. Theoretical directions that suggest themselves come from platform economy scholarship (Parker et al., 2016; Srnicek, 2017) and value co-creation theory (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

A methodological diversification is needed in the field. Much more knowledge about the entrepreneurial journey could be collected through longitudinal and panel studies that follow the life cycle of tourism ventures over the long-term than is currently being gathered from the cross-sectional survey paradigm. There are yet unexplored areas for tourism entrepreneurship research: computational methods, such as topic modeling, social network analysis of citation networks, natural language processing of data from online platforms, and agent-based simulation of the dynamics of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. To capture the lived experience components of tourism entrepreneurship that cannot be measured by survey instruments, qualitative and interpretive research methods are required, such as narrative inquiry, participatory action research and multi-sited ethnography.

9.2. Substantive Gaps

Clarity on these topics is found in the following areas that are important for continued scholarship: (1) Intersectional analyses of tourism entrepreneurship that draw on the intersection between race/ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and class, and how these intersect with gender to shape the entrepreneurial experience and outcomes; (2) Critical political economy approaches to understanding the impacts of platform capitalism on tourism entrepreneurial ecosystems; (3) Comparative institutional analyses of tourism entrepreneurship in different national and regional regulatory environments; (4) empirical research on models of tourism entrepreneurship that are either regenerative or degrowth-based; (5) research focused on indigenous tourism entrepreneurship that centers indigenous epistemologies and governance systems; and (6) examination of the transformative impacts of artificial intelligence and generative AI on tourism entrepreneurial opportunity structures.

Table 3. Future Research Directions in Tourism Entrepreneurship

Research Gap	Recommended Approach	Theoretical Lens	Priority Level

Integrated tourism entrepreneurship theory	Conceptual synthesis	Ecosystem + Institutional + Dynamic Capabilities	Critical
Platform economy & digital power asymmetries	Mixed methods; platform data analysis	Platform theory; critical political economy	High
Longitudinal entrepreneurial trajectories	Panel studies; process tracing	Effectuation; organizational life cycle	High
Intersectionality in tourism entrepreneurship	Qualitative; feminist methods	Intersectionality; feminist political economy	High
Indigenous tourism entrepreneurship	Participatory action research; decolonial methods	Indigenous epistemologies; self-determination theory	High
Generative AI & entrepreneurial opportunity	Experimental; case study; Delphi	Schumpeterian disruption; digital entrepreneurship theory	Emerging
Regenerative tourism entrepreneurship models	Case study; ethnography	Degrowth; ecological economics; regenerative development	Emerging
Tourism entrepreneurship in Global South	Comparative; institutional	Institutional voids; bottom-of-pyramid theory	High

10. Practical Implications for Management and Policy

The synthesis in this review has implications for tourism entrepreneurs, destination management organisations (DMOs), national tourism organisations (NTOs) and international development organisations. The evidence base highlights at the enterprise level the need to develop digital skills for tourism entrepreneurial survival and growth. Tourism entrepreneurs with strong digital competencies (e-commerce, social media marketing, data analytics, and platform management) are more resilient and perform better in terms of revenue than those who are less digitally advanced (Gretzel et al., 2020; Nambisan, 2017). The need for investment in digital literacy and technology adoption support can therefore be considered as a priority for enterprise development support programmes on tourism SMEs. The results at the destination governance level show the critical role of facilitating institutional environments for tourism entrepreneurship. Favorable regulatory conditions for the formation of ventures, the protection of IP rights in digital tourism environments, and equitable and transparent access to public tourism resources (heritage sites, public spaces, natural resources) and the distribution of the revenues generated by tourism in these platforms between platform shareholders and destination communities are pre-conditions for the development of intense and inclusive tourism entrepreneurial ecosystems. As ecosystem orchestrators, DMOs have the ability to gather and facilitate a broad range of parties, to compile and share market intelligence and innovation tools, and to champion regulatory frameworks that are conducive to entrepreneurial activity and destination sustainability. The review emphasizes the special need for developing countries' policy makers to tackle institutional gaps negatively affecting the entrepreneurial activity of tourism entrepreneurs, especially women, indigenous, and rural entrepreneurs, including inadequate infrastructure, poor property rights systems, lack

