Navigating innovations and Indigenous tourism: Insights from a systematic literature review in a four-decade journey of exploration

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous tourism plays a crucial role in sustainable development, cultural heritage preservation, and social equity. However, the integration of innovation in Indigenous tourism remains fragmented and underexplored. This research employs the Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology (TCCM) framework to systematically review 131 studies from major academic databases, offering the first comprehensive analysis of innovations in Indigenous tourism. The findings highlight China as a leading contributor in this field, emphasizing incremental innovations and their social and economic impacts. Despite progress, critical areas such as well-being, education, community empowerment, and environmental impacts remain underrepresented. To address these shortcomings, the study proposes ten propositions to advance theoretical and practical understanding in the sector. These insights guide future research and policy-making, strengthening Indigenous tourism's capacity to foster sustainable development, protect cultural heritage, and empower communities while addressing existing challenges in implementing innovations.

1. Introduction

Over the past four decades, Indigenous tourism has become an essential component of the global tourism industry, driven by the growing demand for authentic, culturally immersive, and sustainable travel experiences (Shale et al., 2023). Indigenous tourism provides visitors with a unique opportunity to engage with Indigenous cultures, traditions, and their deep connection to the land (Siekmann et al., 2017). As travelers increasingly seek transformative experiences that go beyond typical tourist activities, the importance of innovation within Indigenous tourism has become even more pronounced. These innovations are essential for preserving cultural heritage while fostering sustainable development, ensuring that Indigenous communities can share their stories and values in ways that benefit both them and their visitors (Hallmann & Zehrer, 2015).

Innovations in Indigenous tourism have transformed the tourism landscape, playing a critical role in helping Indigenous communities preserve their cultural integrity while adapting to modern tourism demands. As Melubo (2023) stated, the growth of Indigenous tourism is a transformative movement, serving as a powerful avenue for cultural

preservation, economic empowerment, and sustainable development. Innovation facilitates this process by enabling Indigenous communities to balance tradition with the evolving expectations of travelers, ensuring that cultural practices are maintained while fostering economic growth. For instance, Manyara and Jones (2007) demonstrated that Kenya's newly established community-based tourism enterprises have inadvertently promoted neocolonialism and reinforced dependency. A study by Hiwasaki (2000) illustrates how active community involvement in Hokkaido Mountain, Japan, has contributed to shaping the Ainu identity.

Indigenous tourism faces several key challenges that can hinder its growth and sustainability. One major challenge is balancing cultural preservation with the demands of commercialization (Tuulentie, 2006). As Indigenous communities open up to tourism, there is a risk of commodifying their cultural practices, which can dilute their authenticity and spiritual significance. Additionally, there are issues related to capacity building, as many Indigenous communities may lack the infrastructure, training, and resources to effectively manage and benefit from tourism enterprises (Buultjens et al., 2010). As articulated by Dangi and Jamal (2016), the obstacles associated with the equitable

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distribution of tourism benefits, including economic advancement and employment prospects, within the community, have the potential to aggravate pre-existing inequalities in Indigenous tourism. Furthermore, environmental sustainability is critical, as many Indigenous tourism sites are located in ecologically sensitive areas, and unregulated tourism can lead to environmental degradation (Karst, 2017). Lastly, navigating the often-complex legal and regulatory frameworks that govern Indigenous lands can pose significant hurdles for community-led tourism initiatives (Sinclair, 2003). These challenges call for innovative, culturally sensitive approaches that prioritize Indigenous ownership and control of tourism activities.

Taking a leaf from the above, it is also expected that the literature on innovation in Indigenous tourism has mushroomed over the last few years. Scholars have touched upon innovations such as creative methods of Indigenous engagement called the Indigenized model (Calvin et al., 2024), and the development of the social innovation concepts in tourism in a conceptual study by Kusumastuti et al. (2023). From a different angle, Hassan et al. (2022) discussed the shifting movement of Indigenous tourism towards technological applications. Several literatures contributed to entrepreneurship development literature. For instance, Rembulan et al. (2023) showed that using the sense of place in Indigenous tourism enterprises has made a new successful business model in Karangrejo Borobudur, Indonesia. The same can be observed in the studies of eco-friendly tourism models for Orchid Island in the Yami (Tao) tribe (Taiwan) by Chen (2019), a sustainable tribal tourism model in the tribal region of Rajasthan (India) by Chouhan (2022), and the development of a smart tourism integration model in the ancient villages in Northern Guangxi (China) by Li and Zhong (2022).

By far, systematic literature reviews (SLR) on the Indigenous tourism context are scarce, and far fewer on innovations in Indigenous tourism (Høegh-Guldberg et al., 2022). Even within the limited SLR on Indigenous tourism, not many focused on innovations, even though it is a key area for sustainable development (Butler, 2021). Existing SLRs in this field overlook innovative strategies and practices, focusing instead on other aspects like sustainability (Shrestha & L'Espoir Decosta, 2023), success factors and impacts (Ardiyansah Naili et al., 2022), determinants, processes, and impacts of Indigenous entrepreneurship (AlMehrzi et al., 2024). Specifically, the literature review by Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) offers a broad historical overview of Indigenous tourism from 1980 to 2014, using narrative methods to emphasize sustainability and stakeholder involvement, while this SLR focuses on innovations in Indigenous tourism. Notably, this SLR is among the first SLRs in Indigenous tourism literature, using the TCCM framework to systematically provide a more structured and rigorous analysis of the literature. These individual studies suggest the need for a comprehensive SLR on how innovation drives progress within the Indigenous tourism sector.

Additionally, existing literature on Indigenous tourism remains fragmented and lacks a systematic scheme to evaluate the theories and contexts employed in studying innovations within this domain. This absence of a structured evaluative framework results in fragmented and inconsistent assessments of how different theoretical approaches and contextual factors influence the development and impact of tourism innovations among Indigenous tourism (Chen et al., 2024). Consequently, researchers and practitioners face challenges in identifying which theoretical models and contextual variables are most effective or relevant in promoting sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices.

Moreover, the current literature lacks a consistent connection between the types of innovations, their impacts, and the methods used within the domain (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). This disconnection makes obtaining comprehensive conclusions about the effectiveness and influence of different innovations in Indigenous tourism challenging. Without a clear tie between these elements, researchers may struggle to determine the best approaches for fostering impactful innovations and to understand their effects on communities and tourism practices.

Indigenous tourism faces several challenges that necessitate innovation to foster sustainable practices. These challenges include balancing cultural integrity with commercialization, as Indigenous communities often navigate external pressures from the tourism industry that may lead to exploitation (Deutschlander & Leslie, 2003). Moreover, neocolonialism persists in many forms, where profit-driven motives overshadow the authentic representation of Indigenous cultures (Horowitz, 2015). Addressing these issues through innovative approaches can empower Indigenous communities, enabling them to assert control over their cultural narratives while promoting economic development that aligns with their values and aspirations (Davies et al., 2013).

