Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Research in Tourism and Hospitality:
Insights from Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study reviews the existing literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the tourism and hospitality (T&H) sectors. Using bibliometric analysis, it aims to present a comprehensive overview of the scientific structure of DEI research and propose a future research agenda to address ongoing challenges and gaps in the field.

Design/methodology/approach: A two-stage bibliometric methodology was applied. First, 670 articles were collected from Scopus and Web of Science. Then, scientometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer, incorporating descriptive analysis, co-citation network analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis to provide a multidimensional research landscape of DEI in T&H.

Findings: The analysis identified five critical thematic clusters: gender diversity and equality, cultural participation and community engagement, host-guest interactions and social dynamics, economic disparities and empowerment, and accessible and inclusive tourism. The study also highlights gaps, particularly around intersectionality and invisible disabilities, offering a roadmap for future research in the T&H industry.

Practical implications: This research offers insights for industry practitioners, emphasizing the need for comprehensive DEI strategies to improve inclusivity and equity in both workplace environments and customer experiences, ultimately enhancing organizational performance.

Originality/value: This study provides a thorough bibliometric review of DEI research in T&H, mapping its intellectual structure, and identifying key research gaps. It offers significant value by proposing a research agenda to address these gaps and advancing DEI knowledge in the industry.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Bibliometric Analysis, Tourism and Hospitality, VOSviewer

1. Introduction

The tourism and hospitality (T&H) industry is a significant driver of the global economy, contributing over 10% to global GDP and employing more than 330 million people worldwide (WTTC, 2024). Despite its economic importance, the industry faces persistent challenges in implementing effective DEI strategies. A Deloitte (2024) report revealed that while 80% of hospitality executives recognize DEI's importance in fostering innovation and guest experiences, only 32% have fully integrated DEI strategies. Similarly, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023) highlights that marginalized groups, including people with disabilities (PwD) and ethnic minorities, face barriers to fully participating in tourism. These gaps between industry aspirations and practices underline the need for an evidence-based approach to DEI in T&H.

DEI plays a critical role in enhancing organizational performance, improving employee engagement, and fostering a welcoming environment for diverse guests. Several review articles on DEI have been conducted, focusing on specific dimensions such as gender (Russen et al., 2021), age (Sakdiyakorn & Wattanacharoensil, 2018), disability (Manoharan et al., 2024), and race and ethnicity (Floyd et al., 2008). Moreover, Mohammadi et al. (2022) adopted a bibliometric review to examine workplace diversity research in the T&H sectors from 2002 to 2022, concluding that gender and ethnicity are the most studied dimensions, while discussions on gender equality and work-life balance have seen significant growth in recent years. However, these reviews reveal clear research gaps. Although retrospective articles on DEI have increased, most focus predominantly on the "diversity" dimension, often neglecting a comprehensive overview of DEI research. While van Bommel (2024) conducted a bibliometric analysis focusing on diversity and inclusion from a business management perspective, the study excluded equity due to its frequent association with concepts such as brand equity and organizational financial performance. However, the exploration of equity is particularly significant within the context of T&H, as it encompasses critical dimensions of fairness and justice that directly impact stakeholders especially disadvantaged groups such as indigenous, PwD especially invisible disabilities, etc. (Manoharan & Singal, 2017), and resource distribution (Benjamin et al., 2020).

These gaps highlight the need for a more holistic understanding of DEI that encompasses all three dimensions and explores their interconnections in organizational and industry contexts. To address these gaps, this study conducts a bibliometric review, mapping the field's development, identifying key clusters, and proposing a future

research agenda. Building on this foundation, the following three research questions are posed to explore the evolution of DEI research in the T&H domain:

- How are three dimensions of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) conceptually defined, and what are the interrelationships among its three dimensions?
- How has DEI research evolved over time in terms of publication trends and research themes?
- Which journals, authors, and references have been most influential in shaping DEI research?
- What are the emerging topics and potential future directions for DEI research based on bibliometric trends?

A two-stage bibliometric analysis, based on 670 articles from Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), was conducted using VOSviewer. The study's originality lies in applying scientometric tools to systematically map DEI research, offering a data-driven understanding of its intellectual structure. By integrating various dimensions of diversity—gender, ethnicity, disabilities, and socio-economic disparities—the study uncovers underexplored areas like invisible disabilities and intersectionality, often overlooked in traditional DEI research. This innovation enhances analysis rigor and transparency while offering actionable insights and a replicable framework for future studies, advancing DEI in both scholarship and industry.

2. Defining and Integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

DEI are foundational concepts in advancing fairness and representation within the T&H industry. While often used collectively, each dimension addresses different challenges and offers unique value. This section defines each component and presents an integrated framework that captures their interdependence and relevance in the T&H context.

2.1 Diversity

Diversity refers to the presence of individual differences within a group, organization, or society. Despite its frequent use, diversity lacks a universally agreed-upon definition and is often subject to ambiguity and debate (Manoharan & Singal, 2017). April (2021) describes diversity as encompassing the full range of human differences. A widely accepted classification by Manoharan and Singal (2017, p.78) categorizes diversity into "primary/surface-level" dimensions—such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity—and "secondary/deep-level" dimensions, including education, religion, work experience, personality, and income.

Research in T&H has predominantly focused on surface-level diversity, especially gender and ethnicity (Madera et al., 2023), leaving deep-level dimensions comparatively underexplored. Moreover, Mohammadi et al. (2022) emphasize the marginal attention paid to disabilities, particularly invisible ones. Studies by Darcy (2010) and Shaw and Coles (2004) advocate for recognizing both visible and invisible disabilities, as they significantly affect the experiences of employees and guests alike. Addressing diversity comprehensively thus requires acknowledging both visible traits and internal differences that shape human behavior, needs, and contributions in the T&H context.

2.2 Equity

Equity is often conflated with equality but entails a more nuanced approach to fairness. Whereas equality involves treating everyone the same, equity considers individuals' unique circumstances and allocates resources and opportunities accordingly to achieve fair outcomes (Rawls, 1971, 2001). Equity is closely aligned with the concept of distributive justice, which focuses on the fair allocation of power, opportunities, and resources (Jamal & Camargo, 2014).

Despite its significance, equity remains underexplored in T&H DEI literature, partly due to its conceptual complexity and challenges in measurement. Equity is also inherently perceptual—what feels fair to one individual may feel inequitable to another (Ferdman, 2017). For instance, while training opportunities may appear equally available, biases in decision-making or informal access can create perceptions of inequity (Russen & Dawson, 2023). Therefore, equity in the T&H industry must be addressed at both structural and systemic levels, with emphasis on equitable hiring, promotion, and compensation practices (Livingston, 2020). Attention to equity is especially important in addressing the needs of historically marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, and migrant workers.