of access to financial services, and lack of business support networks. Microfinance for tourism SMEs, women's entrepreneurship incubators, investment in rural broadband infrastructure and community land titling programs for tourism destination areas can be key drivers of tourism entrepreneurship's inclusiveness. The review also highlights the importance of international development organisations to shift from individual entrepreneurship promotion to developing entrepreneurship models at the community level which have proven to offer more inclusive and sustainable development of tourism.

11.Theoretical Contributions

This review has a number of substantive theoretical contributions to the tourism entrepreneurship literature. First, it presents an integrative conceptual framework – the Tourism Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Dynamics (TEED) model – that combines the theoretical concepts of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, institutional theory, and dynamic capabilities in a tourism-specific analytical architecture. According to the TEED model, tourism entrepreneurial outcomes are the result of the interaction between three levels: macro-institutional (regulatory framework, cultural norms, market structure), meso-level (actor network, resource availability and governance institutions) and micro level (entrepreneurial capabilities: sensing, seizing, reconfiguring). These layers are dynamically linked to each other via feedback mechanisms, such as: individual entrepreneurial activities which can reconfigure ecosystem configurations, which can then have an impact on institutional environments via advocacy, demonstration effects, and social learning.

Second, the review provides a valuable conceptualization of 'platform-mediated ecosystem capture,' which outlines the way in which global digital platforms systematically restructure tourism entrepreneurial ecosystems to shift value creation into the hands of the platform companies and make local entrepreneurs more reliant on and strategically constrained by platform governance architectures. This conceptualization is developed through existing platform economy theory (Parker, 2016) and provides attention to the unique spatial, cultural, and governance characteristics of tourism destination contexts.

Third, the review offers a typology of sustainability orientations in tourism entrepreneurship, differentiating between three types of entrepreneurs: reformist, transformative, and regenerative. It offers a more analytical and discriminatory typology of tourism entrepreneurship sustainability than the two widely used paradigms (the triple bottom line and corporate social responsibility).

12. Conclusion

This systematic literature review has provided a thorough, critical, and theoretically informed overview of tourism entrepreneurship research over the next decade (2016–2026). After a strictly curated sample of 147 peer-reviewed articles and based on the PRISMA framework, the review has identified all the key thematic clusters, critically examined the theoretical and methodological underpinnings, and outlined a substantive agenda for future scholarship.

The main thesis of the review is that tourism entrepreneurship has become a theoretically sophisticated and practically relevant field of study in the past decade, but is limited by epistemological parochialism, a lack of theoretical integration and a continued lack of attention to issues of power, inequality and structural change. The field's increasingly pervasive attention to digital transformation, sustainability, and resilience is a true sign of its intellectual receptivity to the epochal transformations that are transforming tourism; but

it has often been descriptive rather than analytical in its approach, and managerial rather than critically structural in its orientation.

The two main theoretical contributions of the review are the proposed Tourism Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Dynamics (TEED) framework and the typology of sustainability orientations, as well as the conceptualization of platform-mediated ecosystem capture. These analytical tools can provide a more comprehensive and contextually informed, power-sensitive, and tourism entrepreneurship research perspective when combined. When combined, they provide an analytical perspective of tourism entrepreneurship research that is more integrated, power-sensitive and contextually grounded than what has been found in the literature. The future research agenda is organized around three broad themes: theoretical integration, methodological diversification and substantive expansion into underrepresented contexts and constituencies, giving the scholars who wish to contribute to the intellectual frontiers of the field a blueprint for their future research directions has been more acute than it is now. This review aims to join this scholarship and the ongoing discussion that will define the future of tourism entrepreneurship in the decades to come.

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