

Research Paper

A Systematic Literature Review on Tourism Networks, Knowledge Transfer, Absorptive Capacity, and Performance

Muaz Azinuddin and Nur Shahirah Mior Shariffuddin
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

Mohd Hafiz Mohd Hanafiah
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Ahmad Puad Mat Som and Wan Mohd Adzim Wan Mohd Zain
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

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Abstract: Although there is a prevalence of studies that have analysed crucial components of networks, there is a paucity of empirical efforts that explicitly addresses the intrinsic elements associated with structural knowledge movement in networks within the tourism performance realm. To address this gap, this study systematically investigates the interrelatedness between networks, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity and tourism performance. The systematic literature review (SLR) method was used to select and analyse relevant research works published for the past 20 years. The results reveal that tourism scholars give knowledge-based variables, namely knowledge transfer, knowledge sharing, and knowledge exchange, scant attention. The findings also highlight the importance of absorptive capacity, a valuable tool for acquiring and processing knowledge derived from the tourism networks. Lastly, the study demonstrates the need for more empirical studies to shed light on the effect of networks, knowledge transfer and absorptive capacity in explaining performance, which is crucial for the competitive and strategic management of tourism businesses.

Keywords: Networks, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity, tourism performance, systematic literature review

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Correspondence: Muaz Azinuddin, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia.
Email: muazazinuddin@unisza.edu.my

Introduction

Tourists have always perceived the value received in a destination as an integrated experience despite the direct and indirect involvement from an amalgam of tourism stakeholders (Fyall & Garrod, 2019; Mariani & Baggio, 2020; Solvoll, Alsos, & Bulanova, 2015). For this reason, the need for the involvement and interaction of public, private and hybrid stakeholders in providing services, infrastructure as well as primary and secondary tourist products is heightened in developing a thriving tourism destination (Beltramo, Peira, & Bonadonna, 2021; Zee & Vanneste, 2015). The importance of this relational perspective is evident in the continuous research calls made to address the role of tourism networks in destination management (Nieves & Diaz-Meneses, 2018; Yi, Ryan, & Wang, 2020; Raisi, Baggio, Barratt-Pugh, & Willson, 2020).

The relationship between the networked stakeholders in a tourist destination can be observed through a complex system of connection. It includes complementary tangible and intangible tourism products, including activities, accommodations, transports, and food that co-exist with the support of activities and infrastructures (Pavlovich, 2003; Mariani & Baggio, 2020). Thus, the perspectives of such networks can be considered helpful in understanding the integrated offering of valuable and meaningful tourism products and services that combine natural, cultural, and social components within a destination (Albrecht, 2013; Mariani & Baggio, 2020).

This has led to increasing research interest amongst scholars on the importance of networks in analysing tourism organisations as well as destination-based planning and management (Baggio, 2020; Czernek, 2014). Examples of such analyses entail the advantages of networking as the provider of economic incentives, sustainable management of resources, and promotion of the social well-being of the networks' stakeholders (Stoddarta et al., 2019; Stienmetz & Fesenmaier, 2019). Despite several positive values being attributed to tourism networks, the process of learning and exchange of knowledge is regarded as the most critical benefit that can be obtained from the networking activities among the various types and sizes of tourism stakeholders (Morrison, Lynch, & Johns, 2004; McLeod, 2020; Raisi et al., 2020). It is further asserted that networks would serve as a premise to inculcate inter-organisational learning through knowledge sharing and absorption, improving the competitive position of tourism businesses (McLeod, 2020; Raisi et al., 2020).

Since knowledge becomes an integral element for tourism businesses to survive and be competitive in a dynamic environment, the process of knowledge transfer and absorptive capacity at the level of actor or inter-organisational relations or firm needs to be analysed. Further, it has become even more vital to highlight the importance of networks and knowledge as the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak threatens to derail the entire tourism sector. According to several scholars, there is a multitude of issues related to coordination and knowledge sharing during and after a crisis, which can lead to a significant reduction of tourism stakeholders' capacity in proactively

mitigating and minimising the negative impacts of the pandemic (Mair, Ritchie, & Walters, 2016). Scholars also argue that destinations characterised by network collaborations could cope with external influences as knowledge obtained from such arrangement help to increase the flexibility and resilience of the tourism stakeholders involved (Luthe, Wyss & Schuckert, 2012; London, Lohmann & Moyle, 2021; Zee & Vanneste, 2015).

On the other hand, many scholars lament the limited investigations on networks and knowledge despite the emergence and divergence of these theoretical links within the realm of tourism (Binder, 2018; Raisi et al., 2020; Valeri & Baggio, 2020). Such a literary gap appears to be vital given the crucial roles of networks and knowledge on tourism competitiveness, survivability, and resilience. Hence, this current research aims to catalogue, examine and summarise recent literature on the theoretical links between tourism networks, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity and tourism performance through a systematic literature review (SLR). The adopted SLR will reveal the understudied theoretical links from the point of view of the scientific community.

Accordingly, this paper presents the literature review from various academic domains on networks, knowledge and performance. Next, this paper attempts to survey and systematise the most relevant studies to identify what is being done and what is not through critical and meaningful discussions on the dynamics between tourism networks, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity and performance. The study findings fill an existing gap within the tourism domain through theoretical evidence on the promising links between the variables and provide crucial knowledge to practitioners on potential issues regarding their capacities to harness knowledge derived from networks. The paper then ends with theoretical and practical implications as well as a conclusion for future research directions — especially in the context of COVID-19 becoming an inescapable reality for the foreseeable future (Hanafiah, Md Zain, Azinuddin, & Mior Shariffuddin, 2021).

Literature Review

Understanding Networks

The terms partnership, strategic alliance, coalition, or cooperative agreement are frequently used to describe “forms of collaboration; partnerships between actors in tourism are often operationalised as networks” (Albrecht, 2013, p. 1). These network links are also known as “social ties” consisting of a series of direct or indirect ties representing potential benefits for actors or organisations (O’Donnell, Gilmore, Cummins, & Carson, 2001; Yachin, 2021). Besides, researchers have compared and examined the different types of networks in categorising the networks, namely (a) vertical against the horizontal and (b) formal against informal. From the perspective of tourism’s multi-sectoral interactions, Sørensen (2007) described the vertical networks as relationships between tourism firms and their distributors or suppliers

generally, while the horizontal networks address the relationships between similar or different types of organisations. The social ties among the actors in a network can also be classified as formal or informal in characteristic (Binder, 2018; Yachin, 2021). The formal networks can comprise membership in associations, joint ventures, trading groups, or buyer-supplier agreements. The informal networks are closer to relationships with families, relatives, and friends (Dredge, 2006; McLeod, Vaughan, & Edwards, 2010; O'Donnell et al., 2001; Yachin, 2021). As for the actors, Johannisson (2000) provides a few instances such as managers, entrepreneurs, owners, or any individuals responsible for working within the ties. It can also be a group of individuals such as an organisation, an association or a public agency.

