MAPPING THE INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE OF SERVICE INNOVATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: ***Analyzing 261 Scopus publications (2020-2024) via VOSviewer, this study maps the intellectual landscape of hotel service innovation. It synthesizes eight identified clusters into a novel four-stage conceptual framework: organizational foundations, ecosystems, strategic drivers, and sustainable performance. The research highlights emerging trends like green innovation and AI, offering strategic insights to address fragmented collaboration and enhance competitive advantage for stakeholders.***

• Keywords: *service innovation, hotel industry, bibliometric analysis, conceptual framework, green innovation.*

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1. Introduction

Driven by technological advancements and sustainability pressures, service innovation has become a prerequisite for survival in the hospitality industry (Zhao et al., 2024; Haldorai et al., 2022). Defined as value-enhancing changes to services or processes (Lei & Chen, 2023), recent research highlights diverse drivers ranging from green inclusive leadership to digital transformation (Vena-Oya et al., 2024; Deputata et al., 2024). However, despite growing interest, the field remains theoretically fragmented, lacking a unifying framework to guide managerial practice. To address this gap, this study employs bibliometric analysis of 261 Scopus publications (2020-2024) to answer five key questions: RQ1: What are the publication trends and evolutionary patterns? RQ2: Who are the most influential contributors (authors, institutions, countries)? RQ3: What are the core thematic clusters constituting the field's foundation? RQ4: How do these clusters interconnect to form a conceptual framework? RQ5: What are the emerging trends guiding future inquiry? By synthesizing eight thematic clusters into a novel four-stage process model, this study provides a comprehensive collaboration map and a strategic roadmap for future academic inquiry and policy development.

2. Methodology

To map the intellectual landscape of service innovation in the hotel industry, this study utilized data from the Scopus database, chosen for its comprehensive coverage of hospitality literature. The data collection spanned from January 2020 to 2024 to capture recent evolutionary trends. The search query *TITLE-ABS-KEY (service AND innovation AND hotel*)* was applied, restricted to final-stage English articles and conference papers within Business, Social Sciences, Decision Sciences, and Multidisciplinary domains. This rigorous screening process yielded a final dataset of 261 documents. Data analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010) through two primary approaches: (1) Performance Analysis: To quantify annual publication trends and identify the most influential authors, institutions, and journals and (2) Science Mapping: Employing co-authorship analysis to examine collaboration networks, keyword co-occurrence to identify thematic clusters and emerging trends, and bibliographic coupling to reveal the underlying intellectual structure of the field.

3. Research Results

3.1. Performance Analysis

The analysis of 261 publications (2020-2024)

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reveals a robust upward trajectory, rising from 41 articles in 2020 to 65 in 2023, reflecting the industry's urgent need to adapt to technological shifts and sustainability pressures.

Table 1 synthesizes the top contributors shaping this field. The International Journal of Hospitality Management leads with 35 articles (13.4%), followed by Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management (18 articles). Geographically, China dominates with 39 publications, followed by the USA (24) and Thailand (23), indicating a global yet concentrated research landscape. Institutional leadership is spearheaded by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (7 articles). The author network is decentralized, with Bhat, D.A.R., Luu, T.T., and Sharma, V. sharing the top rank (4 articles each), suggesting a broad base of scholarly contribution rather than dominance by a few individuals.

Table 1. Top Journals, Countries, Institutions, and Authors (2020-2024)

Rank	Top Journals (Articles)	Top Countries (Articles)	Top Institutions (Articles)	Top Authors (Articles)
1	Int. J. of Hospitality Mgt. (35)	China (39)	Hong Kong Polytechnic Univ. (7)	Bhat, D.A.R. (4)
2	J. of Hosp. & Tourism Mgt. (18)	USA (24)	Swinburne Univ. of Tech. (5)	Luu, T.T. (4)
3	The Service Industries J. (15)	Thailand (23)	Univ. of Jammu (5)	Sharma, V. (4)
4	Int. J. of Contemp. Hosp. Mgt. (12)	Spain (22)	Univ. of Jordan (5)	Hoang, G. (3)
5	Tourism Management (10)	India (20)	Amity Univ. (5)	Nguyen, T.T. (3)

3.2. Science Mapping: Thematic Clusters and Evolution

To map the field's conceptual structure, a VOSviewer co-occurrence analysis identified 64 keywords from 1,309 items. The resulting network (Figure 1) reveals eight algorithmic clusters, synthesized here into four strategic meta-clusters:

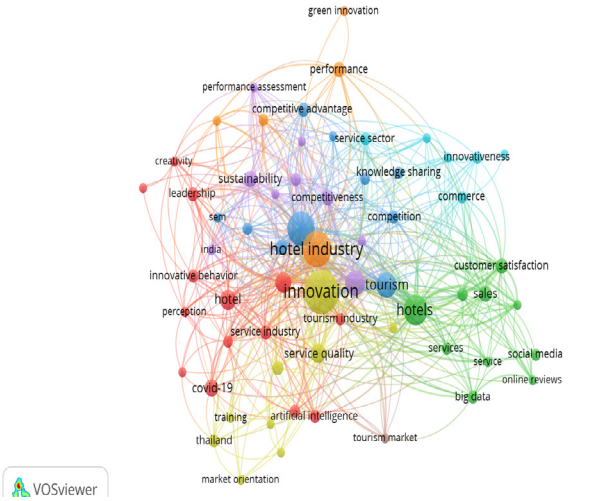
Organizational and Human Foundations (Red): Focuses on internal antecedents like leadership and innovative behavior. This aligns with Zhao et al. (2024), who linked "green inclusive leadership" to employees' innovative behavior.