Given the above, this SLR will identify the different theoretical and methodological lenses that have been used to explore innovations in Indigenous tourism. Additionally, this SLR will provide insights into the specific geographical contexts in which innovations in Indigenous tourism have been implemented, and what impact these contexts have on the nature of the innovations. Furthermore, this review considers how Indigenous governance structures shape the adoption and development of innovations, recognizing the role of self-determination, decision-making processes, and community priorities in influencing tourism-related innovations. Finally, it would provide perspectives on the distinguishing characteristics of successful innovations in Indigenous tourism.

As such, this review not only consolidates existing knowledge but also offers fresh insights that advance our understanding of innovations in Indigenous tourism. These findings provide a robust foundation for guiding future academic research and can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers and practitioners. By integrating Indigenous perspectives, this review promotes strategies that are both culturally sensitive and economically viable, thereby supporting sustainable tourism development and empowering Indigenous communities. Through this dual focus, the SLR contributes meaningfully to both the theoretical exploration of Indigenous tourism and its practical application in shaping more equitable and sustainable tourism practices.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows: in the next section, the applied methods are discussed. Thereafter, the results of the SLR are presented, followed by a conclusion which includes suggested future research directions for advancing knowledge and studies in Indigenous tourism innovations.

2. Methodology

This study follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) protocol developed by Moher et al. (2010) to address the research objectives. The PRISMA statement provides a standardized checklist to ensure all relevant information is reported, facilitating transparent and reproducible review process.

2.1. Search strategy

To align this study with existing tourism-related SLR studies such as Zumba-Zúñiga et al. (2023), Aires et al. (2022), Meneses et al. (2024), Sánchez and Martínez (2022), Andrianto et al. (2022), Santos et al. (2021), and das Neves, 2021, the search terms used include:

"Initiat*" OR "Innovati*" OR "Creativ*" OR "Inventi*" OR "Originality" OR "Novelty" OR "Change" OR "Improvement" OR "Variation" OR "Modification" AND "Indigenous tourism" OR "Aboriginal tourism" OR "First nations tourism" OR "Ethnic tourism" OR "Ethnotourism" OR "Minority tourism" OR "Native tourism" OR "Tribal tourism" OR "Autochthonous tourism".

Additionally, this study utilized Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCOHost, and ScienceDirect, as they encompass various peer-reviewed journals in tourism literature (Fletcher & Bostock, 2022; Singh et al., 2021). The selection of these databases aligns with existing SLRs by scholars such as Jain et al. (2023), Liu et al. (2022), and Rungroueng and Monpanthong

(2023).

The chosen timeframe for this SLR spans from 1984 to 2024 and can be explained from different perspectives. For one reason, this period aligns with the recognition of Indigenous tourism as a field by itself (United Nations, 2007). Before this period, Indigenous tourism was often subsumed under broader categories like cultural or ethnic tourism, and dedicated academic attention to Indigenous perspectives was limited (Pereiro, 2013). It was also in the early 1980s when a movement began to promote, protect and recognize the cultural heritage and rights of the Indigenous community (Perez-Alvaro, 2023). In sum, broader socio-economic and cultural trends often shape innovations in Indigenous tourism. By having 40 years of review starting from 1984, it allows us to better contextualize these innovations within the relevant historical and cultural developments of the time, providing a deeper understanding of the factors that influenced the evolution of Indigenous tourism.

The initial search with titles, authors, and abstract inclusions resulted in 391 studies, with 250 from Scopus, 89 from Web of Science, 15 from EBSCOHost, and 37 from ScienceDirect. After Endnote 21

automatically excluded 92 duplicate studies, we conducted a thorough manual review to ensure no duplicates remained in the dataset. This involved cross-checking titles, authors, and publication years to identify any studies missed during the automatic process or those with slight variations in their metadata that the software could not detect. This manual check resulted in an additional exclusion of 77 duplicates. We also excluded grey literature (non-peered review articles, $n = 30$) as they did not undergo strict reviews like those in high-ranking journals, thus affecting the credibility of this research paper (Paul & Criado, 2020). This practice aligns with the recent systematic literature reviews such as Mir et al. (2024) and Singh et al. (2021). The remaining 192 studies' contents were then screened for relevance. The next part presents how we did the screening.

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To ensure a robust and focused analysis of innovations in Indigenous tourism, we applied specific inclusion and exclusion criteria aligned with established SLR practices. First, we included only studies that
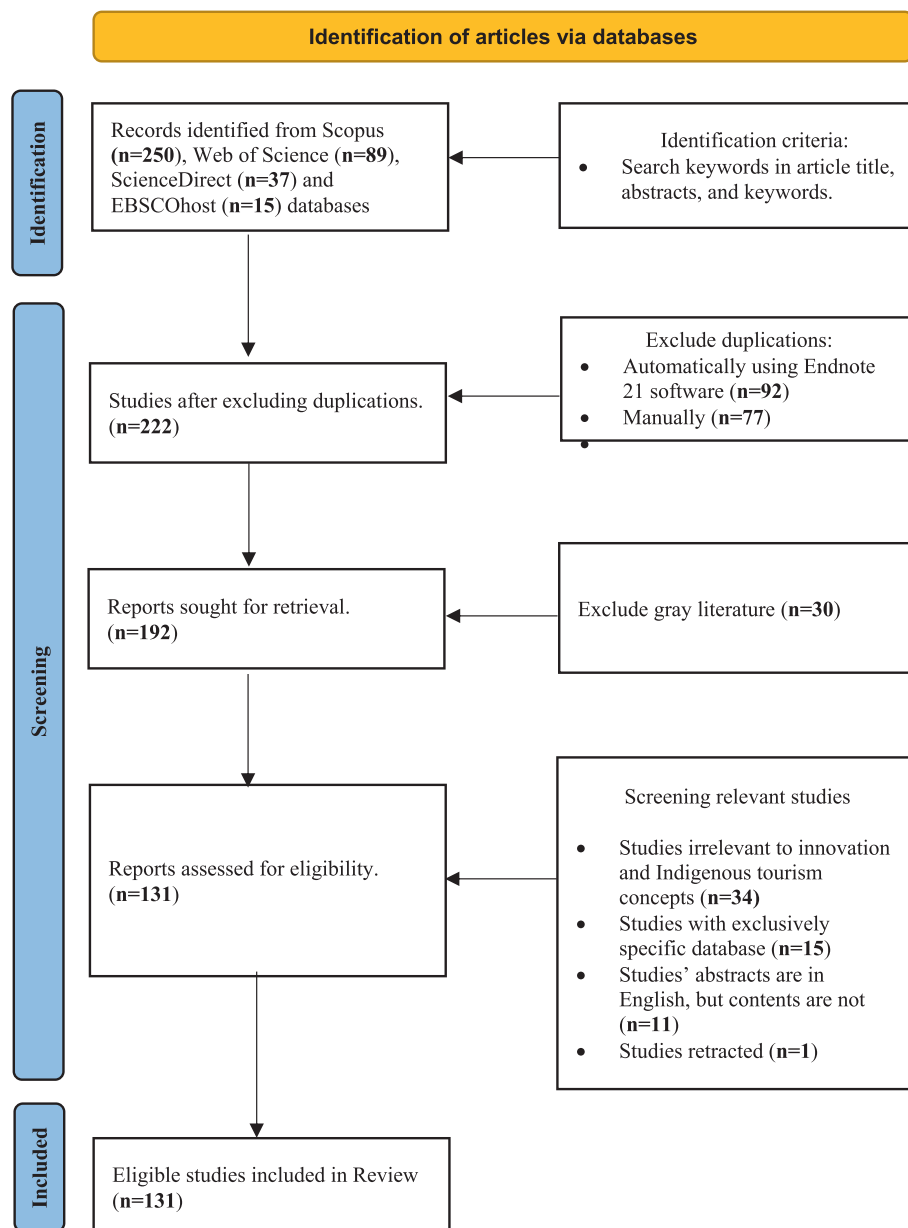

