

Inclusion in Smart Tourism Management: A Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda

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Abstract

The rapid digital transformation of the tourism sector has intensified interest in smart tourism management and underscored the growing importance of inclusion as a strategic dimension of tourism development. Although scholarly attention to this topic is increasing, the literature remains fragmented, with limited integrative understanding of how inclusion interacts with consumer experience, digital engagement, and innovation within smart tourism ecosystems. This study addresses this gap by synthesizing existing research and outlining future research directions. Employing a semi-systematic literature review combined with qualitative meta-synthesis, the study interprets and integrates diverse research streams. This methodology facilitates the identification of recurring themes, conceptual relationships, and theoretical gaps by advancing beyond descriptive analysis toward interpretive synthesis. The findings reveal that inclusion is an underdeveloped yet essential dimension of smart tourism, frequently regarded as complementary rather than central to technological development. Consumer experience is identified as a key mechanism linking inclusive practices to tourism outcomes, while digital engagement supports co-creation and participation. Innovation enhances adaptability but requires strategic alignment to foster inclusive outcomes. The study contributes an integrated conceptual perspective of inclusive smart tourism and demonstrates the value of meta-synthesis in advancing theory. A future research agenda is proposed to guide empirical investigation in this emerging field.

Keywords: Smart Tourism Management, Inclusion, Meta-Synthesis Approach, Semi-Systematic Review, Digital Engagement, Consumer Experience, Tourism Business Management, Social Media.

1. Introduction

The rapid digital transformation of the tourism sector has fundamentally altered the design, management, and experience of destinations, positioning smart tourism management at the forefront of academic research and industry practice. Smart tourism ecosystems utilize advanced technologies, data analytics, and digital platforms to enhance efficiency, improve service quality, and facilitate value co-creation with tourists and local stakeholders (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014; Gretzel et al., 2015). In this context, inclusion has emerged as a critical dimension, emphasizing equitable access, personalized experiences, and the integration of diverse visitor needs into destination planning and management.

Consumer experience is central to shaping tourism outcomes, influencing satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth communication. Emotional responses and experiential factors are increasingly recognized as primary drivers of consumer behavior across service environments, including tourism and retail contexts (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Chatzopoulou et al., 2022). Concurrently, digital technologies and social media platforms have transformed how tourists search for information, interact with brands, and make travel decisions, underscoring the significance of digital influence and online engagement.

Innovation is a fundamental pillar of smart tourism, enabling destinations and organizations to respond to disruptions, evolving consumer expectations, and global challenges. Research highlights the role of disruptive innovation and digital platforms in transforming tourism entrepreneurship and service delivery models (Poulaki et al., 2024).



However, the integration of inclusion into smart tourism management remains an emerging area of inquiry. Understanding how technological innovation and consumer experience in creating inclusive tourism ecosystems is essential for both theoretical and practical advancement. This study therefore examines the role of inclusion in smart tourism management by analyzing how consumer experience, innovation, and sustainability contribute to more accessible, equitable, and resilient tourism environments.

2. Literature Review

The tourism industry has undergone profound structural transformations over the past two decades, driven by rapid technological advancement, evolving consumer expectations, and increasing societal emphasis on sustainability and social equity. Within this dynamic context, the concept of smart tourism has emerged as a dominant paradigm that integrates digital technologies, data analytics, and stakeholder collaboration to enhance destination competitiveness and visitor experiences (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014; Gretzel et al., 2015). While literature widely acknowledges the potential of smart tourism ecosystems to facilitate value co-creation, improve operational efficiency, and deliver personalized experiences, scholars increasingly argue that technological advancement alone does not guarantee improved tourism outcomes without parallel attention to social and organizational dimensions (Sigala, 2018; Hall, 2019).

Indeed, the smart tourism discourse has been criticized for its initial technological determinism, with more recent research emphasizing the need to consider governance, resilience, and stakeholder engagement as integral components of smart tourism development (Sigala, 2018). The integration of real-time data and digital infrastructures enhances resource management and supports more informed decision-making processes. However, the extent to which these capabilities translate into socially inclusive and sustainable outcomes remains uneven across destinations (Hall, 2019). Within this evolving landscape, inclusion has emerged as a critical yet still insufficiently integrated dimension of tourism development.