2.3 Inclusion

Inclusion refers to the creation of environments where individuals from all backgrounds feel welcomed, respected, and able to fully participate. It is not simply about presence or representation but about meaningful engagement. Russen and Dawson (2023), using a critical constructivist lens, argue that inclusion should precede diversity and equity—without inclusive cultures, efforts to diversify or distribute resources equitably may fail to deliver sustainable outcomes.

Inclusion ensures individuals experience a sense of belonging while retaining their

unique identities (April, 2021). Tools like the inclusion-exclusion scale developed by Mor Barak and Cherin (1998) assess participation in decision-making, access to information, and group integration. Inclusion in T&H is vital both in the workplace and in service delivery, ensuring that staff and guests from diverse backgrounds are supported and empowered. As Im and Chung (2023) suggest, inclusive practices must be embedded into organizational culture and strategic operations to create lasting change.

2.4 An Integrated Framework for DEI in Tourism and Hospitality

While diversity, equity, and inclusion are often examined as distinct concepts, they function most effectively when integrated into a cohesive framework—especially within the context T&H industry (Manoharan, 2024). *Diversity* refers to the presence of varied identities and perspectives, including but not limited to race, gender, disability, age, and cultural background. *Equity* involves acknowledging individual needs and circumstances to ensure fair access to opportunities and resources, rather than treating all individuals uniformly. *Inclusion* focuses on fostering environments where all individuals feel respected, valued, and empowered to participate meaningfully.

These three dimensions are inherently interdependent (Feitosa et al., 2022). Diversity without equity can result in tokenism, where representation exists without the structural support necessary to empower marginalized individuals (Ferdman, 2017). Conversely, equity without diversity may promote fairness in theory but fail to embrace the richness that diverse perspectives offer. Inclusion, in the absence of diversity and equity, may create a superficially welcoming environment that lacks the depth required for authentic participation and belonging. Thus, a truly inclusive T&H environment requires the presence and interplay of all three dimensions.

In the T&H industry, adopting an integrated DEI framework involves embedding these principles into both internal operations and guest experiences. Recruitment and promotion should go beyond increasing representation to actively dismantle structural barriers. Equity audits can reveal disparities in access and compensation, enabling targeted action. Inclusion must extend to service design through accessible platforms, multilingual options, and culturally sensitive engagement. DEI should also guide destination development and community involvement, ensuring local voices are included and benefits are fairly shared. This framework offers both a conceptual foundation and a practical roadmap for advancing equity and inclusion across the industry.

3. Methodology

3.1. Stage 1: Data collection

A two-stage bibliometric approach was employed to explore DEI research in T&H. Scopus and WoS are widely recognized as key sources for bibliometric data in T&H research (Koseoglu et al., 2022). In this study, DEI-related research was initially drawn from Scopus as the primary database for analysis. To ensure the reliability and validity of data extraction, a rigorous cross-validation process was implemented. One assistant professor and two PhD students grouped the review team, all with prior publications in SSCI-indexed T&H journals, reviewed the selection process, independently conducted the keyword-based search, and reviewed the results.

We focused on articles in the "Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism" (HLST) category, restricting our scope to Q1 journals based on Clarivate Analytics' 2024 journal impact factor rankings, totaling 34 journals. The search terms TITLE-ABS-KEY (diversity OR equity OR inclusi* OR equality OR discrimination OR stereotype) AND NOT TITLE-ABS-KEY ("brand equity" OR stock) were used. The rationale for selecting the keywords lies in the need to capture a comprehensive and relevant dataset for conducting a bibliometric review of DEI based on previous literature. These keywords were chosen to reflect key dimensions of DEI. The wildcard (*) for "inclusi*" allows for the identification of variations like "inclusion" and "inclusive." To improve analysis quality, we standardized the language to English and selected "article" as the literature type. Following the initial identification, a total of 3,249 records were retrieved. Duplicate entries (1,214 records) and non-peer-reviewed works, such as research notes, editorials, and commentaries (262 records), were removed, resulting in 1,773 articles for further screening.

Discrepancies in article inclusion were resolved through consensus meetings guided by the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Records were screened using the following criteria: 1) exclusion of articles lacking abstracts, authors, or keywords; 2) inclusion of DEI from a human-centric perspective, excluding concepts like biodiversity or geographic diversity.

After screening, 1103 articles were excluded. In total, 670 articles were identified for analysis. To avoid discrepancies from time lags, both Scopus and WoS were searched on the same day, January 6, 2025. Moreover, this review was conducted in strict adherence to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, ensuring a systematic and thorough identification of relevant academic publications (Page et al., 2021). The data collection and cleaning process has been systematically illustrated through the flow diagram presented in Figure 1.
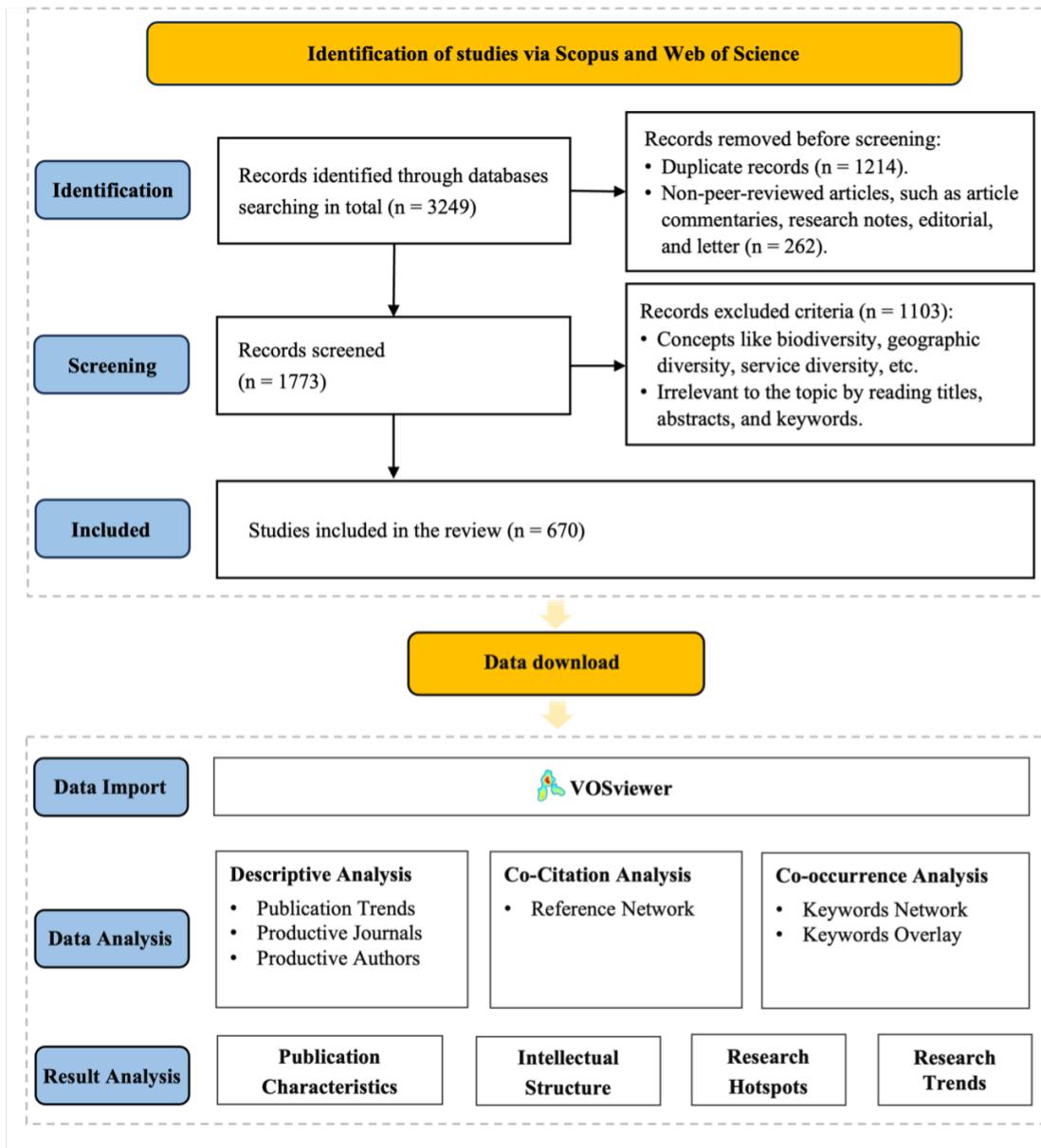
Figure 1. Flow diagram of research design (Source: Authors' own creation)