Fig. 1. PRISMA flowchart.

explicitly addressed innovations within Indigenous tourism, covering products, services, processes, or governance that directly impact Indigenous communities. We also limited our sources to peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers, following the precedent set by Kitchenham and Brereton (2013). Additionally, only studies published in English were considered, consistent with prior reviews like Delgado-Rodríguez (2001), due to the lack of translation resources. We included only studies with accessible full texts, following Tranfield et al. (2003). Finally, the review considered publications from 1984 to 2024.

In addition to the inclusion criteria, we applied several exclusion criteria, commonly used in SLRs, to maintain focus and ensure quality. First, studies that addressed tourism innovation broadly but did not specifically focus on Indigenous tourism were excluded. For instance, the study by Jo et al. (2020) was excluded as it primarily examined the roles of Korean-Chinese tour guides rather than Indigenous tourism, a practice in line with SLRs such as Tan et al. (2023). We removed duplicated studies and retracted articles to avoid redundancy and ensure quality, as recommended by Noor (2024). Additionally, grey literature was excluded, focusing solely on peer-reviewed scholarly work, consistent with guidelines by Paul et al. (2021).

Following these criteria, 61 studies were excluded, resulting in a final set of 131 studies for analysis (see Fig. 1). During the screening process, three reviewers from different cultural and societal backgrounds, one from the Netherlands, one from Singapore, and one from Vietnam, independently assessed each study based on the inclusion criteria. In cases where disagreements arose, we employed a consensus-based approach. The reviewers met face-to-face to discuss each conflicting assessment, reviewing the article's relevancy one by one until mutual agreement was reached. This collaborative and diverse team ensured that regional perspectives were considered, reducing the risk of selection bias. Although we did not statistically measure inter-rater reliability using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960), thorough discussions helped minimize bias and ensure the selection of the most relevant studies. Similar approaches were used in studies by Haneuse (2016) and Jacobsen (2011).

The 131 studies were categorized into four key areas: theories, contexts, characteristics, and methods, following the TCCM framework suggested by Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019). The 'Theories' dimension captures the foundational frameworks applied in existing studies, providing insight into the models and concepts that guide understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption and implementation. 'Context' refers to the specific settings in which these studies are conducted, including geographical, cultural, and organizational environments that shape innovations in Indigenous tourism. The 'Characteristics' dimension highlights the distinct features of the innovations under study, such as their types, functionalities, and potential impacts. Finally, 'Methods' comprise the research designs, sampling techniques, data collection approaches, and analytical methods employed, thereby reflecting the methodological approaches used to examine innovations in these diverse contexts. Each study was systematically analyzed to identify which theories were applied, the specific contextual settings (geographical, cultural, or social) they focused on, the characteristics of the innovations discussed, and the research methodologies used. This structured approach allowed for a comprehensive synthesis of insights, revealing gaps and patterns in the literature related to Indigenous tourism innovations (Paul & Criado, 2020).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Descriptive analysis of the backgrounds of the studies

The descriptive analysis of Indigenous tourism innovations examines key aspects such as the geographical distribution of studies, temporal trends in innovation development, and thematic focus areas including economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts. By analyzing these elements, we can identify both the opportunities and challenges faced by Indigenous communities in tourism innovation (Fulk, 2023). This approach also highlights the contexts and characteristics of innovations, contributing to a deeper understanding of their role in sustainable development and the enhancement of tourism destinations (Bhaskara et al., 2023; González-Rodríguez et al., 2023).

3.1.1. Journal publication circulations

The 131 studies analyzed were published in 70 different journals, indicating that research on Indigenous tourism innovations spans multiple disciplines. Using Scopus quartile classification as a guide, the top ten journals (see Table 1) with the highest number of publications in this field include *Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Management, Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, Tourist Studies, Tourism, Culture and Communication, Current Issues in Tourism, Journal of Ecotourism, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*. Among these, *Annals of Tourism Research* contributed the most with 17 studies, highlighting its prominence in research on Indigenous tourism innovations.

3.1.2. Publication trends

Fig. 2 illustrates fluctuations in publication trends over the years. The number of studies rose from two in 2009 to a peak of 15 in 2016, before dropping to two in 2017 and three in 2018. A new peak was observed in 2022 with 14 studies, followed by a decline to 10 studies in 2023. The number of studies reached a new peak in 2022 with 14 studies and then went down again in 2023 with 10 studies. Inconsistent publication trends in Indigenous tourism innovation research arise from various interrelated factors. A significant challenge is securing funding for projects, which Hanafiah et al. (2024) noted limits the number of studies undertaken and reduce publication volumes. Ethical concerns regarding research with Indigenous communities, highlighted by Butler (2021), can also extend timelines or lead to project cancellations.

Respecting cultural sensitivities and ensuring research benefits Indigenous communities are vital for fostering collaboration and trust. However, historical exploitation complicates these relationships (Thakur et al., 2023). Additionally, the holistic nature of Indigenous knowledge systems often clashes with traditional academic frameworks, hindering the publication process.