Inclusion shifts the focus of tourism management toward accessibility, diversity, and equitable participation, highlighting the importance of designing tourism environments that accommodate diverse visitor needs (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). Although research demonstrates that inclusive tourism contributes to social justice and economic growth by expanding market reach and improving destination reputation (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018), the operationalization of inclusion within smart tourism frameworks remains fragmented. Existing studies often treat inclusion as a complementary rather than central component of tourism strategy, despite growing recognition that equitable participation is fundamental to sustainable tourism development. Digital technologies offer considerable potential to enhance accessibility through personalized services and inclusive design, yet their implementation frequently lacks a coherent strategic orientation.

Consumer experience continues to be widely regarded as a core determinant of tourism success, reflecting the inherently experiential nature of tourism products. The experience economy framework proposed by Pine & Gilmore (1999) underscores the importance of creating memorable and emotionally engaging experiences as key drivers of satisfaction and loyalty. However, subsequent research has demonstrated that customer experience is not solely shaped by service delivery but is instead a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and sensory elements (Verhoef et al., 2009). Emotional engagement has been identified as a critical mechanism through which experiences influence



behavioural intentions, highlighting the importance of designing environments that foster positive affective responses (Chatzopoulou et al., 2022).

The increasing digitalization of tourism has further transformed the nature of customer experience by enabling interactive engagement, personalization, and co-creation of value between consumers and organizations (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). While digital technologies enhance the ability of tourism businesses to deliver customized experiences, they also introduce new challenges related to managing complex customer journeys and ensuring consistent service quality across digital and physical touchpoints.

Social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped information search and decision-making processes in tourism, with research consistently demonstrating their influence on destination image and travel planning (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries who shape consumer perceptions and expectations, particularly within visually driven platforms such as Instagram. Empirical evidence confirms influencers' significant impact on consumer engagement and purchase intentions (Arsenis & Chatzopoulou, 2020). At the same time, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has become a critical determinant of trust and loyalty in online travel environments, reinforcing the importance of digital reputation management (Chatzopoulou & Xanthopoulou, 2021).

Innovation is widely recognized as a key driver of competitiveness and resilience within tourism systems. Disruptive innovations, including digital platforms and sharing economy models, have fundamentally altered market structures and consumer expectations (Poulaki et al., 2024). Although innovation enhances organizational adaptability and supports service customization, its benefits are not uniformly distributed, and the extent to which innovation contributes to inclusive and sustainable outcomes remains a subject of ongoing debate (Sigala, 2018).

Tourism businesses play a pivotal role in translating inclusive principles into practice through service design, workforce diversity, accessible infrastructure, and inclusive marketing strategies (Baum et al., 2016). Inclusive practices extend beyond physical accessibility to encompass cultural sensitivity and equitable employment opportunities, contributing to customer satisfaction and organizational performance (Paiva et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the adoption of inclusive business models remains uneven, often constrained by resource limitations and lack of strategic integration. Inclusive approaches also contribute to social sustainability by promoting fair working conditions and supporting community participation in tourism development (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Digital transformation further reinforces inclusion by enabling personalized services and data-driven understanding of customer needs, yet the effectiveness of these tools depends on their integration into broader organizational strategies (Gretzel et al., 2015). Emotional engagement within inclusive service environments has been shown to influence behavioural intentions, highlighting the importance of designing experiences that accommodate diverse visitor needs (Chatzopoulou et al., 2022). Digital platforms also provide opportunities for tourism businesses to engage with diverse audiences and promote inclusive brand narratives (Arsenis & Chatzopoulou, 2020).

Consumer experience is closely linked to emotional constructs such as place attachment, which significantly influences satisfaction and destination loyalty (Chatzopoulou & Tsogas, 2022). Emotional responses within service environments shape behavioural intentions and reinforce the importance of designing experiences that foster meaningful connections between tourists and destinations (Chatzopoulou et al., 2022). These emotional dynamics are



particularly relevant in smart tourism contexts, where technology-mediated experiences interact with physical environments to shape overall perceptions.