Networks as a Tool of Knowledge Movement

The knowledge transfer process depends on the actors, network's opportunity structure, the characteristics of the knowledge and type of network. In examining the transferability of knowledge as one of the crucial resources within the networks, scholars have categorised knowledge into two different types: tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge (Ranucci & Souder, 2015). Explicit knowledge is known as hard and most declarative knowledge from diverse places and formats such as documents, databases, procedures, manuals, files, customer directories and others (Matsuo, 2015; Ranucci & Souder, 2015). It is systematic, easily codified and transferable in the form of language compared to tacit knowledge (López-Cabarcos, Srinivasan, & Vázquez-Rodríguez, 2020; Nonaka, Umemoto, & Senoo, 1996). Meanwhile, tacit knowledge is linked to the type of knowledge that is difficult to be formalised, expressed or coded. It consists of mental models and schemas, which arise and accumulate through the interaction between an individual and a situation (García-Almeida & Ballesteros-Rodríguez, 2018). As tacit knowledge is characterised as specific to the context in which it was inimitably created, it is considered highly valuable since it can contribute to the firm's profitability and competitive advantage (García-Almeida & Ballesteros-Rodríguez, 2018; López-Cabarcos et al., 2020).

In comparing tacit and explicit knowledge, both should not be viewed as two oversimplified discrete types since they are considered mutually distinctive and represent both ends of the continuum (García-Almeida & Ballesteros-Rodríguez, 2018; Koskinen, 2003; Nonaka, Toyama, & Nagata, 2000). For this reason, various researchers argue that there is a degree of tacitness or explicitness of knowledge in the knowledge-intensive activities carried out by individuals (Hadjimichael & Tsoukas, 2019; Nooteboom, 2000). This can be seen in how the transferability of knowledge depends on the absorptive capacity of the actors involved, as their motivation dictates whether the process would occur in the environment between companies, between society and organisations, between private and public organisations, or between producers and customers (Gibson, Lynch, & Morrison, 2005; Lopes, Oliveira,

Lopes, & Zaman, 2021; McLeod, 2020). Notably, absorptive capacity is related to the actor's previous knowledge and skills. However, the lack of motivation to integrate new knowledge may lead to detrimental effects in implementing and using shared knowledge (Lopes et al., 2021).

Since most of the tourism stakeholders such as micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises are not equipped with the resources to generate new knowledge and thus, rely on external sources, this further stresses the crucial role of inter-organisational knowledge transfer in knowledge creation (Brandão, Costa & Buhalis, 2018; Raisi et al., 2020). According to Valeri and Baggio (2020), knowledge sharing through networks enables businesses to develop reusable knowledge (private advantage) and gain new knowledge, which may represent a significant inspiration for renovation and organisational upgrade. For this to happen, businesses need to possess and strengthen the absorptive capacity to leverage and transform the transferred knowledge into created values that enhance business performance (Cruz-Ros, Guerrero-Sánchez & Miquel-Romero, 2021; Flatten, Greve, & Brettel, 2011; Valentina & Passiante, 2009).

On the other hand, the transferability of the resources is also affected by the network's opportunity structure, namely size, strength (strong or weak ties), centrality (the position of actors or organisations within the network structure which enables them to coordinate and manage resources) or density (the overall structure of the network), to name a few (Pavlovich, 2003; Raisi et al., 2020). Specifically, high centrality and density of relations lead to overall tighter communication systems, faster access to more quality information, speedier action and implementation, and improved organisational monitoring among the actors (Pavlovich, 2003). While the network size allows greater possibility in managing extensive information channels derived from each network ties through emergence, combination or recombination of good new ideas and actions (Fernandez-Perez, Verdu-Jover & Benitez-Amado, 2013; Obstfeld, 2005). The effective management of these channels could also be impacted by the strength of the ties as lesser emotions involved in weaker ties induce higher levels of uncertainty and possibilities for gaining new ideas and opportunities from the external environment (McLeod et al., 2010; Yachin, 2021). The preponderance of the strong or weak ties can vary within any type of network.

Indeed, the dynamics of the knowledge flow can also be influenced by the types of networks. Williams and Shaw (2011) claimed that knowledge within the horizontal networks of similar organisations is crucial in providing the sector-specific's best or better practices. They further asserted that businesses could accumulate codified tacit knowledge in-house through a horizontal network of different organisations. In contrast, explicit and generalised knowledge can be transferred along with the vertical relationships of value chains. As for the comparisons between the formal and informal networks, numerous scholars concur that most small businesses are more appreciative of their informal connections, especially during nascent entrepreneurship

(Grossman, Yli-Renko, & Janakiraman, 2012; Teixeira, Andreassi, Köseoglu, & Okumus, 2019). This is because they are heavily reliant on contacts within their vicinity, where these informal relationships provide tourism entrepreneurs with a sense of security (Kelliher, Reinl, Johnson, & Joppe, 2018; Teixeira et al., 2019). Besides, businesses can get their resources cheaper and create opportunities in building reputations and customer contacts, considering the nature of informal relations is based on socially embedded ties (Witt, 2004).

Despite the potential importance of the resources that can be gained from the informal relations, it is believed that they would not be substantial in positively impacting the business performance. Instead, in the past two decades, scholars have been arguably emphasising on the importance of formal strategic relations such as joint ventures, long-term supplier-buyer partnerships and other similar enduring ties in acquiring valued “uncommon knowledge” beyond the boundaries of internal resources (Shaw & Williams, 2009; Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000; Hakansson & Snehota, 1997). However, this notion has been disputed by several scholars recently, as their studies have shown that a balanced number of contextualised formal and informal relations is critical in acquiring better breadth and accuracy of the required information (Binder, 2018; Dar & Mishra, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for empirical studies to shed light on the effect of networks, knowledge transfer and absorptive capacity domain, which is crucial for the competitive and strategic management of tourism businesses.