3.2 Stage 2: Data Analysis

Bibliometrics has found extensive application across various disciplinary fields due to its ability to minimize subjectivity and potential bias (Donthu et al., 2020). After Stage 1 of data collection, the 670 records were analyzed using VOSviewer in Stage 2. VOSviewer is effective for visualizing bibliometric networks, enabling the identification of prominent themes, key contributors, and patterns of collaboration (Kong et al., 2023). It provides robust methods for analyzing intricate data and delivering systematic and visually engaging insights. Leveraging the visualizing tool, this study aims to: (1) discover the growth trend and productive journals, revealing the

evolution and dynamics of the field; (2) analyze co-citation networks from author and reference levels, showcasing the intellectual structure of this domain; (3) identify focal points by co-occurrence network of keywords; (4) develop research trends through co-occurrence overlay visualization of keywords, discovering the state-of-the-art and potential directions.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Publication Trends
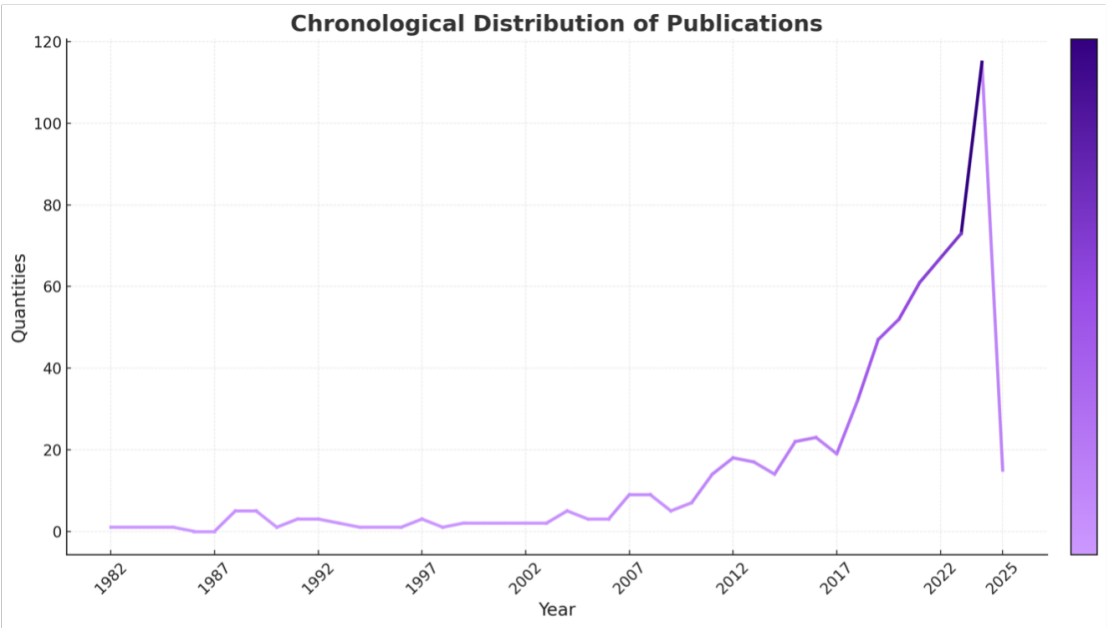
Figure 2. Chronological distribution of publications (Source: Authors' own creation)

Figure 2 illustrates the chronological distribution of publications, revealing a clear progression through three distinct developing periods. Each phase reflects different dynamics in research activity, driven by various social, economic, and technological factors. Early Sprouting Period (1982-2007): The first traceable article was published in 1982, from then on, the number of publications was on the rise. This period represented the initial accumulation of research, highlighting early explorations and laying the groundwork for foundational developments in the field.

Fluctuating Growth Period (2007-2017): This period saw rapid workforce globalization, introducing new challenges in managing diversity and spurring increased research (Devine et al., 2007). Since 2007, however, the T&H sector and its workplaces

have faced continuous disruptions due to broader social, economic, political, and technological shifts (Baum, 2015). This led to a focus on economic recovery and market expansion rather than addressing DEI concerns.

Rapid Expansion Period (2017-Jan 6 2025): This growth was driven by heightened global awareness, spurred by movements like #MeToo (Ram, 2021) and Black Lives Matter (Koh et al., 2023). Additionally, 2017 marked a turning point, as Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) emphasized, with mobility emerging as a critical issue for sustainable societies. Over-tourism challenges prompted the industry to reflect on its practices. This growing awareness, combined with increased corporate, academic, and regulatory efforts to address systemic inequalities, significantly expanded DEI research. Furthermore, technological advancements and the effects of COVID-19 propelled a deeper examination of intersectionality (Yang et al., 2019), leading to more comprehensive studies on DEI within the industry.