Social media influencers contribute to co-creation processes by acting as brand architects, enhancing trust, engagement, and perceived authenticity (Poulis & Chatzopoulou, 2023; Chatzopoulou et al., 2025). Digital engagement, driven by user- and firm-generated content, plays a crucial role in building brand communities and strengthening relationships among stakeholders within tourism ecosystems (Poulis et al. 2025).

E-WOM remains a central determinant of trust and loyalty, as perceived value and service quality influence customers' willingness to share positive experiences and maintain long-term relationships with tourism providers (Chatzopoulou & Xanthopoulou, 2021). These dynamics highlight the increasing importance of digital engagement within smart tourism management frameworks.

The integration of inclusion within smart tourism ecosystems is closely associated with co-creation and digital participation, enabling tourists to actively contribute to experience development through digital platforms and social interactions (Gretzel et al., 2015). However, despite growing recognition of these interconnections, literature still tends to examine smart tourism, innovation, sustainability, and consumer experience as largely separate domains.

As a result, research remains limited in its examination of how these dimensions collectively interact through the lens of inclusion to shape tourism outcomes. The interplay between emotional experiences, digital influence, and inclusive design are particularly underexplored within the context of rapidly evolving digital environments. Addressing these conceptual gaps is critical for advancing a holistic understanding of how smart tourism management can support the development of inclusive, sustainable, and resilient tourism systems.

Moreover, the interaction among emotional experiences, digital influence, and inclusive design remains insufficiently examined, particularly within the context of dynamic digital environments. Bridging these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive conceptualization of how smart tourism management can advance inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a semi-systematic literature review approach to critically examine the role of inclusion within smart tourism management and its interrelationships with consumer experience, digital engagement, and innovation in tourism business contexts. A semi-systematic review is particularly appropriate for research areas characterized by conceptual diversity and interdisciplinary development, as it allows researchers to map, synthesize, and critically evaluate literature across multiple research streams while identifying theoretical gaps and emerging directions (Snyder, 2019). Given the fragmented nature of the literature on smart tourism and inclusion, this approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how these constructs have evolved and how they intersect within tourism business environments. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, the semi-systematic approach provides greater methodological transparency while maintaining flexibility in synthesizing conceptual insights (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, which are widely recognized for their extensive coverage of tourism, marketing, and management research. The search aimed



to capture both foundational and contemporary studies relevant to the study's conceptual focus.

Keywords were developed based on the core constructs identified in the research objectives and literature review, including: “smart tourism”, “inclusive tourism” OR “tourism inclusion”, “consumer experience” AND “tourism”, “digital engagement” OR “social media tourism”, “innovation in tourism”, “tourism businesses”.

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine search results and improve relevance. In addition, backward and forward citation tracking was conducted to identify influential studies and ensure comprehensive coverage of key theoretical contributions (Webster & Watson, 2002).

To ensure academic rigor and relevance, specific inclusion criteria were applied. Studies were included if they a) were peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, or conference papers, b) focused on tourism, hospitality, or related service industries, c) addressed at least one of the core constructs of the study (smart tourism, inclusion, consumer experience, innovation, digital influence) and d) provided theoretical or empirical insights relevant to tourism management.

Seminal works were included to establish theoretical foundations, while recent studies were incorporated to capture current developments in digital transformation and inclusive tourism. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on technical or engineering aspects without managerial implications, were not directly related to tourism contexts, or lacked theoretical contribution. The selection process followed an iterative and interpretive procedure. Initially, titles and abstracts were screened to identify potentially relevant studies. Subsequently, full texts were reviewed to assess conceptual relevance and theoretical contribution. This iterative refinement process ensured that the final body of literature reflected both breadth and depth across the study's main thematic domains. This iterative selection process reflects semi-systematic review methodologies, which prioritize conceptual relevance over strict quantitative inclusion thresholds (Snyder, 2019).