These inconsistencies suggest a need for innovative approaches to funding and collaboration in future research. As academic institutions and funding bodies adapt to these dynamics, the field may benefit from alternative funding models and enhanced partnership frameworks to support sustained and ethical research efforts.

3.1.3. Authors' country

Table 2 indicates that Indigenous tourism researchers are represented across all five continents, with the center of gravity ($n = 49$) in Asia, followed by Oceania ($n = 33$), North America ($n = 30$), South America ($n = 6$), and Africa ($n = 3$). However, this dominance may influence the global narrative, potentially creating regional biases and shaping the perspectives represented in Indigenous tourism research.

Africa's low representation in Indigenous tourism research is

Table 1
Top 10 journals published articles on innovations in Indigenous tourism.

Journal name	No. of studies	Ranking
Annals of Tourism Research	17	Q1
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	12	Q1
Tourism Management	7	Q1
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	6	Q1
Tourist Studies	4	Q2
Tourism, Culture and Communication	3	Q4
Current Issues in Tourism	3	Q1
Journal of Ecotourism	3	Q2
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	3	Q1
Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change	3	Q2

Fig. 2. Studies of innovations in Indigenous tourism and year published.

Table 2
Country allocation of researchers.

Continents	Asia	Oceania	North America	Europe	South America	Africa
No. of authors	49	33	30	18	6	3

Table 3
Theories used in the studies of Indigenous tourism innovations.

Theory Name	Number of Occurrences	Theory Name	Number of Occurrences
Social Exchange Theory	3	Social Construction Theory	1
Stakeholder theory	2	Social Identity Theory	1
Whiteness theory	1	Social space production theory	1
Attraction systems theories	1	Sustainable Impact Assessment (SIA) theory	1
Cognitive-experiential self-theory	1	Entrepreneurial management theory	1
Collaboration theory	1	The inter-organizational collaboration theory	1
Complexity theory	1	Resource-based view theory	1
Constructivist theory	1	TEAR theory of Experiential Design	1
Endogenous theory of local development through tourism	1	Theory of ethnic tourism	1
Ethnocentric/ Ethno-relative theory	1	Tourism empowerment theory	1
Social Cognitive Theory	1	Theory of commoditization	1
Evolutionary theories, including life history theory and evolutionary ecology theory	1	Theory of network of tourism development	1
Nationalism theory	1	Theory of Planned Behavior	1
Place theory	1	Transformative learning theory	1
Postcolonial theory	1	Value exchange theory	1
Resilience capacities theory	1	Technology Acceptance Model	1
Sustainable social-environmental enterprise theory	1		

noteworthy, with only three authors contributing to the field. This underrepresentation may be attributed to several factors, including limited funding opportunities and insufficient institutional support for research initiatives (Schmitz & Lekane Tsobgou, 2016). Additionally, geopolitical challenges, such as instability and conflict in some regions, can hinder collaboration and discourage researchers from engaging in Indigenous tourism studies (Adams, 2001). The focus on pressing socio-economic issues may also divert attention away from Indigenous tourism, further limiting research visibility.

3.2. Theories

Referring to Table 3, this SLR identified a wide range of theories applied to explain innovation in Indigenous tourism. Among them, the two most frequently used theories are Social Exchange Theory and Stakeholder Theory.

Social Exchange Theory, which analyzes interactions through a cost-benefit lens, is widely applied in tourism research. The three studies by Sakata and Prideaux (2013), Yang et al. (2022), and Meera and Vinodan (2023), which examine this theory in different contexts - community-based ecotourism, resident value creation, and sustainability initiatives - highlight its potential to explain the trade-offs involved in various tourism models. In Indigenous tourism, this theory supports innovations that are more likely to be welcomed by communities, as it emphasizes mutual benefits and encourages participation when innovations align with local values (Lloyd et al., 2015). This suggests an underexplored area for future research on reciprocity and exchange dynamics in Indigenous tourism.

The stakeholder theory was employed two times in the studies by Diekmann and Maulet (2009) and Rembulan et al. (2023). Diekmann and Maulet (2009) utilized the theory to explore tourism development issues and stakeholder perceptions in Matonge town in Belgium, while Rembulan et al. (2023) used stakeholder theory to understand the interactions between actors involved in the creation of a sense of place value for Indigenous tourism enterprise in Karangrejo village in Indonesia. This theory aids Indigenous tourism innovation by ensuring

inclusive decision-making and aligning goals among diverse stakeholders, from Indigenous leaders to tourism providers. Additionally, Yiamjanya et al. (2022) emphasized that stakeholder participation is

crucial for the success of Indigenous tourism, making this theory particularly useful for fostering sustainable and respectful innovations.

The number of theories (n = 36) exceeds the number of 31 studies because some of the identified studies used multiple theories. For instance, Meera and Vinodan (2023) employed three theories, including the endogenous theory of local development through tourism, the theory of network of tourism development, and the social exchange theory in the study mentioned earlier. The same authors, in a different study, also applied the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Social Cognitive Theory to identify factors hindering tech adoption among Indigenous tourism stakeholders in various regions in India. Likewise, Rembulan et al. (2023) combined stakeholder and value exchange theories in their same study in Karangrejo village in Indonesia. The use of multiple theories in Indigenous tourism literature provides a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues, such as community development, stakeholder interactions, and cultural preservation (Braut, 2023). By combining different theoretical perspectives, researchers can offer deeper insights and develop more effective solutions to the unique challenges Indigenous tourism faces.

The majority of studies did not adopt any theory due to their use of qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research is often exploratory, seeking to deeply understand contexts and phenomena without necessarily adhering to existing theoretical frameworks (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2019). Rather than fitting data into pre-existing theories, qualitative research in Indigenous tourism often contributes to theory development by generating new insights, uncovering unique cultural dynamics, and highlighting underexplored aspects of Indigenous communities (Shrestha et al., 2024). This process of theory building can offer a more organic, context-specific understanding of the field.

3.3. Contexts

The research context refers to the geographical locations where the studies were conducted (Paul & Criado, 2020). Our review indicates that among the 131 studies, China (n = 31), Australia (n = 17), and Canada (n = 11) account for the highest number of studies examining innovations in Indigenous tourism (see Table 4).

A probable explanation resides in the fact that Australia, Canada, and China have diverse cultures (Tung & Baumann, 2009). For instance, in China, there are over 125 million Indigenous people. The same goes for Canada, with almost two million Indigenous people, and Australia, with almost one million Indigenous people (Ang, 2023). Besides, many favourable elements support Indigenous research in these countries, such as significant funding government role (Shi & Rao, 2010), government policy support (Chang et al., 2021; Shang et al., 2021), and a supportive environment for collaboration and knowledge sharing (Gilmour, 2023). It is evident that government funds have been fostering both research collaboration and funding. For instance, the Australia-China Science and Research Fund-Joint Research Centres provides

grants of up to AU$ 5 million to support joint Indigenous research projects between Australia and China (Business, 2024). Similarly, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade allocated a total grant of CA$ 28 million for seven-year projects regarding Indigenous research (Hayman, 2011). These funds enhance cross-national research efforts and promote in-depth studies on Indigenous issues in these countries.