4.1.2 Research Profiling

Journals	Total publications	TC	AC	SC	JI
International Journal of Hospitality Management	95	2685	28.3	21.2	9.9
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	89	3878	43.6	23.1	6.9
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	70	1626	23.2	16.9	9.1
Annals of Tourism Research	58	4316	74.4	19.1	10.4
Tourism Management	54	3433	63.6	24.1	10.9
Tourism Management Perspectives	32	558	17.4	15.6	7.3
Current Issues in Tourism	30	787	26.2	15.5	5.7
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	28	535	19.1	13.3	7.6
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	23	628	27.3	8.5	3.4
Journal of Travel Research	22	596	27.1	18.9	8

Note: TC=Total citations; AC=Average citations; SC=Scopus CiteScore 2023; JI= Journal Citation Reports Impact Factor (JCR IF) 2023

Figure 3. Top 10 productive journals (Source: Authors' own creation)

Figure 3 highlights the top 10 journals that have published a significant number of DEI-related studies. The *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (IJHM) and the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (JST) lead DEI research in the T&H industry, publishing 95 and 89 studies, respectively. Following these are the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, and *Tourism Management*, all of which have significantly contributed to DEI discourse. In

terms of average citations, *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Tourism Management* surpassed other journals, reflecting their high-quality articles and leading roles in advancing cutting-edge research, consistent with their high CiteScore and Impact Factor. The upcoming 2024 special issue in the JST, titled "Co-Creating Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Tourism," has already concluded its call for papers, signaling more DEI discussions soon.

4.1.3 Highly Productive Authors

Analyzing influential authors in DEI research is critical to identifying thought leaders and key contributors shaping T&H (Kong et al., 2023). This analysis allows us to understand the scholarly impact of individual researchers, their institutions, and the geographical distribution of DEI-related studies, providing insights into the intellectual development and global collaboration patterns in the discipline. Appendix A ranks authors based on total citations, reflecting their influence in the network of DEI research. Authors like Madera, J.M., and Darcy, S. have made significant contributions, as evidenced by their high h-indices and citation counts, underscoring their substantial scholarly impact. For example, Darcy's work on accessibility has been instrumental in advancing inclusive tourism, while Madera's research focuses on workplace diversity and equity in hospitality. The geographical diversity of authors, including representation from the United States, Australia, and Europe, highlights the global importance of DEI issues in tourism. Additionally, high-impact researchers like Baum, T. and Hsu, C.H.C. have enriched discussions on cultural and organizational inclusion. This sequence of authors, arranged by total link strength, underscores their centrality and connectivity within the field's research ecosystem.

Appendix A. Top 10 authors based on the number of publications

No.	Author	Institution	h-Index	Country	Documents	Citations
1	Madera, J.M.	University of Houston	31	United States	20	545
2	Brewster, Z.W.	Wayne State University	14	United States	9	116
4	Darcy, S.	University of Technology Sydney	39	Australia	9	617
3	Ma, E.	University of Surrey	22	United Kingdom	9	194
5	Dawson, M.	University of Houston	19	United States	8	381
6	Benjamin, S.	The University of Tennessee, Knoxville	13	United States	6	208
7	Luu, T.T.	Swinburne University of Technology	35	Australia	6	177
8	Baum, T	University of Strathclyde	43	United Kingdom	5	414
9	Campos-Soria, J.A.	Universidad de Málaga	16	Spain	5	165
10	Hsu, C.H.C.	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	46	Hong Kong	5	165

Note: Documents here mean DEI related research in Q1 journals

(Source: Authors' own creation)

4.2 Co-Citation Analysis

Co-citation occurs when two publications are cited together in the reference lists of other works (Donthu et al., 2020). Analyzing co-citation patterns reveals connections and similarities in research interests between articles and identifies influential publications in a field (Donthu et al., 2020). Moreover, co-citation analysis can serve as a quantitative method to identify seminal works by analyzing the scholarly impact and influence reflected in citation patterns (Kong et al., 2023). We conducted a co-citation analysis focusing on co-citation references.

4.2.1 Co-Citation Reference

Co-citation reference analysis reveals the intellectual structure of research domains by identifying key works frequently cited together (Fauzi, 2022). Appendix B lists the top 10 co-citation references based on total link strength, which measures the strength of co-citation relationships and highlights central works in the field of T&H studies. The results reveal two prominent research themes: gender-related issues and accessibility

for PwD. Both gender- and disability-related issues are integral to the DEI discourse, making them central themes in co-citation reference analysis. Their widespread recognition and relevance across disciplines, combined with their focus on addressing systemic inequities, contribute to their prominence in DEI literature. Gender-focused studies address critical topics such as the structural barriers women face in tourism management, exemplified by Carvalho et al. (2019) in their exploration of the "glass ceiling." Additionally, Alarcón and Cole (2019) emphasized the integration of gender perspectives into sustainability initiatives, promoting inclusivity. Regarding accessibility, Darcy (2010) highlighted barriers in key tourism sectors, while later works such as Darcy et al. (2020) advocated for inclusive destination experiences that ensure equity for disabled tourists. The scope of accessibility research has expanded beyond wheelchair users to encompass other disabilities, such as visual impairments (Devile & Kastenholz, 2018).

Appendix B. Top 10 co-citation references based on the total link strength

No.	Author	Focus	Weight <Total link strength>	Citations
1	Darcy, S. (2010)	Accessible tourism	156	225
2	McKercher, B. & Darcy, S. (2018)	Conceptualization: barriers faced by disabilities when traveling	143	131
3	Darcy, S., McKercher, B., & Schweinsberg, S. (2020)	Conceptualization: accessible tourism	125	127
4	Ferguson, L. (2011)	Critical analysis of Gendered issues	125	133
5	Alarcón, D & Cole, S. (2019)	Gender equality and sustainability	120	182
6	Buhalis, D. & Michopoulou, E. (2011)	Differentiate accessibility market in Europe and the needs of its sub-segments.	119	166
7	Carvalho, I., Costa, C., Lykke, N., & Torres, A. (2019)	Gender inequality in tourism management	115	88
8	Duffy, L. N. et al. (2015)	Gender ideology shift	102	91
9	Ferguson, L. & Alarcón, D. (2015)	Critical reflection of integrating gender into sustainable tourism projects	96	91
10	Santero-Sanchez, R. et al. (2015)	Index construction: job quality considering gender difference	96	131

(Source: Authors' own creation)