3.1. Data Analysis and Synthesis

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis, which involved multiple readings and coding to identify recurring themes, theoretical perspectives, and conceptual relationships. The analysis focused on areas of convergence and divergence across studies, particularly regarding how inclusion is conceptualized within smart tourism ecosystems and how it interacts with consumer experience, digital engagement, and innovation.

Rather than presenting the literature descriptively, the review adopts a critical synthesis approach to evaluate underlying assumptions, identify inconsistencies, and highlight theoretical gaps. This approach enables the development of an integrated conceptual understanding of inclusive smart tourism management (Tranfield et al., 2003).

3.2. Meta-Synthesis Approach

To complement the semi-systematic review and enhance the interpretive depth of the analysis, this study adopts a qualitative meta-synthesis approach. Meta-synthesis is particularly appropriate for research domains characterized by conceptual fragmentation and interdisciplinary development, as it enables the integration and reinterpretation of findings across diverse theoretical streams without relying on statistical aggregation (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Snyder, 2019).



Unlike quantitative meta-analysis, which focuses on aggregating empirical effect sizes, meta-synthesis emphasizes interpretive integration, allowing researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and underlying assumptions across studies. This approach is widely used in management and tourism research where the objective is theory development rather than statistical generalization.

In the context of this study, meta-synthesis facilitates the integration of insights from research on smart tourism, inclusion, consumer experience, digital engagement, and innovation, enabling a holistic understanding of how these constructs interact within tourism business environments. Through this interpretive process, the review moves beyond descriptive summarization to develop a conceptual synthesis that highlights both areas of convergence and theoretical tensions within literature.

The meta-synthesis process followed an iterative interpretive procedure. First, key themes identified during the thematic analysis were compared across studies to identify recurring conceptual patterns. Second, relationships among themes were examined to explore how inclusion is positioned within smart tourism ecosystems and how it influences experiential and organizational outcomes. Third, the synthesis focused on identifying gaps, inconsistencies, and underexplored relationships, particularly regarding the integration of inclusion into smart tourism strategies and its links with digital engagement and innovation.

This interpretive synthesis enabled the development of a conceptual map of literature, highlighting the multidimensional nature of inclusive smart tourism management and clarifying how different research streams contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon. The approach also supports the identification of theoretical gaps that inform the proposed research framework and future research directions.

By adopting a meta-synthesis approach, the study enhances methodological rigor while maintaining flexibility in interpreting diverse sources, providing a robust foundation for theory building in the emerging field of inclusive smart tourism.

4. Results

Thematic analysis of the literature identified key conceptual domains that shape current understanding of inclusive smart tourism management. Table 1 summarizes the main themes, core concepts, and representative sources, highlighting the multidimensional nature of the research field and supporting the integrative perspective adopted in this study.

The thematic synthesis presented in Table 1 provides a structured overview of the key conceptual domains identified in the literature on inclusive smart tourism management. The table organizes reviewed studies into core thematic areas, highlighting the main concepts, dominant arguments, and representative sources that shape the field's current understanding. This structured mapping illustrates how literature converges around several interrelated themes, including smart tourism management, inclusion, consumer experience, digital engagement, innovation, and the role of tourism businesses in operationalizing inclusive practices.

By categorizing the literature into thematic domains, the table demonstrates the multidimensional nature of the research field and clarifies how different streams of research contribute to the broader conceptual framework of the study. In particular, it highlights the strong emphasis on technological transformation and digital engagement in smart tourism research, while also revealing the growing recognition of inclusion as a critical yet still insufficiently integrated dimension.



Furthermore, the thematic synthesis illustrates the central role of consumer experience and emotional engagement in shaping tourism outcomes, as well as the influence of social media and digital platforms in transforming consumer behaviour. The inclusion of themes related to innovation and co-creation reflects the growing importance of participatory, dynamic tourism ecosystems, while the focus on tourism businesses underscores their role in translating inclusive principles into practice.

Importantly, the table also reveals areas of convergence across studies, such as the recognition of digital technologies as enablers of value co-creation, as well as areas of fragmentation, particularly regarding the integration of inclusion within smart tourism frameworks. This synthesis therefore identifies theoretical gaps and reinforces the need for a more integrated perspective that connects technological, experiential, and organizational dimensions through the lens of inclusion.