Methodology

This study adopted a more interpretive rather than an aggregative systematic literature review (SLR). Similar to meta-analysis, the study followed Miles and Huberman’s (1994) approach, emphasising data reduction, display and verification. At the data reduction phase, categories such as ‘tourism networks’, ‘networks’, ‘knowledge transfer’, ‘knowledge absorption capacity’ and ‘tourism performance’ were established, and research articles were classified accordingly. This mirrors the content analysis technique as categories are firstly established, and then studies are compared and tabulated into the adopted study categories (Baloglu & Assante, 1999).

The articles surveyed in this study were retrieved from the Google Scholar (advanced) search engine. Google Scholar was utilised as a database source because it is one of the most comprehensive research publications archives. First, we defined the search string to be given in input to the data source. The advanced search terms represent “tourism networks”, “networks”, “knowledge transfer”, “knowledge absorption capacity” and “tourism performance” in the articles’ title, abstract, or keywords. They were deployed in different combinations to find the relevant tourism research articles. These combinations were leveraged through the ensuing search matching:

- a. “tourism” “networks”
- b. “tourism” “networks” “knowledge”

- c. “tourism” “networks” “knowledge transfer”
- d. “tourism” “networks” “absorptive capacity”
- e. “tourism” “networks” “knowledge absorption capacity”
- f. “tourism” “networks” “performance”

Subsequently, research articles identified for the SLR were sourced from general management and tourism journals through various major databases such as Wiley, Taylor and Francis, Sage, Emerald and Elsevier, etc. As Zee and Vanneste (2015) concurred, papers on tourism networks were mainly published after the millennium. Thus, only articles published between 2000 and 2021 were included in the SLR. On top of this, additional relevant articles cited in previous literature reviews conducted by other scholars (Mariani & Baggio, 2020; Zee & Vanneste, 2015) were obtained to further enrich the data within SLR. This was done to avoid unintended omissions and to ensure all the relevant articles were included in the SLR (Singh & Trivedi, 2016).

The combination from both sources yielded 247 downloaded unique articles. Next, manual double-checking was done by speed-reading titles, abstracts, keywords, first paragraph, and as much text as needed from relevant sections. The authors removed any articles that did not address the scope of this study. Furthermore, the inclusion criteria entailed that the articles be published in internationally peer-reviewed journals, thus leaving out books, book chapters, and conference proceedings. After this sorting, the researchers were left with 132 research articles (Table 1). The articles were then scanned in detail to identify the research aim and questions. This was done to whittle down the articles that explicitly measure two or more SLR’s established categories of the research variables of tourism networks, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity and tourism performance.

Consequently, only 20 empirical papers in tourism literature were found to fall within this study’s scope. These were then systematised and coded accordingly to the following classification categories: author(s), year of publication, journal, title, networks, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity and performance. The next part of this paper presents and discusses the SLR findings.