While most studies occurred in a specific location, this review noted that four studies attempted to explore Indigenous tourism innovations in multiple countries. For instance, Viken et al. (2021) studied Indigenous tourism in Finland, Norway, and Canada, while van den Berghe and Keyes (1984) examined various Indigenous tourism in shared territories of the Cajuns of Louisiana, USA and the Torajas of Sulawesi, Indonesia. Most recently, Molina et al. (2024) studied the initiatives from the Puerto Nariño communities, known for their Indigenous tourism in the Amazon region that appears in multiple countries. As Cuoco et al. (2022) highlighted that conducting multinational studies presents a myriad of challenges that stem from cultural, regulatory, logistical, and methodological differences across countries, these challenges can significantly impact the design, execution, and outcomes of research, necessitating careful planning and adaptation by researchers. These limited studies underscore the potential value of cross-country comparisons, revealing how diverse political and social contexts shape Indigenous tourism practices and challenges. By examining Indigenous populations across different regions, researchers can uncover unique insights into governmental regulations, socioeconomic inequalities, and cultural dynamics, fostering more insights of Indigenous tourism on a global scale. Furthermore, these studies present opportunities for future research to explore collaborative approaches and best practices that transcend national boundaries, ultimately contributing to the preservation and promotion of Indigenous knowledge and tourism initiatives worldwide.

Indigenous tourism innovations in the Americas evolved through distinct pathways, resulting in 16 and nine studies (see Table 4), offering new insights into how cultural, economic, and governance factors shape tourism development. In South America, innovations prioritized cultural preservation (de la Maza et al., 2023), self-governance (Theodossopoulos, 2012), and environmental sustainability (Peredo et al., 2015), demonstrating how Indigenous communities adapted traditions to tourism while maintaining cultural integrity. In contrast, North American initiatives emphasized economic growth (Grant, 2005), entrepreneurship (Swanson & DeVereaux, 2017; Williams & Peters, 2008), and institutional frameworks (Bennett et al., 2012; Lemelin et al., 2015), highlighting how tourism became a tool for self-determination and political influence. These differences suggest that Indigenous tourism innovations are shaped not only by economic opportunities but also by historical governance structures and sociopolitical contexts. This finding emphasizes the role of governance and institutional support in shaping Indigenous tourism trajectories across regions.

Indigenous governance structures are crucial in shaping how tourism

Table 4
Geographical context of studies.

Country	No. of studies	Country	No. of studies	Country	No. of studies
China	31	Brazil	2	Mongolia	1
Australia	17	Papua New Guinea	2	Nepal	1
Canada	11	Indonesia	2	Iran	1
Thailand	6	Chile	2	Guyana	1
Taiwan	6	Vietnam	2	Malaysia	1
New Zealand	5	Ecuador-Peru border	1	Belgium	1
USA	5	South Africa	1	Kazakhstan	1
Mexico	5	South Pacific countries	1	Cuba	1
India	5	Zambia	1	Amazona region	1
Russia	3	Mozambique	1	Ecuador	1
Norway	3	Latvia	1	Peru	1
Panama	2	Suriname	1	Third-world countries	1
Poland	2	Jamaica	1	Sweden	1
Kenya	2				

innovations are adopted within Indigenous communities (Semwal et al., 2024). Traditional governance systems, such as those practiced by the Indigenous Newars, emphasize collaborative decision-making and grassroots participation, which can foster community-driven sustainable tourism development and cultural revitalization (Shrestha et al., 2024). However, economic shifts and governance changes, as seen in Miao village experiencing economic diversification, can either facilitate or hinder innovation adoption depending on the alignment of new initiatives with existing governance frameworks (Tian et al., 2023). For instance, co-management models that involve Indigenous leaders in tourism policy and administration, as observed in the Hopi Tribe's tourism policy, can enhance local control and ensure that innovations align with cultural values (Swanson & DeVereaux, 2017). Conversely, rapid tourism development, such as in Xijiang, may generate economic benefits but exclude local participation, creating governance challenges (Yang et al., 2022). Furthermore, government and corporate support for initiatives like educating Indigenous youth on the land underscores the importance of embedding Indigenous knowledge systems into tourism development, reinforcing cultural identity alongside economic progress (Cohen, 2016). Challenges such as the impact of the pandemic on Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs, infrastructure limitations in remote communities, and extreme weather conditions also highlight the need for governance structures that can adapt to external pressures while maintaining cultural and environmental sustainability (Brattland et al., 2023; de la Maza et al., 2023). By integrating traditional governance models with modern economic and technological opportunities, Indigenous communities can navigate the complexities of innovation adoption while preserving their autonomy and cultural integrity.

4. Characteristics

4.1. Types of innovations

According to Kerzner (2022), types of innovation are classified based on the extent of change. Incremental innovations involve small, gradual improvements to existing products, services, or processes. For instance, Rembulan et al. (2023) examined continuous minor changes implemented amidst uncertainty due to the pandemic, with a focus on service excellence and consumer orientation in Indigenous tourism enterprises in Karangrejo, Indonesia.

Radical innovations refer to the development of completely new products, services, or technologies that significantly deviate from existing solutions. For instance, Nie and Yao (2022), analyzed the evolving attitudes towards linguistic commodification among the Naxi minority community in Lijiang (China), illustrating a transition from hesitation and objection to integration and creative accommodation.

Disruptive innovations initially enter the market by targeting a niche or underserved segment, often offering a simpler, more affordable, or more accessible solution than mainstream options. Over time, they gain traction and eventually displace established products, services, or competitors, fundamentally transforming industries. For instance, Shrestha et al. (2024) mentioned the change towards collaborative practices among the Indigenous Newars, Nepal. This practice initially started small but eventually overthrew existing market leaders. With these clear definitions guided by Kerzner (2022), the innovation categorization process was conducted with little disagreement among our researchers.

This innovation categories was also adopted in other studies, such as Sergeeva (2016) study of the radicality of innovation on perceptions of organizational members and Korhonen (2018) study of degrees of change in enterprises. Given this, it is natural that we leveraged Kerzner's definition in this SLR to classify the types of innovation. As categorized by the degree of change ($n = 131$), incremental innovations were found in 64 studies, followed by radical innovations in 47 and disruptive innovations in 21 (see Table 5).