Table 1. Thematic Literature

Theme	Key Concepts	Main Arguments in Literature	Sources
Smart Tourism Management	ICT integration, data analytics, smart ecosystems, value co-creation	Smart tourism enhances destination competitiveness through digital infrastructures, real-time data, and stakeholder collaboration, but requires governance and organizational capabilities beyond technology adoption.	Alsharif et al. (2024); Gretzel et al. (2015); Sigala (2018); Hall (2019)
Inclusion in Tourism	Accessibility, diversity, equitable participation, inclusive design	Inclusion promotes equitable access and enhances social and economic value; however, its integration into smart tourism strategies remains fragmented and underdeveloped.	Darcy & Dickson (2009); Scheyvens & Biddulph (2018);
Consumer Experience	Experience economy, emotional engagement, multidimensional experience	Tourism experiences are shaped by emotional, cognitive, and sensory dimensions that influence satisfaction and behavioural intentions.	Aarabe et al. (2024); Verhoef et al. (2009); Chatzopoulou et al. (2022)
Digital Engagement and Social Media	Social media influence, online communities, digital interaction	Social media and digital platforms shape travel decisions, destination image, and customer engagement through user-generated content and influencer marketing.	Chatzopoulou et al. (2025)
Innovation in Tourism	Digital platforms, disruptive innovation, service innovation	Innovation enhances competitiveness and resilience, though its contribution to inclusive outcomes remains uneven across contexts.	Poulaki et al. (2024); Sigala (2018)
Inclusion in Tourism Businesses	Inclusive service design, workforce diversity, accessible infrastructure	Tourism businesses operationalize inclusion through service design and organizational practices, contributing to customer satisfaction and social value creation.	Baum et al. (2016); Scheyvens & Biddulph (2018)
Inclusive Smart	Co-creation, digital participation,	Inclusive smart tourism ecosystems enable participation and value co-creation but	Paiva et al. (2025); Gretzel et al. (2015); Sigala (2018)



Theme	Key Concepts	Main Arguments in Literature	Sources
Tourism	stakeholder	remain insufficiently explored as integrated	
Ecosystems	collaboration	frameworks.	

5. Discussion

The meta-synthesis of the literature provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of inclusion within smart tourism management by revealing a set of interrelated conceptual domains that collectively shape tourism ecosystems. The findings highlight that inclusive smart tourism is not defined solely by technological advancement but rather emerges from the dynamic interaction between technological infrastructures, consumer experiences, digital engagement processes, innovation, and organizational practices.

The analysis confirms that smart tourism serves as a foundational enabling context that supports value co-creation, personalization, and operational efficiency through the integration of digital technologies, data analytics, and interconnected platforms. However, the literature consistently indicates that technological development alone is insufficient to ensure positive tourism outcomes. Instead, the effectiveness of smart tourism ecosystems depends on the extent to which technological capabilities are complemented by inclusive governance structures, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic alignment. This perspective reinforces the understanding of smart tourism as a socio-technical system in which social and experiential dimensions are as critical as technological infrastructures.

Within this context, inclusion emerges as a central yet still underdeveloped dimension of smart tourism management. Although existing research recognizes the importance of accessibility, diversity, and equitable participation, inclusion is often treated as a complementary element rather than a core strategic driver. The findings suggest that positioning inclusion at the center of smart tourism ecosystems can enhance both social value creation and destination competitiveness by ensuring that tourism experiences are accessible and meaningful for diverse visitor segments. This highlights the need to shift from viewing inclusion as a compliance requirement to recognizing it as a strategic capability that supports long-term value creation.

Consumer experience appears as a key mechanism through which inclusion influences tourism outcomes (Lee & Jan, 2022). Literature consistently demonstrates that emotional engagement, experiential quality, and meaningful interactions shape satisfaction, loyalty, and behavioural intentions. Inclusive environments contribute to stronger emotional bonds between tourists and destinations by fostering a sense of belonging, perceived fairness, and psychological comfort. This reinforces the argument that inclusion enhances not only social equity but also experiential value, positioning consumer experience as a critical pathway linking inclusive practices with organizational and destination performance.