Table 1. Summary of SLR findings — article information and research variables

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|----------------|---|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 1 Money (2000) | Social networks and referrals in international organisational buying of travel services: The role of culture and location | <i>International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 2 Mathews (2000) | Competition in the international hotel industry | <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 3 Copp & Ivy (2001) | Networking trends of small tourism businesses in post-socialist Slovakia | <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 4 Tyler & Dinan (2001) | The role of interested groups in England's emerging tourism policy networks | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 5 Pavlovich (2003) | The evolution and transformation of a tourism destination networks: The Waitomo Caves, New Zealand | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 6 Novelli, Schmitz & Spencer (2006) | Networks, clusters & innovation in tourism: A UK experience | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 7 Hwang, Gretzel & Fesenmaier (2006) | Multicity trip patterns tourists to the United States | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 8 Mackellar (2006) | Conventions, festivals, and tourism: Exploring the network that binds | <i>Journal of Convention & Event Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 9 Brunetto & Farr-Wharton (2007) | The moderating role of trust in SME owner/managers' decision-making about collaboration | <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 10 Sørensen (2007) | The geographies of social networks and innovation in tourism | <i>Tourism Geographies</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 11 Timur & Getz (2008) | A network's perspective on managing stakeholders for sustainable urban tourism | <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 12 Prats, Guia & Molina (2008) | How tourism destinations evolve: The notion of tourism local innovation system | <i>Tourism and Hospitality Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 13 Watts (2009) | Collaborative implementation network structures: Cultural tourism implementation in an English seaside context | <i>Systemic Practice and Action Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 14 Cooper, Scott & Baggio (2009) | Networks position and perceptions of destination stakeholder importance | <i>Anatolia</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 15 Erkus & Ozturk (2009) | The role of cluster types and firm size in designing the level of network relations: The experience of the Antalya tourism region | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 16 Lemmetyinen (2009) | The coordination of cooperation in strategic business networks—The Cruise Baltic case | <i>Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 17 Petrou & Daskapolou (2009) | Innovation and small firms' growth prospects: Relational proximity and knowledge dynamics in a low-tech industry | <i>European Planning Studies</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 18 Valentina & Passiante (2009) | Impacts of absorptive capacity on value creation | <i>Anatolia</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|---|--|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 19 Karlsen & Nordsröm (2009) | Festivals in the Barents region: Exploring festival-stakeholder cooperation | <i>Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 20 Hede & Stokes (2009) | Network analysis of tourism events: An approach to improve marketing practices for sustainable tourism | <i>Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 21 Ziakas & Costa (2010) | Explicating inter-organizational linkages of a host community's events network | <i>International Journal of Event and Festival Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 22 Park et al. (2010) | Travel personae of American pleasure travelers: A network analysis | <i>Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 23 Denicolai, Cioccarelli, & Zucchella (2010) | Resource-based local development and networked core-competencies for tourism excellence | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 24 McLeod et al. (2010) | Knowledge networks in the tourism sector of the Bournemouth, Poole, and Christchurch Conurbation: Preliminary analysis | <i>The Service Industries Journal</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 25 Presenza & Cipollina (2010) | Analysing tourism stakeholders' networks | <i>Tourism Review</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 26 Paget, Dimanche, & Mounet (2010) | A tourism innovation case: An actor-networks approach | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 27 Romeiro & Costa (2010) | The potential of management networks in the innovation and competitiveness of rural tourism: A case study on the Valle del Jerte (Spain) | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (cont)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 28 Baggio (2011) | Collaboration and cooperation in a tourism destination: A network science approach | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 29 Beritelli (2011) | Cooperation among prominent actors in a tourist destination | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 30 Kokkranikal & Morrison (2011) | Community networks and sustainable livelihoods in tourism: The role of entrepreneurial innovation | <i>Tourism Planning & Development</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 31 Cobbs (2011) | The dynamics of relationship marketing in international sponsorship networks | <i>Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 32 Beritelli & Laesser (2011) | Power dimensions and influence reputation in tourist destinations: Empirical evidence from a network of actors and stakeholders | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 33 Leung et al. (2011) | A social network analysis of overseas tourist movement patterns in Beijing: The impact of the Olympic games | <i>Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 34 Sallent, Palau, & Guia (2011) | Exploring the legacy of sport events on sport tourism networks | <i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 35 de Klerk & Saayman (2012) | Networking as key factor in artpreneurial success | <i>European Business Review</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 36 Fuglsang & Eide (2012) | The experience turns as 'bandwagon': Understanding networks formation and innovation as practice | <i>European Urban and Regional Studies</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 37 Luthé, Wyss, & Schuckert (2012) | Networks governance and regional resilience to climate change: Empirical evidence from mountain tourism communities in the Swiss Gotthard region | <i>Regional Environmental Change</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 38 Farsani, Coelho, & Costa (2012) | Analysis of network activities in geoparks as geotourism destinations | <i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 39 García-Melón, Gómez-Navarro, & Acuña-Dutra (2012) | A combined ANP-Delphi approach to evaluate sustainable tourism | <i>Environmental Impact Assessment Review</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 40 Li & Stepchenkova (2012) | Chinese outbound tourists' destination image of America: Part I | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 41 Strobl & Peters (2013) | Entrepreneurial reputation in destination networks | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 42 Kimbu & Ngoasong (2013) | Centralised decentralisation of tourism development: A network perspective | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 43 Dela Santa (2013) | The politics of implementing Philippine tourism policy: A policy network and advocacy coalition framework approach | <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 44 D'Agata, Gozzo, & Tomasselli (2013) | Network analysis approach to map tourism mobility | <i>Quality & Quantity</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 45 Beritelli, Strobl, & Peters (2013) | Interlocking directorships against community closure: A trade-off for development in tourist destinations | <i>Tourism Review</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 46 Lee et al. (2013) | Evaluating spatial centrality for integrated tourism management in rural areas using GIS and network analysis | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 47 Carson, Carson, & Hodge (2013) | Understanding local innovation systems in peripheral tourism destinations | <i>Tourism Geographies</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 48 Del Chiappa & Presenza (2013) | The use of network analysis to assess relationships among stakeholders within a tourism destination: An empirical investigation on Costa Smeralda-Gallura, Italy | <i>Tourism Analysis</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 49 Zenker, Eggers, & Farsky (2013) | Putting a price tag on cities: Insights into the competitive environment of places | <i>Cities</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 50 Casanueva et al. (2014) | Airline alliances: Mobilizing network resources | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 51 Herath & Mahmood (2014) | Strategic orientations and SME performance: Moderating effect of absorptive capacity of the firm | <i>Asian Social Science</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 52 Nogueira & Pinho (2014) | Stakeholder networks integrated analysis: The specific case of rural tourism in the Portuguese Peneda-Gerês National Park | <i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 53 Correia & Brito (2014) | Mutual influence between firms and tourist destination: A case in the Douro Valley | <i>International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 54 Czernek (2014) | Tourism features as determinants of knowledge in the process of tourist cooperation | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 55 Aubke et al. (2014) | Knowledge sharing in revenue management teams: Antecedents and consequences of group cohesion | <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 56 Hazra, Fletcher, & Wilkes (2014) | An evaluation of power relationships among stakeholders in the tourism industry networks of Agra, India | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 57 Baggio (2014a) | Real and virtual relationships in tourism digital ecosystems | <i>Information Technology & Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 58 Baggio (2014b) | Complex tourism systems: a visibility graph approach. | <i>Kybernetes</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 59 Ying, Norman, & Zhou (2014) | Online networking in the tourism industry: A webometrics and hyperlink network analysis | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 60 Volgger & Pechlaner (2014) | Requirements for destination management organizations in destination governance: Understanding DMO success | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 61 Thomas & Wood (2014) | The absorptive capacity of tourism organisations | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 62 Thomas & Wood (2015) | Innovation in tourism: Re-conceptualising and Measuring the absorptive capacity of the hotel sector | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 63 Del Chiappa & Baggio (2015) | Knowledge transfer in smart tourism destinations: Analysing the effects of a network structure | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 64 Beritelli, Buffa, & Martini (2015) | The coordinating DMO or coordinators in the DMO? —An alternative perspective with the help of network analysis | <i>Tourism Review</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 65 Bendle (2015) | The structures and flows of a large tourist itinerancy network | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 66 Asero, Gozzo, & Tomaselli (2015) | Building tourism networks through tourist mobility | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 67 Maciejewski & Cumming (2015) | The relevance of socioeconomic interactions for the resilience of protected area networks | <i>Ecosphere</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 68 Stienmetz & Fesenmaier (2015) | Estimating value in Baltimore, Maryland: An attractions network analysis | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (cont)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|---|---|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 69 Williams et al. (2015) | Community crosstalk: An exploratory analysis of destination and festival eWOM on Twitter | <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 70 Pulido-Fernández & Merinero-Rodríguez (2016) | Destinations' relational dynamic and tourism development | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 71 Baggio (2016) | Mapping time series into networks as a tool to assess the complex dynamics of tourism systems | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 72 Edwards (2016) | AAmbassadors of knowledge sharing co-produced travel information through tourist-local social media exchange | <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 73 Hwang & Stewart (2016) | Social capital and collective action in rural tourism | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 74 Luthé & Wyss (2016) | Resilience to climate change in a cross-scale tourism governance context: A combined quantitative-qualitative network analysis | <i>Ecology & Society</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 75 Park et al. (2016) | An analysis of the utilisation of Facebook by local Korean governments for tourism development and the network of smart tourism ecosystem | <i>International Journal of Information Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (cont)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 76 Tran, Jeeva, & Pourabedin (2016) | Social network analysis in tourism services distribution channels | <i>Tourism Management Perspectives</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 77 Yang (2017) | Understanding tourist attraction cooperation: An application of network analysis to the case of Shanghai, China | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 78 Tasci et al. (2017) | Network analysis of the sensory capital of a destination brand | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 79 Jin, Cheng, & Xu (2017) | Using user-generated content to explore the temporal heterogeneity in tourist mobility | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 80 Liu, Huang, & Fu (2017) | An application of network analysis on tourist attractions: The case of Xinjiang, China | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 81 Williams et al. (2017) | Destination eWOM: A macro and meso network approach? | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 82 Otengei et al. (2017) | Internationalisation of African-ethnic restaurants: A qualitative enquiry using the dynamic capabilities perspective | <i>Tourism Management Perspectives</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 83 Liu (2018) | Examining social capital, organisational learning and knowledge transfer in cultural and creative industries of practice | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|---|--|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 84 Nieves & Diaz-Meneses (2018) | Knowledge sources and innovation in the hotel industry: Empirical analysis on Gran Canaria Island, a mature mass-tourism destination | <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 85 Khalilzadeh (2018) | Demonstration of exponential random graph models in tourism studies: Is tourism a means of global peace or the bottom line? | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 86 Binder (2018) | Impacts of network relationships on absorptive capacity in the context of innovation | <i>The Service Industries Journal</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 87 Chang (2018) | The affecting tourism development attitudes based on the social exchange theory and the social network theory | <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 88 Ghahramani, Khalilzadeh, & Birendra (2018) | Tour guides' communication ecosystems: an inferential social network analysis approach | <i>Information Technology & Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 89 Jarman (2018) | Social network analysis and the hunt for homophily: Diversity and equality within festival communities | <i>Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure & Events</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 90 Zee & Bertocchi (2018) | Finding patterns in urban tourist behaviour: A social network analysis approach based on TripAdvisor reviews | <i>Information Technology & Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (cont)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|--|---|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 91 Baggio & Scaglione (2018) | Strategic visitor flows and destination management organization | <i>Information Technology & Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 92 Czernek-Marszałek (2018) | Cooperation evaluation with the use of network analysis | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 93 Éber, Baggio, & Fuchs (2018) | Hyperlink network analysis of a multi destination region: The case of Halland, South Sweden | <i>Information Technology & Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 94 David-Negre et al. (2018) | Understanding European tourists' use of e-tourism platforms. Analysis of networks | <i>Information Technology & Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 95 Han, Kim, & Otoo (2018) | Spatial movement patterns among intra-destinations using social network analysis | <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 96 Hernández, Kirilenko & Stepchenko-va (2018) | Network approach to tourist segmentation via user generated content | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 97 Høegh-Guldberg et al. (2018) | Dynamics of innovation network journeys: Phases and crossroads in seven regional innovation networks | <i>Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 98 Kang et al. (2018) | Identifying the spatial structure of the tourist attraction system in South Korea using GIS and network analysis: An application of anchor-point theory | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 99 Kim & Scott (2018) | Network dynamics of tourism development in South Korea | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 100 Lee & Kim (2018) | Change and stability in shopping tourist destination networks: The case of Seoul in Korea | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 101 Lozano & Gutiérrez (2018) | A complex network analysis of global tourism flows | <i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 102 Provenzano, Hawelka, & Baggio (2018) | The mobility network of European tourists: a longitudinal study and a comparison with geo-located Twitter data | <i>Tourism Review</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 103 Kofler, Marcher, Volgger, & Pechlaner (2018) | The special characteristics of tourism innovation networks: The case of the Regional Innovation System in South Tyrol | <i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 104 Huang (2018) | Assessing the performance of tourism supply chains by using the hybrid network data envelopment analysis model | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 105 Kale, Aknar, & Başar (2019) | Absorptive capacity and firm performance: The mediating role of strategic agility | <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 106 Kirilenko, Stepchenkova, & Hernandez (2019) | Comparative clustering of destination attractions for different origin markets with network and spatial analyses of online reviews | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 107 Capriello & Riboldazzi (2019) | How can a travel agency network survive in the wake of digitalization? Evidence from the Robintur case study | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (cont')