Table 5
Innovation types by degree of change in Indigenous tourism.

Innovation type - degree of change	Incremental Innovations	Radical Innovation	Disruptive Innovation
Number of studies	64	46	21

4.1.1. Incremental innovations

64 studies fall under the category of incremental innovations. These innovations typically build upon existing practices and frameworks, aiming to enhance or refine them rather than introducing entirely new concepts or models (Rubin & Abramson, 2018). For instance, Rembulan et al. (2023) described the setting of an Indigenous tourism enterprise in Karangrejo, Indonesia, to enhance existing practices to better cope with the uncertainties brought by the pandemic, while Yang et al. (2022) illustrated the enhancement and adaptation of existing cultural conservation practices and attitudes among residents in Xijiang Miao Villages (China), leading to gradual improvements and increased community engagement. The dominance of incremental innovations in Indigenous tourism can be attributed to several factors: the need to respect cultural authenticity while navigating contemporary challenges, the limited resources and funding often available to Indigenous communities, and the desire to ensure community buy-in through gradual change. These innovations underscore a strategic approach to growth and development that fosters community resilience and social cohesion, rather than disrupting or altering established cultural practices.

4.1.2. Radical innovations

47 studies mentioning radical innovations indicate a substantial number of studies focusing on radical innovations in Indigenous tourism. For instance, Veeck (2023) portrayed the implementation of The Major Function Oriented Zoning policies initiated in the Aba Prefecture, Western China, as transformative, broad scope, and potential for significant impact on both ecological conservation and tourism development among the local Indigenous community; while Hongsuwan and Sritharet (2022) described the dynamic presentation and adaptation of ethnic identities in response to changing social contexts in Indigenous tourism among the Tai Dam community in Ban Na Pa Nad, Thailand, due to their transformative nature, focus on continuous change, and potential to redefine traditional approaches to cultural representation and tourism promotion. These innovations involve more transformative changes, such as new approaches to cultural representation, community empowerment, and sustainability integration. However, such large-scale changes also pose risks and challenges, particularly in Indigenous communities that prioritize cultural preservation. The potential for conflict between innovation and tradition, along with the possibility of alienating community members who may feel their cultural identity is at stake, underscores the need for careful consideration and inclusive dialogue in implementing radical innovations.

4.1.3. Disruptive innovations

21 studies of disruptive innovations indicate a less common focus in Indigenous tourism. For instance, Zhou and Chen (2022) mentioned the design innovation of ethnic cultural wisdom tourism products based on digital information technology in Indigenous tourism in Yunnan province (China), as new technologies and approaches that can significantly modify existing market structures, business models, and consumer behaviours in the tourism industry; while Molina et al. (2024) demonstrated the initiatives aimed at encouraging public engagement in communication with the government among the Puerto Nariño communities in the Amazon region as a potential to fundamentally change governance structures, practices, and outcomes, fostering a more inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable approach. As supported by Poulaki et al. (2024), disruptive innovations, commonly begin by filling gaps in existing markets. These innovations challenge and potentially disrupt established ways of thinking and operating within the sector.

However, their relatively low occurrence in Indigenous tourism may originate from a combination of factors, including concerns over cultural erosion, which can make communities hesitant to embrace disruptive changes (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, the difficulties in adopting such innovations in remote or resource-limited areas further hinder their implementation (Buultjens et al., 2005). Consequently, it is not surprising that the number of disruptive innovations in Indigenous tourism is the smallest among the three categories.

4.2. Innovation impacts

The impact of innovation in Indigenous tourism is categorized into several key areas, as commonly discussed in prior tourism research. Economic impacts include increased revenue, job creation, and improved competitiveness (Bibire et al., 2023). Social impacts encompass the preservation and revitalization of culture, identities, and the environment, as well as community empowerment and well-being (Dale et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019).

The literature also considers environmental impacts, particularly in relation to sustainability efforts and resource conservation (Dale et al., 2010). Additionally, Kim et al. (2020) examined marketing and organizational impacts, focusing on enhancing tourist experiences. Furthermore, Camarero and Garrido (2012) emphasized the role of education and cultural exchange in shaping Indigenous tourism development.

As innovations in Indigenous tourism may have more than one impact, we agreed to list every impact they may have in those established innovation impact categories. For instance, the study by Chio (2011) described reimagining mobility and travel as integral components of modern subjectivities and opportunities in ethnic rural communities in China, which resulted in a contribution to the economic development of Indigenous communities and promotion of environmental sustainability, which we eventually categorized as Economic impacts and Social impacts. As a result, we utilize the established innovation impact categories to align this SLR with existing literature (see Table 6).

4.2.1. Social impacts

The greatest attention was paid to social impacts, particularly community resilience and sustainability in 61 studies, and preservation and revitalization of culture and identities in 34 studies. These studies highlight the importance of maintaining and revitalizing cultural heritage, traditions, and identities through tourism, aligning with the goals of many Indigenous tourism to protect and share their cultural legacy (Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2021).

4.2.2. Economic impacts

Economic impacts were highlighted in 46 studies, indicating a significant focus on fostering economic growth and generating revenue for Indigenous tourism. Most studies emphasize the creation of jobs and the stimulation of local economies from within the communities. External

economic support, such as outside investments, was seldom mentioned, possibly reflecting a deliberate focus on Indigenous sovereignty and self-reliance, as well as barriers to attracting outside investment. This finding underscores the prioritization of local solutions and empowerment over external dependency, highlighting a commitment to sustainable economic development within Indigenous communities.

4.2.3. Environmental impacts

Environmental impacts were mentioned in 25 studies, highlighting the importance of environmental preservation in Indigenous tourism development (Yiamjanya et al., 2022). Several studies discuss innovations that promote sustainability, such as eco-friendly practices (Nguyen et al., 2020), sustainable management of natural resources (Yiamjanya et al., 2022), and environmental conservation (Ruhanen et al., 2015), all aimed at minimizing the ecological footprint of tourism. This focus underscores the need for tourism development to not only respect but actively support the natural environment.

4.2.4. Marketing and customer relation impacts

With only 11 studies mentioning marketing and customer relations impacts, this area appears underexplored in Indigenous tourism research. The limited focus may originate from the predominant emphasis on social and economic impacts, potentially overlooking the crucial role that innovative marketing strategies can play in enhancing the tourist experience and supporting overall development. As Hossain et al. (2023) noted, improving the tourist experience can lead to higher satisfaction, positive reviews, and repeat visits, which are essential for sustainable tourism growth.