Digital engagement further strengthens inclusive smart tourism ecosystems by enabling participation, interaction, and co-creation. Social media platforms, online communities, and digital content enable tourists to actively contribute to the development of experiences and destination narratives. The findings suggest that digital technologies extend beyond information sharing by facilitating participatory experiences that enhance perceived inclusiveness and emotional connection. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of digital engagement in promoting inclusive outcomes depends on tourism organizations' ability to design inclusive digital environments that accommodate diverse user needs.

Innovation emerges as a critical factor supporting the adaptability and resilience of tourism systems. The literature indicates that innovation enhances service customization,



operational flexibility, and responsiveness to changing consumer expectations. However, the relationship between innovation and inclusion remains complex and insufficiently explored. While innovation creates opportunities for improving accessibility and personalization, its contribution to inclusive tourism depends on strategic orientation, organizational capabilities, and stakeholder collaboration. This suggests that innovation must align with inclusive objectives to ensure technological advancements translate into equitable tourism experiences.

Tourism businesses are identified as key actors in translating inclusive principles into practice. Organizational practices such as inclusive service design, workforce diversity, and accessible infrastructure play a crucial role in shaping customer experiences and operationalizing inclusion within smart tourism ecosystems. The findings emphasize that businesses act as intermediaries between technological capabilities and consumer outcomes, highlighting the importance of embedding inclusion into business strategies rather than treating it as a peripheral consideration.

A central insight emerging from the synthesis is the strong interdependence among the identified constructs. Inclusion interacts with consumer experience through emotional engagement, while digital engagement facilitates co-creation processes that enhance perceived inclusiveness. Innovation supports organizational adaptability, and smart tourism provides the enabling infrastructure that connects these dimensions. This interconnectedness underscores the need for a holistic perspective that moves beyond isolated examination of individual constructs toward an integrated understanding of inclusive smart tourism ecosystems.

Despite the growing body of literature, the findings reveal several conceptual gaps that limit the current understanding of inclusive smart tourism. In particular, limited research examines inclusion as a central strategic construct within smart tourism frameworks, while the emotional mechanisms linking inclusion to behavioural outcomes remain underexplored. Furthermore, empirical evidence on how digital engagement fosters inclusive participation is still limited, and the interaction between innovation and inclusion requires further theoretical development. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing both theoretical knowledge and practical applications in tourism management.

Overall, the integrated analysis highlights that inclusive smart tourism should be understood as a multidimensional ecosystem in which technological infrastructures, experiential processes, and organizational practices interact dynamically to shape tourism outcomes. By positioning inclusion as a central driver rather than a peripheral element, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how tourism systems can create value that is not only technologically advanced but also socially inclusive and experientially meaningful.

5. Implications

This study advances the conceptual understanding of inclusion within smart tourism management by positioning it as a central construct rather than a peripheral consideration. While previous research has primarily examined smart tourism from a technological perspective, the findings underscore the importance of integrating social and experiential dimensions to enhance understanding of tourism ecosystems. First, the study synthesizes fragmented research streams and proposes an integrated perspective that connects inclusion, consumer experience, digital engagement, and innovation. By uniting these constructs, the study extends smart tourism literature beyond its traditional focus on technological



infrastructure and emphasizes the significance of socio-technical interactions. Second, the findings contribute to experience theory by highlighting emotional engagement as a key mechanism linking inclusion to behavioural outcomes. This perspective reinforces that tourism experiences are shaped not only by service quality and technological capabilities but also by perceptions of fairness, belonging, and accessibility. Third, the study contributes to innovation literature by demonstrating the conditional relationship between innovation and inclusive outcomes. The findings indicate that innovation alone does not guarantee inclusive tourism development unless supported by appropriate organizational capabilities and strategic alignment. Finally, the study proposes a holistic conceptual framework for inclusive smart tourism ecosystems, emphasizing the interdependence among technological, experiential, and organizational dimensions. This integrative approach provides a foundation for future empirical research and theoretical development in the field.