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|--|---|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 108 Chung et al. (2019) | International tourism dynamics in a globalized world: A social network analysis approach | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 109 Lin & Fu (2019) | Cognitive implications of experiencing religious tourism: An integrated approach of means–end chain and social network theories | <i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 110 Stoddarta et al. (2019) | Collaboration gaps and regional tourism networks in rural coastal communities | <i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 111 Yustika & Goni (2019) | Network structure in coastal and marine tourism: Diving into the three clusters | <i>Tourism Planning & Development</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 112 Czernek-Marszałek (2018) | Applying mixed methods in social network research – The case of cooperation in a Polish tourist destination | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 113 Toyran, Semerciöz, & Hassan (2020) | Knowledge sharing in strategic alliance relationships: An empirical research on hotels in Turkey | <i>European Journal of Tourism Research</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 114 Alford & Jones (2020) | The lone digital tourism entrepreneur: Knowledge acquisition and collaborative transfer | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 115 Baggio (2020) | Tourism destinations: A universality conjecture based on network science | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 116 Bianchi, Cappelletti, Mafrolla, Sica, & Sisto (2020) | Accessible tourism in natural park areas: A Social network analysis to discard barriers and provide information for people with disabilities | <i>Sustainability</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 117 Garcia-Almeida & Bolívar-Cruz (2020) | Successful replication of knowledge in the growth of service organizations: evidence from Spanish hotel chains | <i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i> | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 118 Henche, Salvaj, & Cuesta-Valiño (2020) | A sustainable management model for cultural creative tourism ecosystems | <i>Sustainability</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 119 Kang, Kim, & Park (2020) | Understanding tourist information search behaviour: The power and insight of social network analysis | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 120 Li & Barbieri (2020) | Demystifying members' social capital and networks within an agritourism association: A social network analysis | <i>Sustainability</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 121 Marques & Matos (2020) | Network relationality in the tourism experience: Staging sociality in homestays | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 122 McLeod (2020) | Understanding knowledge flows within a tourism destination network | <i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 123 Minnaert (2020) | Stakeholder stories: Exploring social tourism networks | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 124 Raisi et al. (2020) | A network perspective of knowledge transfer in tourism | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 1 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 125 Valeri & Baggio (2020) | Italian tourism intermediaries: A social network analysis exploration | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 126 Wang et al. (2020) | Evolution characteristics of the spatial network structure of tourism efficiency in China: A province-level analysis | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 127 Yi, Ryan, & Wang (2020) | China's village tourism committees: A social network analysis | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 128 Wang et al. (2021) | Tourism economic network structural characteristics of national parks in the central region of China | <i>Sustainability</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 129 Jeon & Yang (2021) | The structural changes of a local tourism networks: Comparison of before and after Covid-19 | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 130 Chen & Wu (2021) | An exploration of actor-network theory and social affordance for the development of a tourist attraction: A case study of a Jimmy-related theme park, Taiwan | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 131 Kádár & Gede (2021) | Tourism flows in large-scale destination systems | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 132 London et al. (2021) | Network fragmentation and risk in cruise tourism infrastructure development: Auckland, New Zealand | <i>Case Studies on Transport Policy</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Number of Papers Reviewed | | | 123 | 10 | 12 | 9 |

Study Findings

Development of Network Research in Tourism

The shortlisted papers in SLR were reviewed through content analysis, where the topic areas and trends in theoretical perspectives were analysed. The publication patterns over time were segmented into two stages: the first 11 years (2000 to 2010) and the last 11 years (2011 to part of 2021) (Figure 1). Based on Figure 1, there are not many studies that have been conducted within the area of networks (33 papers) during the first 11 years. However, since 2011, there has been a rapid increase of scholars' attention on tourism networks, with 123 articles published. This reflects the rapid theoretical evolution of networks in the past two decades and its rising importance in providing crucial avenues to research tourism organisations and destination-based planning and management.