Innovation and Operations Ecosystem (Yellow/Green): Connects innovation with operational execution (AI, service quality). Studies like Aboramadan et al. (2022) confirm the integration of eco-friendly practices within this operational framework.

Strategic Drivers (Blue/Purple): Encapsulates macro-level imperatives such as competitiveness and sustainability within the broader tourism sector (Bhutto et al., 2021).

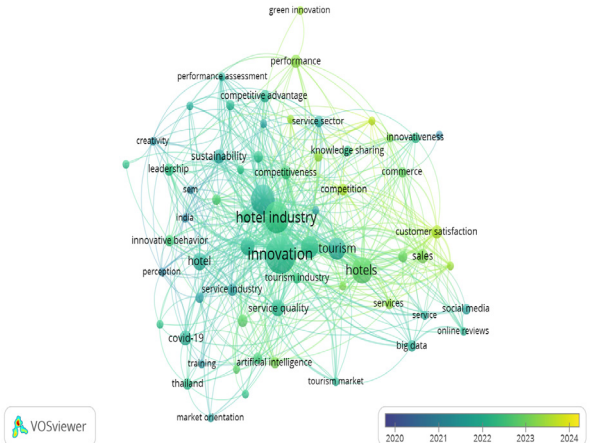
Sustainable Performance (Orange): Centers on outcome variables, positioning green innovation as a key driver of competitive advantage and environmental performance (Haldorai et al., 2023).

Figure 1. VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence network map



Source: authors, 2025

Figure 2. VOSviewer Overlay Visualization



Source: authors, 2025

Evolutionary trends: The temporal overlay analysis (Figure 2) traces the field's evolution. Foundational concepts (c. 2020) like

"innovativeness" transitioned into core themes (c. 2021-2022) such as "sustainability" and "service quality". Most notably, recent frontiers (c. 2023-2024) signal a distinct shift toward "artificial intelligence" and "green innovation," marking them as the critical emerging streams for future inquiry.

4. Discussion

4.1. The four-stage process framework

This study synthesizes the fragmented literature into a novel four-stage process-oriented framework, mapping the innovation value chain from antecedents to outcomes:

(1) Foundational Enablers: Innovation begins with human capital. Consistent with Zhao et al. (2024), "green inclusive leadership" is the engine that cultivates employee innovative behavior.

(2) Operational Ecosystems: These foundations enable an ecosystem where technology (AI) and operations intersect to enhance guest experiences, a link validated by Aboramadan et al. (2022).

(3) Strategic Drivers: At the macro level, sustainability shifts from a compliance issue to a central strategic driver essential for survival (Bhutto et al., 2021).

(4) Sustainable Performance: The process culminates in measurable outcomes, where green innovation directly drives environmental and competitive performance (Haldorai et al., 2023).

4.2. Implications

Theoretical contributions: This study advances the field by offering an integrative lens that connects micro-level theories (e.g., Self-Determination Theory) with macro-level competitive advantage. It documents the critical evolution of sustainability from a peripheral concern to a core element embedded in both strategic drivers and performance outcomes.

Managerial Roadmap:

(1) Invest in People: Managers must prioritize inclusive leadership training to foster engagement.

(2) Holistic Integration: Innovation should not be siloed but integrated across technology and operations.

(3) Measure What Matters: Executives must develop KPIs that evaluate the tangible returns of green innovation initiatives rather than treating them as mere branding exercises.

4.3. Limitations and future research

While this study provides a comprehensive map using Scopus data, it is limited by the descriptive nature of bibliometric analysis. Future research should move beyond co-occurrence to empirically test the causal pathways within this four-stage framework. Longitudinal studies tracking emerging trends like the circular economy and service robots will be vital to illuminating the field's future trajectory.

5. Conclusion

This study systematically maps the intellectual structure of hotel service innovation (2020-2024), synthesizing 261 publications into a coherent framework comprising organizational foundations, operational ecosystems, strategic drivers, and performance outcomes. The findings reveal a decisive shift toward AI and green innovation as the dominant frontiers. Theoretically, this research bridges the gap between fragmented micro-macro perspectives. Practically, it provides stakeholders with a strategic roadmap to leverage human capital and sustainability for enduring competitive advantage.

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