4.3 Co-Occurrence Network of Terms Analysis

Co-occurrence network analysis is an effective method for identifying frequently mentioned keywords in references, revealing key research themes within the discipline (Kong et al., 2023). VOSviewer was employed as a visualization tool to create a map depicting the keyword co-occurrence network and overlay timeline, facilitating exploration of current research themes and future directions (see Figures 4(a) & 4(b)). This analysis systematically organized keywords into thematic categories, using color coding to visually group related nodes (Kong et al., 2023). To enhance clarity, synonymous keywords with varied spellings were consolidated. In total, 5 clusters, 86 nodes, and 1,220 links were represented and analyzed. The clusters are inherently interconnected rather than independent. The significant overlap between Cluster 4 (Blue) and Cluster 5 (Purple) underscores that reducing economic disparities through empowerment initiatives aligns with social sustainability by fostering equitable participation and supporting underprivileged communities. Similarly, accessible and inclusive tourism advances sustainable practices by promoting equity and embracing the diversity of travelers, including those with disabilities and marginalized groups. These overlaps demonstrate that effective DEI initiatives are not only ethical imperatives but also essential to building a sustainable future for the T&H industry.
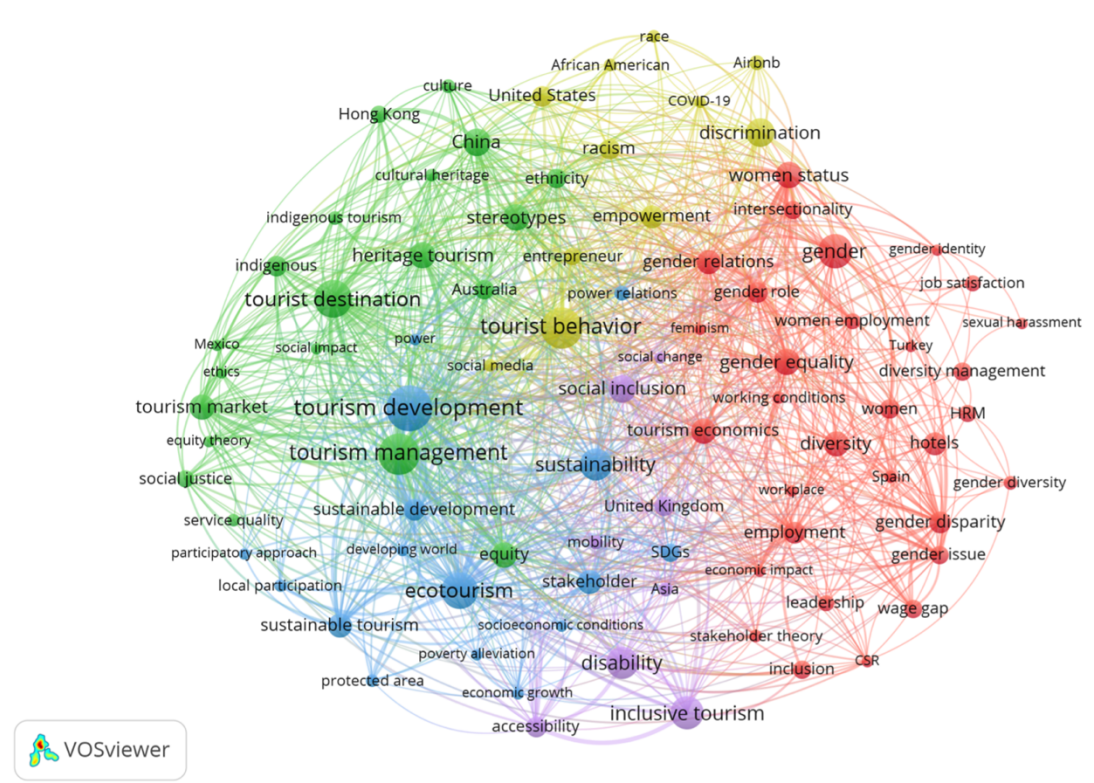
Figure 4(a). Co-occurrence keyword network (Source: Authors' own creation)

Figure 4(b). Co-occurrence overlay timeline of keywords (Source: Authors' own creation)

Cluster 1 (Red: Gender Diversity and Equality) comprises 31 items with representative keywords such as "gender," "gender equality," "intersectionality," "diversity management," "inclusion," "tourism economics," and "stakeholder theory." Im et al. (2025) highlighted that women constitute a significant share of the workforce, accounting for 54%, a proportion notably higher than in the overall economy. Nevertheless, gendered stereotypes and systemic biases often result in disparities such as wage inequality, restricted career advancement, and occupational segregation, which ultimately impact the economic dynamics.

Discussions of gender in the T&H sector have evolved significantly over time. Initially, gender issues, particularly related to women, were framed within a feminist context, leading to a somewhat narrow interpretation (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015). Calás et al. (2014) outlined two primary metatheoretical perspectives on gender: one based on biological determinism and the other on social construction, both of which shaped gender discussions in T&H. However, this binary view often limited understanding, overlooking the complexities of gender diversity. Some scholars argue that factors like resource advantage should also be considered when exploring the impact of gender on organizational outcomes such as financial performance and business growth (Russen et al., 2021). Over time, influenced by postmodern theory,

gender relations have been understood as emerging from discourse and interaction between groups, and research has expanded to consider the intersectionality of key social categories (see Figure 4(b); Mooney, 2020). Acknowledging intersectionality allows researchers to better understand how different identities—such as race, class, and sexual orientation—interact with gender to shape the experiences of women in tourism (Chambers, 2022). This broader understanding of gender dynamics not only deepens academic inquiry but also has practical implications for fostering inclusivity and equity in the industry. Russen & Dawson (2023) argue that merely promoting individuals from multiple underrepresented groups, like Black women, into leadership is insufficient to address DEI issues effectively.

Stakeholder theory also acts as a prominent keyword in Cluster 1. Im & Chung (2023) identified three primary applications of stakeholder theory: descriptively, to outline a firm's characteristics and its relationships with stakeholders; instrumentally, to examine how stakeholder management influences firm-level outcomes such as financial performance; and normatively, to highlight ethical principles and responsibilities in addressing stakeholder needs. Within T&H, stakeholder theory is frequently employed to explore the role of gender diversity within top management teams and its impact on corporate social responsibility initiatives (Quintana-García et al., 2018).

Cluster 2 (Green: Cultural Participation and Community Engagement) includes 20 items. Representative keywords such as "tourist destination", "tourism management," "heritage tourism," "equity," "social justice," "equity theory," "indigenous," and "ethics" reflect key themes, with "Australia," "Canada," "Hong Kong," "China," and "Mexico" as major sites. While tourism expansion generates opportunities, including employment and income, it also introduces challenges and negative impacts (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). For instance, many destinations fail to incorporate traditional elements like cultural heritage and ethnic resources into development. Stephenson (2014) criticized Dubai's focus on constructing "world-first" buildings, arguing this neglects indigenous societal contexts in development. As a result, sustainable tourism development has gained increased attention (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012).