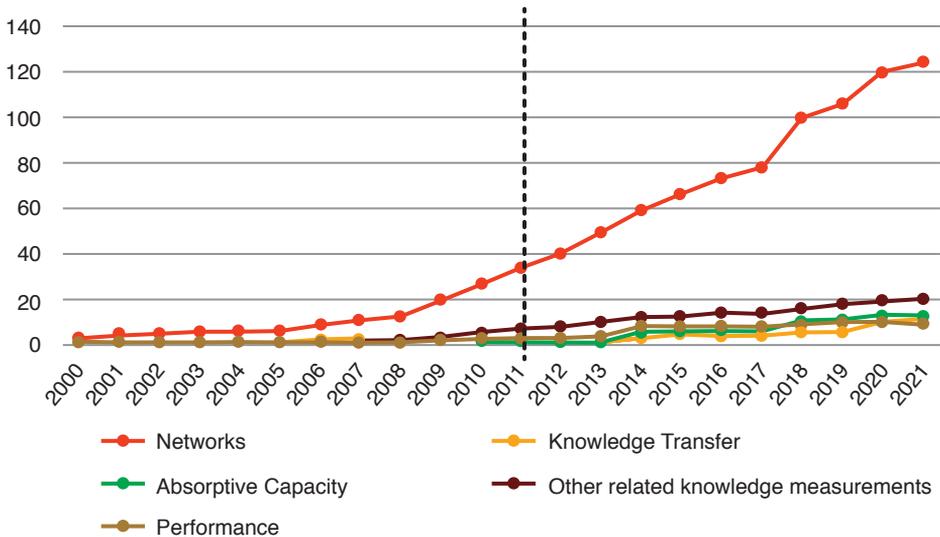


Figure 1. Cumulative number of research articles in SLR

However, the same cannot be said in the context of the other variables. Notably, knowledge transfer and absorptive capacity appear to be underexplored in the tourism realm. In fact, other knowledge-based variables, namely knowledge sharing and knowledge exchange, to name a few, have been given scant attention by scholars within the last two decades. Out of 123 articles on networks, only ten involved knowledge transfer, with 12 articles on absorptive capacity and nine on performance.

This varying pattern reflects the different directions undertaken by many scholars in researching tourism networks. Past research surveyed in the SLR has examined a variety of important components of networks such as its structural characteristics, governance and content from both the perspectives of tourism supply- and demand-side (Ahmad, 2005; Cooper et al., 2009; Novelli et al., 2006; Pavlovich, 2003). These components were analysed by adopting different definitions of a network and units of analysis. This is due to the nature of the theoretical context where networks are intertwined and embedded within the inconsistent level of complexity, dynamism and peculiarities of destination systems. The broad range of actor categories and ties further contribute to the lack of a universal consensus among scholars on this issue.

Links between Networks, Knowledge Transfer, Absorptive Capacity and Performance

Notably, numerous studies highlighted the network utilisation by tourism businesses and its effect on destination success (Baggio & Valeri, 2020; Bianchi et al., 2020; McLeod, 2020; Raisi et al., 2020). However, it is imperative to note that there is an apparent scarcity of research that explicitly addresses the empirical connection between the networks, knowledge transfer, absorption capacity and performance. Table 2 summarises SLR findings, which only includes network papers that include knowledge transfer, absorption capacity or performance variables in their study.

Table 2. Summary of SLR findings — Network papers that include Knowledge Transfer, Absorptive Capacity or Performance variables

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 1 Novelli et al. (2006) | Networks, clusters & innovation in tourism: A UK experience | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 2 Petrou & Daskapolou (2009) | Innovation and small firms' growth prospects: Relational proximity and knowledge dynamics in a low-tech industry | <i>European Planning Studies</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 3 Denicolai et al. (2010) | Resource-based local development and networked core-competencies for tourism excellence | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |

Table 2 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 4 Del Chiappa & Presenza (2013) | The use of network analysis to assess relationships among stakeholders within a tourism destination: An empirical investigation on Costa Smeralda-Gallura, Italy | <i>Tourism Analysis</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 5 Herath & Mahmood (2014) | Strategic orientations and SME performance: Moderating effect of absorptive capacity of the firm | <i>Asian Social Science</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6 Correia & Brito (2014) | Mutual influence between firms and tourist destination: A case in the Douro Valley | <i>International Review on Public and Non-profit Marketing</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 7 Czernek (2014) | Tourism features as determinants of knowledge in the process of tourist cooperation | <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 8 Aubke et al. (2014) | Knowledge sharing in revenue management teams: Antecedents and consequences of group cohesion | <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 9 Casanueva et al (2014) | Airline alliances: Mobilising network resources | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 10 Volgger & Pechlaner (2014) | Requirements for destination management organisations in destination governance: Understanding DMO success | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 11 Del Chiappa & Baggio (2015) | Knowledge transfer in smart tourism destinations: Analysing the effects of a network structure | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing & Management</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 2 (con't)

| Author(s) | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|---|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 12 Liu (2018) | Examining social capital, organisational learning and knowledge transfer in cultural and creative industries of practice | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 13 Binder (2018) | Impacts of network relationships on absorptive capacity in the context of innovation | <i>The Service Industries Journal</i> | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 14 Czernek-Marszałek (2018) | Cooperation evaluation with the use of network analysis | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 15 Kale et al. (2019) | Absorptive capacity and firm performance: The mediating role of strategic agility | <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 16 Alford & Jones (2020) | The lone digital tourism entrepreneur: Knowledge acquisition and collaborative transfer | <i>Tourism Management</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 17 Bianchi et al. (2020) | Accessible tourism in natural park areas: A social network analysis to discard barriers and provide information for people with disabilities | <i>Sustainability</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| 18 Garcia-Almeida & Bolívar-Cruz (2020) | Successful replication of knowledge in the growth of service organisations: Evidence from Spanish hotel chains | <i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i> | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 19 Li & Barbieri (2020) | Demystifying members' social capital and networks within an agritourism association: A social network analysis | <i>Sustainability</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |

Table 2 (con't)

| Author(s) | | Article Information | | Research Variables | | | |
|-----------|---------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | | Article Title | Journal | Networks | Knowledge Transfer | Absorptive Capacity | Performance |
| 20 | Raisi et al. (2020) | A network perspective of knowledge transfer in tourism | <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |

In terms of the concerned variables in SLR, only Binder (2018) and Czernek (2014) explicitly measured the link between them. Czernek (2014) identified the determinants of knowledge transfer and absorption from a set of specific tourism features and examined their consequences for the cooperation between stakeholders in a tourist destination. While the former analysed how network participation and relationship quality can improve an organisation’s absorptive capacity. Aside from this, Correia and Brito (2014) examined how the firms’ strategic actions in networking impact the general level of absorptive capacity from the perspective of regional structure and dynamics. Other notable examples also include the works produced by McLeod et al. (2010), Petrou and Daskapolou (2009) as well as Beritelli (2011), with their respective work involving: (1) analysis of knowledge sharing through the mapping of knowledge networks, (2) identification of the effects of firm’s knowledge base and relational proximity processes on growth prospects, and (3) the impacts of different types of formal contacts, relational preferences as well as communication behaviour in terms of intensity, contact ease and information exchange towards cooperative behaviour.

On the other hand, this study found a lack of research that analysed the impacts of networks or absorptive capacity on performance. Studies by Petrou and Daskalopoulou (2009) as well as Denicolai et al. (2010) are a few examples that addressed this relationship. They employed the statistical number on the failure rates and competitive dynamics perception of tourism stakeholders on growth prospects and satisfaction on the economic performance. As for the absorptive capacity, it is interesting to note that only two studies analysed this concept concerning performance (see Herath & Mahmood, 2014; Kale et al., 2019) despite the theoretical foundations established in numerous past works of literature on the importance of knowledge.

Knowledge Transferability within a Destination System

The prevalence of studies that analysed the transferability of knowledge illustrates the limited understanding of network thinking to understand destination systems. Most of them used the Social Network Analysis (SNA) to identify how knowledge

management practices can significantly impact organisational performance (Czernek, 2014; Nieves & Diaz-Meneses, 2018). For clarity, SNA involves numerous mathematical approaches in providing information into the tourism network structure, composition, and organisation (Luthe, Wyss & Schuckert, 2012; Romeiro & Costa, 2010). With more emphasis on the evolutionary dynamics of network structure as an antecedent of knowledge diffusion and coproduction, it paints a clearer picture of the structural configuration of a destination system. The relational and attribute elements are important in analysing the network structures to understand knowledge transfer processes among stakeholders. The former element is a descriptor of the network as a whole (e.g., size, density). At the same time, the latter element is linked to the individual actor, and can be measured (e.g., cognitive capacity) or computed (e.g. actor centrality).

By assuming a general correlation between both levels, the relational approach enables scholars to present how the web of connections (centrality, density, betweenness) can be used to identify the magnitude of knowledge flow within any parts (groups or actors) of a destination system. While most studies acknowledged the importance of knowledge within the destination systems of networks (see Table 2), they still cannot address the direct experiment with more “intrinsic” or attribute elements relevant to the “structural knowledge movement”. Consequently, their research renders the two elements of knowledge transfer or absorptive capacity as the supplementary point (see the works of Chang, 2018; Henche et al., 2020; Kofler et al., 2018). Increasing calls have been made to address these intrinsic elements as it is argued that through qualitative consideration, the studies would be able to provide a “physical meaning” to the quantitative analyses of the network’s parameters (Czernek-Marszałek, 2019; Valeri & Baggio, 2020). Besides that, visualisation of networks through SNA only provides a snapshot of a network. This would not be sufficient to explain stakeholders’ engagement in a cooperation network without the qualitative perspectives (Czernek-Marszałek, 2018).

Furthermore, it is also suggested that more studies are needed to shed light on the development of innovation processes and practices to further complement the findings from the structuralist perspectives on networks (Høegh-Guldberg et al., 2018). This can be investigated further through the lens of actors or micro-unit of analysis. The micro-unit of analysis integrates tripartite components of social practices, namely (1) social meaning — valuing a new practice, (2) competencies (e.g. the knowledge and skills) to carry out the practice, and the necessary materials (or resources and technologies) to engage in the practice (Stoddarta et al., 2019). These practices constitute the core elements of the absorptive capacity constructs, and the learning ability of business organisations is determined by the characteristics of their networks (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998).

Knowledge Absorption in Tourism Businesses

Valentina and Passiante's (2009) work highlighted that the crux of the absorptive capacity lies in the importance of both internal and external knowledge in business operations, particularly the tourism sector. They underlined that this organisational capacity's focus should be on the business ability to capture, use, and share the internal knowledge. In extending the knowledge in-house, tourism businesses need to possess the ability to scan the environment, which is equally important for them to receive and interpret the external knowledge received from networks such as new markets, new technologies and competitive threats to generate superior returns (Binder, 2018; Teece, 2000; Thomas & Wood, 2014). Tourism firms are particularly reliant on external knowledge, mainly from the suppliers, which is consistent with the demand of the tourism sector itself that requires different stakeholders to work together for the common goal of successful livelihood of the businesses and tourist destinations (Kale et al., 2019; King, Breen, & Whitelaw, 2014; Williams & Shaw, 2011; Zee & Vanneste, 2015).

Given this dynamic, Thomas and Wood (2015, 2014) further contributed to the tourism body of knowledge in the SLR by conceptualising this capacity based on the theoretical refinements produced by Zahra and George (2002). They introduced four organisational dynamic capabilities of acquisition, assimilation, transformation and exploitation that businesses should simultaneously develop and manage. This is because a business without the ability to transform and exploit the knowledge could not possibly influence the business performance despite acquiring the knowledge from their respective networks and assimilating the knowledge in the first place (Flatten et al., 2011). Concrete comprehension of these dynamics should be acknowledged and further developed in future studies. The works produced by Binder (2018) and Thomas and Wood (2014, 2015), in particular, pave the way for further replication and reconceptualisation of absorptive capacity in the context of tourism networks.