The findings present several practical implications for tourism managers, policymakers, and destination planners aiming to enhance competitiveness while promoting inclusive tourism development. Tourism organizations should prioritize inclusion as a strategic objective rather than a compliance requirement. Integrating inclusive principles into service design, marketing strategies, and customer engagement initiatives can improve customer satisfaction, strengthen brand reputation, and expand market reach. Additionally, designing inclusive customer experiences that foster emotional engagement and a sense of belonging is essential. Managers should create environments that accommodate diverse visitor needs through personalized services, accessible infrastructure, and inclusive communication practices. Digital engagement strategies should also be utilized to promote inclusive participation, as social media platforms, online communities, and digital content can facilitate co-creation and strengthen relationships with diverse customer segments. Furthermore, innovation initiatives must align with inclusion goals to ensure technological advancements contribute to equitable tourism experiences, necessitating investment in training, organizational capabilities, and strategic planning. Finally, collaboration among stakeholders, including businesses, local communities, and policymakers, is crucial for developing inclusive smart tourism ecosystems that balance technological advancement with social value creation.

6. Future research

The existing literature provides significant insights into smart tourism, consumer experience, innovation, and sustainability; however, several gaps remain that offer promising opportunities for future research.

- *Integration of Inclusion within Smart Tourism Models:* Future research should further explore how inclusion can be systematically integrated into smart tourism management frameworks. While current studies emphasize technological efficiency and personalization, there is limited empirical evidence on how smart technologies can enhance accessibility and equitable participation across diverse tourist segments. Researchers could examine how digital tools such as artificial intelligence, mobile applications, and smart infrastructure can support inclusive service delivery and improve tourism accessibility for individuals with diverse needs. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in assessing how inclusive smart tourism initiatives evolve over time and influence destination competitiveness.

- *Consumer Experience and Emotional Mechanisms:* Although consumer experience has been widely studied, further research is needed to understand the emotional mechanisms that link inclusion to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Future studies could explore the mediating role of emotional engagement, place attachment, and perceived inclusiveness in shaping



behavioural intentions. Additionally, experimental research designs could examine how inclusive service environments influence tourists' perceptions of authenticity, trust, and well-being. Understanding these psychological mechanisms would contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of inclusive tourism experiences.

- *Digital Engagement and Co-Creation*: Future research should investigate how digital engagement strategies, including influencer marketing, user-generated content, and virtual communities, contribute to inclusive tourism experiences. While existing studies highlight the importance of social media in shaping travel decisions, more research is needed to understand how digital platforms can foster inclusive participation and co-creation among diverse stakeholders. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts could provide insights into how digital engagement strategies vary across markets and how cultural factors influence perceptions of inclusion.

- *Innovation and Organizational Capabilities*: Another important direction for future research is the examination of organizational capabilities required to implement inclusive innovation. Studies could explore how leadership, organizational culture, and strategic orientation influence the adoption of inclusive practices within tourism businesses.

Moreover, research could investigate the role of public–private partnerships in promoting inclusive smart tourism initiatives and supporting innovation at the destination level.

- *Sustainability and Inclusive Value Creation*: Future studies should also examine the relationship between inclusion and sustainability, particularly how inclusive tourism practices contribute to social sustainability and community well-being. There is a need for empirical research that explores how inclusive strategies influence responsible consumer behaviour, environmental awareness, and local community engagement. Mixed-method approaches combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from stakeholders could provide a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive value creation processes.

- *Methodological Recommendations*: Future research could benefit from employing advanced quantitative methods such as structural equation modelling (SEM or PLS-SEM) to examine complex relationships among inclusion, experience, innovation, and sustainability.

Additionally, qualitative approaches such as case studies and interviews could provide deeper insights into how inclusive practices are implemented in real-world tourism contexts.

- *Proposed Conceptual Framework*: Based on the literature, a multidimensional conceptual framework is proposed to examine the role of inclusion in smart tourism management. The framework integrates key constructs including inclusion, consumer experience, digital engagement, innovation, sustainability, and behavioural outcomes. The proposed model positions inclusion as a central driver influencing both customer experience and organizational outcomes within smart tourism ecosystems.

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