Additionally, we manually categorized 670 articles, counting how frequently DEI were mentioned (see Figure 5). Notably, discussions on DEI in T&H originated primarily from conversations about equity. Among the reviewed articles, Morgan Jr (1982) was the first to highlight how wage, gender, and race inequities in American society negatively impacted T&H, contributing to workforce shortages. Human rights legislation advancements in the 1980s reflected social progress, increased public

awareness, economic transformation, and the influence of international human rights standards, fostering the growth of a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive society. Additionally, although the literature from 2025 is still relatively limited, the majority of studies approach DEI as an integrated framework, a trend not observed in earlier years. This shift indicates a growing recognition among scholars of the importance of examining DEI as a cohesive whole, rather than as separate dimensions, reflecting an evolution in the academic understanding of the subject.
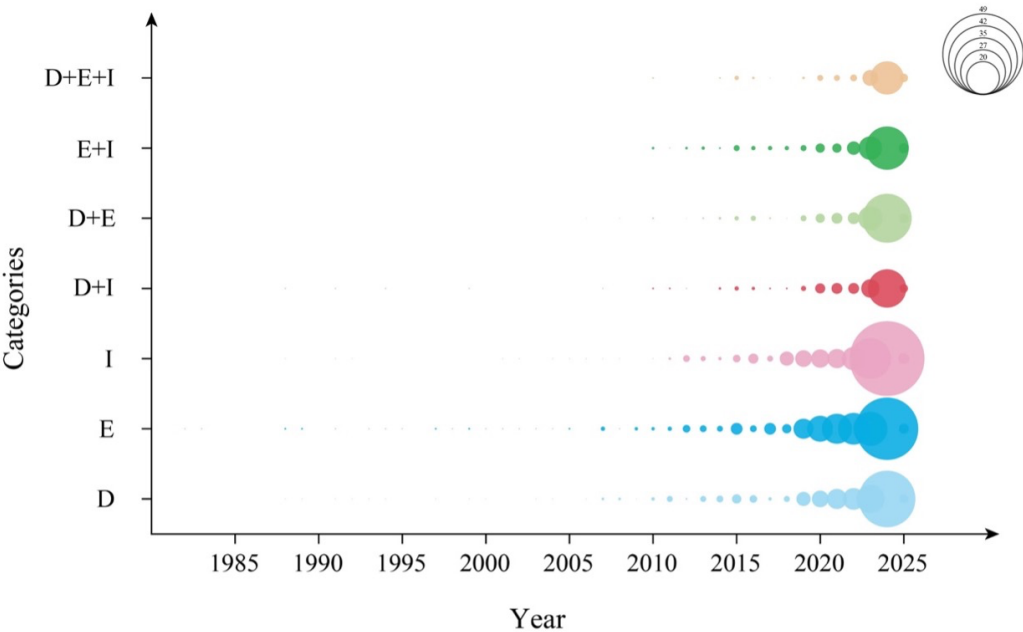
Figure 5. Number of publications regarding categories over time (Source: Authors' own creation)

Equity theory, as a keyword in cluster 2, is framed around the concepts of inputs and outcomes, emphasizing the balance individuals perceive in their exchange relationships. When individuals feel that equity and fairness exist within these relationships, they are more likely to experience satisfaction, which fosters positive attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions. In T&H, equity theory provides valuable insights into the dynamics of various relationships, such as those between stakeholders and tourists (Burrai et al., 2015) or between customers and employees (Cheng et al., 2020). This framework helps to elucidate how perceptions of fairness influence interactions and outcomes within these key relationships, shaping overall experiences and organizational success.

Moreover, the extant research on ethical issues in DEI has largely focused on its relationship with equality, particularly on how to better incorporate marginalized

groups into advantage distribution and decision-making processes. For example, studies have examined efforts to improve inclusion for PwD (Manoharan et al., 2024) and LGBTQ+ communities (Jin et al, 2024) to achieve greater social equity. More recently, the discussion has expanded to include the ethical implications of technology in advancing DEI. Lv et al. (2025) demonstrated that tourism brands utilizing AI-generated (as opposed to human-generated) ethical content to support marginalized out-groups could effectively fulfill DEI commitments, subsequently reducing brand avoidance among tourists.

Cluster 3 (Yellow: Host-Guest Interactions and Social Dynamics) includes 16 items such as "tourist behavior," "discrimination," "Airbnb," and "racism", with "United States" as a key site.

The dynamics of host-guest relationships have been extensively explored across various T&H contexts. Discrimination between Airbnb hosts and guests has also gained academic attention due to the rise of the sharing economy. Airbnb has been accused of fostering digital discrimination, where individuals are disadvantaged based on personal characteristics (Cheng & Foley, 2018). For instance, guests with "white-sounding" names are more likely to have booking requests accepted than those with African American names (Edelman et al., 2017). Host-guest dynamics in backpacking communities also highlight these disparities. While earlier studies focused on Western backpackers in less-developed Asian countries (Teo & Leong, 2006), recent research has shifted to non-Western solo travelers, particularly Asian women, emphasizing intersectionality. Yang et al. (2019) examined how Asian women navigate and negotiate their identities within heteronormative, gendered, and Western-centric tourism spaces. Host-guest relationships often mirror deeper inequalities in power, resources, and opportunities, manifesting in issues like stereotypes and discrimination (Chen et al., 2018).

Moreover, research on social dynamics always links to the United States. The main reason may lie in that immigrant communities continue to play a crucial role in the social structure of the United States. The T&H industry depends on a diverse workforce to staff frontline roles such as fast-food outlets, and casual dining establishments (Lefrid et al., 2022). However, the lack of robust diversity and inclusion policies, insufficient leadership training, and the unwillingness of management to acknowledge and accommodate immigrant workers have fostered mistrust and created a gap between managers and immigrant employees (Lefrid et al., 2022), even racial discrimination (Wen & Liu-Lastres, 2021).

Cluster 4 (Blue: Economic Disparities and Empowerment) consists of 11 items focused on keywords such as "tourism development," "sustainability," "sustainable tourism," "SDGs," and "economic growth." Tourism plays a critical role in advancing several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting global economic growth (SDG 8) and reducing inequality (SDG 10). Specifically, sustainable tourism seeks to minimize negative environmental and social impacts while fostering local economic development (Liu & Hao, 2024). By implementing resource-efficient practices, such as energy conservation and waste reduction, businesses can reduce operational costs while simultaneously supporting local communities, creating a mutually reinforcing cycle of economic and environmental sustainability. However, Bianchi and de Man (2021) critically examined the tension between these goals, arguing that sustained, inclusive growth often overlooks structural injustices that perpetuate inequality and exploitative labor practices. Instead, it reinforces capitalist, market-driven notions of justice, failing to address deeper issues of inequity.

Neoliberalism has compounded these challenges by shaping tourism development through market-driven strategies that prioritize economic growth and privatization (Yang et al., 2019). These approaches frequently result in unequal power dynamics, enabling wealthier stakeholders—such as corporations and private investors—to dominate resource allocation and decision-making processes. Consequently, the benefits of tourism are unevenly distributed, exacerbating social inequalities. Marginalized communities are often left with limited access to opportunities and fewer tangible benefits, as neoliberal policies frequently disregard the need for equitable resource distribution (Wang & Cheung, 2024).