State of Knowledge in Tourism Networks Post COVID-19

The review of the SLR assessments results reveals promising conceptual links between networks and knowledge in tourism. Before COVID-19 altered the tourism landscape, various factors such as the domination of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises in the sector, fragmentation and diversity of supply, lack of trust and collaboration as well as poor human resources have been cited as the main reasons behind the general reluctance of tourism organisations to invest in knowledge through networks (Czernek, 2014; Mior Shariffuddin, Wan Mohd Zain & Azinuddin, 2020; Raisi et al., 2020). This caused stagnant knowledge and information transfer initiatives among the tourism organisations. A similar pattern also can be observed in the SLR during pre-and-post COVID-19 since the adoption of knowledge management within empirical investigations has been slow. This is

consistent with the view of Cooper (2018) and Raisi et al. (2020). They adopted this research paradigm focusing on the perspective of how structural properties of the tourism network can affect knowledge transfer, where the actual nature of what is exchanged (e.g. attribute elements) is relatively inconsequential (Raisi et al., 2020; Valeri & Baggio, 2020).

However, the far-reaching and unprecedented effects of COVID-19 on the shutdown of travel, businesses and life activities have led to many scholars highlighting the need to restart tourism in the next normal (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Jamal & Budke, 2020). Stemming from this need, COVID-19 has forced a comprehensive revision on various present and existing behavioural and organisational tourism models. In the context of networks, most current research works can be described as the advent of deviation from the research premise within the last two decades as most of them are centred on the structural or relational features of the networks. This deviation can be seen in the substantial number of qualitative investigations and attribute elements that have been explored empirically (Alford & Jones, 2020; Chen & Wu, 2021; Kang, Kim, & Park, 2020; Li & Barbieri, 2020; London et al., 2021; Marques & Matos, 2020). It includes various intrinsic elements such as sociality and experience, search behaviour, network risk and fragmentation, collaborative transfer, social capital, and social affordance. This reflects the increasing interest among tourism scholars in addressing the calls for more research on the networks' qualitative aspects and attribute elements.

Study Implications

The need for more research on networks, knowledge, and performance is heightened considering the strategic significance and endurance for the participating tourism stakeholders, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the operational capacities of tourism reduced to a small fraction of what they used to be before the spread of COVID-19, new questions have been raised by the research communities on how tourism can respond and recover from COVID-19, then grow sustainably in order to be competitive. Since an increasing number of studies is addressing this call, a common theme emerged on the importance of networks and knowledge sharing in managing the crisis (Jamal & Budke, 2020; Mair et al., 2016). Based on this premise, important implications to both research and practice are outlined in the subsequent discussion.

Theoretical Implications

As the tourism industry is susceptible to varying disasters and uncertain risks, the understanding and improved knowledge from past experiences of crises will assist in the formulation of suitable management tools and techniques. Thus, it is proposed that future studies should explicitly analyse the transferability of tacit and explicit knowledge through the context of different types of tourism networks, such as formal and informal

networks as well as vertical and horizontal networks. Such empirical efforts derived during different stages of stability, critical situations, or volatile modifications on the tourism sector would explain the actors' participation in tourism networks.

Moreover, more research should be conducted to understand the role of each type of network in facilitating knowledge transfer and absorptive capacity at these different stages, given the crucial role of networks in aiding the process of learning, securing and appropriating skills. In addition, scholars from the field of general management and networks shared varying views on the importance of broad and multi-dimensionality aspects of performance, which usually consists of financial and non-financial measurements. Therefore, more empirical investigations adopting both facets of measurements are needed to conceptualise tourism performance comprehensively. This ultimately can lead to a better understanding of its links with the variables of networks, knowledge transfer and absorptive capacity.

Practical Implications

Several scholars noted that the tourism industry, in retrospect, had resisted changes toward the sustainable direction by maintaining its unsustainable practices (Romagosa, 2020). This can be seen in the failure to understand the value of knowledge and information as a vital source of competitive advantage and sustainable destination management which led to stagnant development amongst tourism organisations (Mat Som, Azinuddin, Mohd Saufi, Zarhari, & Wan Mohd Amin, 2021; Raisi et al., 2020). This is essential as the capabilities of tourism organisations to learn and exchange knowledge are dependent on their inclinations to commit to networking activities (Azinuddin, Mior Shariffuddin, & Wan Mohd Zain, 2020). According to Valeri & Baggio (2020), the significance of networks as a valuable platform of knowledge sharing has been recognised by the practitioners. A new way of thinking emerges towards realising the “communities of knowledge” within a destination. Besides, there is a consensus among the scholars on the influence of networks and knowledge on tourism destination and organisational performance. Furthermore, the result of this study illuminates how the different types, characteristics and elements of networks can be theoretically crucial and fundamental to perform at different stages or cycles of the tourism sector. This may be used to assist practitioners in aligning or re-aligning their networking strategy, where this approach should be constituted as a normal and deliberate decision-making process within the macro and micro level of tourism stakeholders.

Conclusion

Tourism has always been known as a complex and dynamic industry. Continuous changes and transformations characterise it due to the constant evolving of tourist

preferences and new technologies. In sustaining the tourist destination's success and livelihood, networks and knowledge are crucial for tourism stakeholders to provide competitive products and services. Based on this premise, the current paper has systematically reviewed the empirical literature on the analysis of relations or ties that illustrate the functioning dynamics within the destination systems. The SLR conducted on a considerable number of articles reflects the range of diversity of literature, especially in the context of different analysis levels applied in different fields of research investigation. Given the significant number of works of literature reviewed, it is evidenced that there is a scarcity of research on the link between the variables mentioned above despite the scholars increasing interests in the potential benefits of conceptual links between networks and knowledge in tourism development and management. Subsequently, there remains a lack of synthesised knowledge. The paucity of available research led to a deficient understanding of the tourism stakeholders' overall learning process and exchange.

In this respect, the first contribution has been made where the paper established a premise based on the review of a range of academic domains on the conceptual links between networks and knowledge in tourism. The second important contribution has also been made in considering the multitude of factors and perspectives in relation to the dynamics between networks, knowledge and performance that warrant the attention of future research. This reflects a different theoretical advance compared to the previous attempts of SLR on networks, as the current paper focuses on a niche area of tourism that links the networks, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity, and performance. Finally, the SLR also makes a practical contribution to the different destination stakeholders because it presents an overview of varying niche components and their relative importance in shaping their competitiveness and, possibly, their future intentions to put their scientific experiences into practice.

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Disclosure Statement

Following international publication policy and our ethical obligation as a researcher, we report that we have no conflict of interest.

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