4.2.5. Educational and cultural exchange impacts

Six studies mentioned the educational and cultural exchange impacts. Colton and Whitney-Squire (2010) highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing and fostering mutual understanding between visitors and Indigenous tourism. The limited focus on local community education and cultural exchange indicates a significant gap in the literature. Future research could explore innovative approaches to Indigenous education, such as culturally relevant curriculum development, and programs that facilitate deeper cultural exchanges between visitors and Indigenous communities, enriching both experiences and understanding.

5. Methods

Among the 131 papers, qualitative methodology ($n = 96$) is the dominant analytical method (see Table 7). The trend reflects two issues. One, researchers prioritize understanding the nuanced, cultural, and subjective aspects of Indigenous tourism through detailed observations, interviews, and case studies; and two, the literature domain of Indigenous tourism innovations is not mature yet. This finding is further supported by Edmondson and Zuzul (2018), who note that researchers tend to use quantitative methods in more established fields, while qualitative approaches are preferred in emerging areas of study.

Within the quantitative studies, four dominant curvilinear relationships among the key variables in Indigenous tourism research were identified (see Table 8). These include the link between tourist preferences and experience enhancements, as seen in the works of Zhang et al. (2022), Mawroh and Dixit (2023), and Zhou and Chen (2022), which emphasize the growing importance of improving visitor experiences.

Similarly, the interaction between tourism management and

Table 6
Impacts of innovations.

Impacts	No. of studies
Social impact - Community resilience/ sustainability	61
Social impact - Preservation and revitalization of culture, and identities	34
Social impact - Community empowerment	11
Social impact - Well-being	3
Economic impacts	36
Environmental impacts	25
Marketing and customer relation impact/ Enhancing tourist experience	11
Organizational impact/Education & cultural exchange	6

Table 7
Methodologies used to study Indigenous tourism innovations.

Methodologies used	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed Methods	Conceptual
No. of studies	96	16	16	4

Table 8
Main variable correlations in studies of innovations in Indigenous tourism.

Authors	Tourist preferences vs. Experience enhancements	Tourism management vs. Community involvement	Socioeconomic dynamics vs. Demographics	Sustainability constructs vs. tourism development
Forsyth (1995)			X	
Mattison et al. (2022)				X
Yang et al. (2022)		X		
Zhang et al. (2022)	X			
Liang et al. (2023)		X		
Mawroh and Dixit (2023)	X			
Ramos-García et al. (2023)		X		
Brandão et al. (2014)				X
Chouhan (2022)				X
Zhou and Chen (2022)	X			
Ishii (2012)			X	

community involvement, explored by Yang et al. (2022), Ramos-García et al. (2023), and Liang et al. (2023), underscores the critical role of local engagement in sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, socioeconomic dynamics and demographics, discussed by Forsyth (1995), and Ishii (2012), revealed how these factors influence tourism patterns, while constructs of sustainability, examined by Brandão et al. (2014) and Chouhan (2022) and Mattison et al. (2022) emphasized the need for integrating sustainable practices within Indigenous tourism frameworks. Together, these curvilinear relationships reflect broader research trends that prioritize experiential enhancement, community involvement, and sustainability in Indigenous tourism.

Nevertheless, contrasting views were also recorded. Firstly, the relatedness of ecosystem conservation and the utility value of a destination is also arguable. Chen (2019) pointed out that increasing the ecosystem conservation trust fund may decrease the utility value of Orchid Island tourism for tourists. This finding might contrast with the general expectation that conservation efforts enhance the attractiveness of a destination by preserving its natural beauty (Habibi, 2021; Murphy et al., 2018). Secondly, there are also controversial points on the constructs of sustainability and tourism development. Brandão et al. (2014) stated that tourism is perceived as sustainable in social, cultural, and environmental dimensions but not economically due to low visitor numbers. From a different angle, Chouhan (2022) suggested that social, economic, and ecological dimensions positively impact sustainability in tribal tourism, highlighting social sustainability's significant influence. The differing emphasis on economic sustainability indicates a potential controversy regarding what constitutes sustainable tourism and how different stakeholders prioritize these dimensions for tourism development. Lastly, the curvilinear relationship between perceived values and revisit intentions was not firmly defined. Wu et al. (2019) noted that although tourists recognize high values of natural or socio-cultural

recreational resources, these perceptions do not significantly impact their willingness to revisit. This finding contradicts previous studies that typically find a strong link between perceived value and revisit intentions (Mulkunee & Monpanthong, 2023; Rungklin et al., 2023). This discrepancy could trigger discussions on the factors influencing repeat visitation and the relative importance of perceived value.

Furthermore, among the 131 studies on innovations in Indigenous tourism, advanced quantitative techniques were largely absent, such as big data analytics, econometric modeling, and the use of advanced technology in data collection, despite their increasing significance in identifying trends and evaluating the economic impacts of tourism innovations (Chon & Hao, 2024). These advanced techniques provide insights by analyzing vast datasets, identifying patterns, and forecasting future trends with a high degree of accuracy.

Only one study used longitudinal research methods (see the Appendix), likely due to challenges in data collection, including extended time requirements, participant attrition, complex data management, and consistency issues (Beddoes, 2023). Meanwhile, Broadbent and Osborne (2022) stated that the benefits of capturing temporal dynamics, assessing long-term effects, and improving causal inference make it a powerful approach for understanding changes over time and informing effective policies and practices.

6. Future research directions

6.1. Advancing theory

The potentially complex relationships between curvilinear connections, such as the trade-off between ecosystem preservation and destination utility value, are particularly significant. As indicated in our review, most studies, including those by Vinodan and Meera (2024) and Zhou and Chen (2022), apply linear relationships when testing the effect of technology on various outcomes within the context of Indigenous tourism. However, Zhang (2023) suggests that a curvilinear relationship may exist. For instance, introducing technology (such as social media or digital archives) can aid in preserving and promoting Indigenous culture by making it more accessible and engaging to a wider audience (Tuominen et al., 2023). beyond a certain point, excessive reliance on technology may contribute to the commercialization and dilution of cultural elements, ultimately undermining cultural preservation. Scholars such as (Ramaiah & Shimraya, 2017). Scholars such as Zhang and Li (2024) have made similar arguments. Hence, our first proposition:

Proposition 1. Leveraging curvilinear relationships to advance theories to better understand and analyze the relationships on the role of technology within innovation in Indigenous tourism.