Cluster 5 (Purple: Accessible and Inclusive Tourism), containing 8 items, focuses on keywords such as "disability", "inclusive tourism," "accessibility," "social inclusion," and "social change" with the "United Kingdom" and "Asia" as key case sites. The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 significantly impacted the UK's tourism industry (Shaw & Coles, 2004), prompting research on tourism for PwD to emerge, particularly around interpreting the Act and its implications for the sector. Discussions about PwD are often framed around their roles as either tourists or employees, with disabilities typically categorized as visible or invisible. Visible disabilities include physical impairments requiring mobility aids, while invisible disabilities encompass a wide range of physical and psychological conditions not immediately apparent (Mohammadi et al., 2022). In the context of PwD as tourists, the focus is on their human rights and legal entitlements, ensuring accessible

accommodations that allow them to engage in leisure activities safely, independently, and with dignity (Tlili et al., 2021).

The development of accessible tourism offers new opportunities for the industry to grow and evolve. When considering PwD as employees, the focus shifts towards recognizing the diversity of disabilities and implementing effective diversity management strategies. Despite these efforts, the employment of PwD remains underexplored within T&H, with much of the literature still concentrating on visible disabilities (Manoharan et al., 2024). As the field continues to develop, there is a clear need for more comprehensive research addressing both visible and invisible disabilities in the workplace, and for strategies that promote a truly inclusive workforce. Moreover, in the context of Asia, the most frequently discussed topics within this cluster include the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups such as PwD (Darcy et al., 2020), tourism-led migration (Adam et al., 2023), and spatial conflicts between tourists and local residents (Huang et al., 2024).

5. Future research agendas

Conceptualization of DEI. Our literature review highlights a significant gap in the conceptual clarity of DEI. Many studies address its dimensions in isolation or in limited pairings, such as "diversity + inclusion" or "diversity + equity." This fragmented approach has led to a disconnect between the academic discourse and the practical advancements in DEI within the T&H industry. A more integrated conceptual framework is crucial to bridge these gaps. Future research should focus on establishing precise definitions of DEI and developing a holistic model that considers diversity, equity, and inclusion collectively. By proposing a comprehensive DEI framework, future studies can lay a solid foundation for empirical research and practical application, helping to advance the field beyond isolated discussions and fostering a deeper, interconnected understanding of these dimensions.

Expanding the Scope of Diversity Research. While diversity has been a central focus of DEI studies, much of the research remains limited to primary human characteristics, particularly gender and ethnicity. Consistent with Im & Chung (2023), diversity management strategies are largely grounded in ensuring representational diversity within an organization's workforce. Specifically, diversity management has focused on gender, race, and disability, with less attention to other characteristics like sexual orientation and religious beliefs (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017). However, there is a marked lack of attention to other critical aspects of diversity, such as disabilities (especially invisible disabilities), religion, and gender identity. Furthermore, secondary-level diversity characteristics—including education, income, religion, work

experience, and personality—remain underexplored. Future research should expand its scope to incorporate marginalized groups and adopt an intersectional approach, examining how different human characteristics interact to shape individuals' experiences (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023; Wang & Cheung, 2024). This intersectional perspective will allow for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of diversity within the T&H industry and help uncover underrepresented areas that demand scholarly attention.

Shifting the Focus from Equality to Equity. Much of the discourse surrounding fairness in DEI has historically focused on equality—treating everyone the same. However, equity, which emphasizes distributing resources and opportunities according to individual needs, offers a more nuanced approach that addresses structural disparities. As Benjamin et al. (2020) argue, achieving equity is particularly critical in the post-pandemic era, as the tourism industry seeks to rebuild with greater fairness and inclusivity. Future research should investigate the transition from an equality-based approach to an equity-focused framework within T&H. This includes examining the specific policy changes, management practices, and decision-making processes necessary to foster equity at various organizational levels. Scholars should also explore how equity initiatives can be embedded in the long-term strategy of T&H organizations, ensuring that diverse groups benefit from tourism's recovery and future growth.

Reframing Inclusion as Equal to Diversity and Equity. The prevailing discourse often situates inclusion within the framework of diversity, implying that inclusion is a byproduct of diversity efforts. Russen & Dawson (2023) challenge this perspective, advocating for inclusion to be treated as an independent and equally critical dimension of DEI. Future research should reframe the discussion, treating diversity, equity, and inclusion as distinct yet interconnected components of an inclusive organizational culture. Studies should explore how inclusion can be fostered independently of diversity initiatives and identify the specific policies, practices, and cultural shifts necessary to create an environment where all individuals feel a sense of belonging and can contribute fully. Investigating how these three dimensions interact to create synergies will offer valuable insights into designing more effective DEI strategies in the T&H sector.

Navigating the Ethical Boundaries of DEI. While DEI initiatives aim to promote social equity and inclusion, their implementation raises critical questions about fairness, ethical boundaries, and unintended consequences. Future research should delve into the ethical limits of DEI implementation, examining how to balance inclusivity without inadvertently creating new forms of exclusion or perceived disadvantages for other groups. Specifically, prioritizing certain groups under DEI policies may unintentionally

marginalize others. Moreover, the perception of DEI as a form of social engineering or ethical overreach has sparked debates about its long-term viability. Some critics argue that DEI initiatives risk becoming overly prescriptive, dictating social norms and behaviors in a way that feels coercive rather than inclusive. Future research could examine the societal implications of DEI initiatives, exploring how organizations can implement them in ways that respect individual autonomy and cultural diversity while still promoting equity and inclusion. Lastly, studies may also evaluate the impact of DEI on organizational and social dynamics, determining whether such initiatives foster cohesion or exacerbate group tensions, thus offering insights into designing effective, inclusive strategies.

Leveraging Technology to Advance DEI. The integration of technology is poised to shape future research directions in DEI by highlighting both its potential benefits and inherent challenges. Among its opportunities, technology holds significant promise in enhancing accessibility and fostering inclusion, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Buhalis (2019) emphasized that smart technologies can help PwD, especially those with physical impairments, overcome barriers in tourism, enhancing both inclusivity and accessibility. However, the potential of technology in advancing DEI extends beyond physical access. Moreover, researchers could explore the impact of real-time DEI monitoring systems that use AI to analyze workforce and customer data, identifying exclusionary patterns and proposing actionable solutions. Immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and metaverse platforms also open avenues for investigating their effectiveness in DEI training. Georgiadou (2020) explored the use of VR in DEI training, demonstrating its potential to create more immersive and impactful learning experiences. These technologies could be studied to assess how scenario-based, hands-on experiences enhance employee empathy, cultural intelligence, and their ability to navigate diverse customer interactions.

Regarding potential challenges, it is important to exercise caution to prevent the reinforcement of existing biases. Future studies may focus on how AI-driven tools can be leveraged to address structural inequalities within organizations while avoiding the reinforcement of existing biases. For instance, examining the design and auditing processes for AI systems could uncover strategies to ensure fairness and equity in recruitment, promotion, and workforce management, especially in light of past cases where biases were unintentionally embedded such as Amazon's recruitment tool (BBC, 2018) and biased hospital algorithms (Jee, 2019).

From a customer-centric perspective, future research could evaluate how technology-driven personalization—such as AI-powered tailored recommendations, multilingual services, and accessible booking platforms—improves inclusivity. By

focusing on diverse cultural, linguistic, and physical ability backgrounds, such studies could shed light on how inclusivity in service delivery fosters guest satisfaction, brand loyalty, and a broader customer base.

6. Conclusions and discussions

This study offers a comprehensive examination of DEI in the T&H industry through a bibliometric lens. Analyzing 670 peer-reviewed articles and visualizing their intellectual structure using VOSviewer, the study identifies five major thematic clusters: gender equality, cultural participation, host-guest dynamics, economic disparities, and inclusive tourism. These clusters reflect the evolving, multidimensional nature of DEI in T&H.

The conceptual review reveals that DEI dimensions are often treated in isolation or without clear definitions. To address this, the study proposes an integrated framework emphasizing their interdependence. Diversity without equity can lead to performative inclusion; equity without diversity may overlook the value of representation; and inclusion without both results in superficial engagement (Schilcher, 2007).

While DEI scholarship is expanding, it remains dominated by Western perspectives and traditional categories like gender and ethnicity. Underexplored areas such as invisible disabilities, socio-economic inequality, and marginalized voices in non-Western contexts require greater scholarly attention (Bian, 2002). Expanding research in these areas will enhance global relevance and foster inclusive practices.

As DEI becomes increasingly politicized and shaped by technological change, organizations must adopt ethically grounded, evidence-based strategies that are resilient to shifting societal conditions. When thoughtfully applied, technology can support inclusion, but must be monitored to prevent reinforcing structural bias.

This study contributes by mapping the field, proposing a unified conceptual model, and identifying gaps and trends. Moving forward, researchers and practitioners must move beyond fragmented approaches and commit to systemic DEI strategies that promote equity, amplify diverse voices, and foster people-centered progress in the global T&H industry.

6.1 Theoretical implications

This study offers several main theoretical contributions. First, the conceptualization of DEI is advanced by challenging existing assumptions and integrating diverse perspectives. On one hand, "diversity" is differentiated from "inclusion," underscoring

the critical need to view "equity" as a distinct dimension. On the other hand, by highlighting power structures, unequal resource distribution, and social construction processes, this work incorporates postmodernism and intersectionality. Such a lens underscores the compounded effects arising from overlapping social identities, thereby enriching the theoretical scope of DEI and providing a more robust foundation for future research.

Second, the theoretical boundaries of DEI are broadened by intersecting it with core management and sociological theories. Drawing on stakeholder theory, resource-based views, and equity theory, DEI concerns are shown to extend well beyond internal human resource management. They also influence, and are influenced by, corporate social responsibility, financial performance, and sustainable development. This integrative perspective sheds new light on macro-micro dynamics in T&H and refines the research landscape surrounding inequality and collaboration across diverse groups.

Lastly, in light of emerging topics across diverse global contexts, a dual research agenda is proposed, balancing both exploitative and exploratory inquiries. At the exploitative level, more nuanced analyses of established theories and research models are encouraged, including deeper investigations into how gender-diverse top management teams, framed within stakeholder theory, affect corporate social responsibility and financial outcomes. At the exploratory level, cutting-edge issues such as algorithmic fairness, the ethical dimensions of new technologies, and the role of intersectionality in leadership merit attention. The significance of examining DEI initiatives under various cultural and institutional conditions—particularly in China and other emerging economies—is also highlighted, thus enhancing the global applicability and explanatory power.

6.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for T&H managers, policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to build more inclusive and equitable organizations. As DEI continues to evolve within a complex global environment—shaped by shifting social values, political landscapes, and stakeholder expectations—organizations must adopt strategies that are not only ethically grounded but also resilient and adaptable.

First, a comprehensive DEI approach requires moving beyond surface-level initiatives or symbolic efforts. T&H organizations should integrate DEI into the core of their business models by addressing both primary dimensions of diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity) and secondary ones (e.g., socio-economic background, neurodiversity, mental health). Conducting regular DEI assessments can help identify structural

barriers, measure inclusion outcomes, and ensure fair access to development and advancement opportunities. Embedding equity into recruitment, compensation, and promotion practices fosters trust and retention, while supporting long-term organizational performance.

Second, inclusive organizational cultures must be cultivated intentionally. Rather than prescribing behavior, DEI education and training should foster open dialogue, empathy, and awareness of unconscious bias. These efforts should prioritize cultural humility and critical reflection, enabling teams to navigate increasingly diverse workforces and customer bases. Establishing employee resource groups and peer support networks can also enhance belonging and mentorship, particularly for underrepresented employees.

Third, technological innovation presents both opportunities and ethical challenges. Managers can leverage emerging tools—such as VR for DEI training or AI for accessible guest services—to enhance inclusion. However, these technologies must be carefully designed and audited to avoid reinforcing biases (Yoshino & Glasgow, 2024). Organizations should implement oversight mechanisms to ensure fairness in algorithmic decision-making, particularly in recruitment or customer engagement platforms.

Finally, DEI initiatives must consider the broader socio-cultural context in which tourism operates. Community engagement and destination development strategies should involve local stakeholders to ensure that tourism growth supports—not marginalizes—local populations. Culturally responsive planning, multilingual services, and inclusive design contribute to a more sustainable and socially equitable tourism model.

6.3 Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the literature review is restricted to sources indexed in the Journal Citation Reports under the category of "Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism," focusing on Q1 journals. While this ensures a high-quality selection, it excludes relevant studies from lower-quartile journals, non-English publications, and those outside the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus databases. Second, the reliance on co-citation and keyword co-occurrence analysis, although effective for mapping intellectual structure and identifying trends, may overlook emerging topics that have not yet gained significant academic attention. As DEI is rapidly evolving, continuous updates to this analysis are necessary to capture the latest developments. Third, this

study does not further distinguish between publication types (e.g., quantitative/qualitative/conceptual/theoretical), which limits its impact. Future research will address this by conducting systematic reviews on specific themes, incorporating a detailed categorization of publication types to provide a more nuanced understanding of trends in DEI within T&H. Finally, the study's use of bibliometric tools such as VOSviewer, while powerful for visualizing data, may not fully capture the qualitative nuances of DEI research. Future studies should incorporate qualitative methods to explore the deeper contextual factors influencing DEI in the T&H industry.

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