The challenges of studying clustered Indigenous tourism in various locations are also considerable. According to Schmidt et al. (2012), the challenges may lie in unique cultural considerations, service capacity variations, and potential difficulties in participant retention. Several scholars have mentioned the benefits of combining theories that help to solve this issue. For instance, Sacca et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of integrating dissemination and implementation frameworks to improve evidence-based programs in Indigenous tourism. Similarly, Whitesell et al. (2020) combined Indigenous and academic perspectives to address challenges in studying clustered Indigenous tourism. Additionally, Braut (2023) supported the arguments, urging researchers to use multiple theories to address intricate scenarios that present diverse challenges. Mayer and Sparrowe (2013) complimented Braut's point by highlighting that many phenomena and research questions cannot be adequately addressed by a single theory, thus necessitating the integration of elements from multiple theories to shed light on issues that no single theory could address individually. Hence, our second proposition:

Proposition 2. Utilize combinations of theories to study clustered Indigenous tourism in different locations for better research of clustered Indigenous tourism in various locations.

6.2. Advancing context

Our Review highlighted a striking trend that countries with substantial Indigenous populations, including Pakistan, Ethiopia, Vietnam, and Nepal, have received comparatively little research attention. Investigating these regions can provide valuable insights and diversify global understanding of Indigenous tourism innovations. Additionally, under-represented, more developed regions in Europe, particularly Western and Southern Europe, deserve more attention. Research into these areas can reveal how Indigenous tourism can be integrated and innovated within developed cities, challenging the conventional view of Indigenous tourism as isolated and suburban, as suggested by the urban Indigenous tourism study in Brussels by Diekmann and Maulet (2009). Hence, our third proposition:

Proposition 3. Focus research on understudied and underrepresented regions with highly populated Indigenous tourism to better understand innovations in these contexts.

The historical background of ethnology suggests that Indigenous populations across multiple regions could potentially have common ancestral origins, suggesting a shared lineage that could be linked to comparable sources (Moreno-Estrada et al., 2013). This view is corroborated by linguistic, cultural, and genetic resemblances identified among Indigenous tourism (Hunley et al., 2007). Besides, Cheng (2024) has indicated that the ability to study across different regions would provide a comprehensive understanding of the diverse impacts and dynamics of tourism on regional development. In the broad tourism literature context, there have been studies employing the comparative approach among Indigenous communities, such as Reynolds et al. (2019), Per and Peter (2011), Kirmayer and Brass (2016), and Carson et al. (2018). However, our earlier review indicated that there has been little research effort to explore the implications of how distinctive environmental circumstances have influenced the development of their distinct cultural and traditional practices. Hence, our fourth proposition:

Proposition 4. Compare the geographical regions inhabited by Indigenous populations to discover distinct cultural differences and similarities.

6.3. Advancing characteristics

Indigenous tourism development must empower local communities (Colton & Whitney-Squire, 2010; Durán-Díaz et al., 2020). In our SLR, 12 studies discussed community empowerment impacts, indicating relatively low attention given to this aspect and suggesting that there is room for innovatively developing and diversifying community empowerment. Various researchers have identified key components of Indigenous community empowerment, such as social embeddedness, Indigenous viewpoints, and asset-based community development frameworks, as highlighted by Graci et al. (2021) and Shrestha et al. (2024). However, these studies have not effectively established a comprehensive research framework that promotes community empowerment. Hence, our fifth proposition:

Proposition 5. Build a comprehensive research framework that integrates social embeddedness, Indigenous perspectives, and asset-based community development principles to facilitate Indigenous community empowerment.

The well-being of Indigenous people involved in the tourism industry is critical for sustaining resilience in tourism development (Hutchison et al., 2021). Notably, it is essential to acknowledge that Western concepts of well-being may not always align with Indigenous values.

Indigenous perspectives on well-being often emphasize communal relationships, cultural continuity, and spiritual connection to the land rather than individualistic or purely material aspects commonly emphasized in Western frameworks (Parter et al., 2024). However, only three studies highlighted the social impacts on the well-being of local populations and communities. This underscores a relatively underexplored research area concerning the benefits of physical and mental well-being for community members. Hence, our sixth proposition:

Proposition 6. Focus studies on how innovative practices in Indigenous tourism enhance the well-being of Indigenous tourism and people.

Innovative marketing strategies and customer relationship management play crucial roles in benefiting the tourism industry by enhancing customer loyalty, satisfaction, and long-term profitability (Vogt, 2011). Remarkably, it is equally vital that Indigenous communities maintain control over their cultural narratives when utilizing these innovations. Indigenous communities need to be empowered to shape and communicate their heritage in a way that aligns with their values and respects cultural sensitivities, ensuring that technology-enhanced marketing does not compromise or misrepresent their cultural identity (Macdonald et al., 2021). Maintaining control over these narratives allows Indigenous communities to harness advanced marketing tools effectively while safeguarding their heritage and promoting authenticity. This SLR, however, showed that only 11 studies attempted to delve into this research area. The limited emphasis on innovative marketing strategies and customer relationship management suggests a potential area for growth and improvement. Integrating the latest technology into marketing strategies has proved effective (Nivetha & Sudhamathi, 2019). Hence, our seventh proposition:

Proposition 7. Examine the impact of innovative marketing practices (e.g. advanced technological innovations) on the promotion and marketing of Indigenous tourism destinations and their visibility, appeal, and accessibility to a global audience.

Gender roles and social capital play critical roles in tourism development, particularly for marginalized groups (Khoo et al., 2024). Noticeably, Ishii (2012) pointed out a relationship between gender roles and the revenue generated from tourism, with the younger population and women typically earning greater benefits. With the advent of tourism, this phenomenon has the potential to trigger novel patriarchal standards within the younger generation and heighten the discrepancies in earnings based on gender and age across Indigenous populations, consequently posing a significant societal issue. Hence, our eighth proposition:

Proposition 8. Explore evolving gender roles and the continued marginalization of undocumented residents to validate the community involvement and social capital relationship.

6.4. Advancing method

As mentioned earlier, the nature of Indigenous tourism is characterized by complex interactions at various levels, including individual tourists, local guides, community organizations, and broader regional or national policies, which requires a more nuanced understanding of the different effects at different levels (McAfee, 2019). To this end, multilevel studies are recommended as they can provide comprehensive insights into how technology impacts these various stakeholders differently, allowing for a more holistic and accurate analysis of the curvilinear relationships involved. Several authors, including Wong (2017), de la Maza et al. (2024), and McGuire-Adams (2020), also supported the need for multilevel methodologies in tourism research, including Indigenous tourism, to address the hierarchical nature of social dynamics. This approach will ensure that promotional and marketing strategies are practical and culturally sensitive, benefiting all parties involved in Indigenous tourism. Hence, our ninth proposition:

Proposition 9. Employ multilevel studies to advance quantitative methodologies and our understanding and management of this sector.

Similarly, our SLR showed that only one study used a longitudinal research design, suggesting that this method was not commonly adopted in this research area. Challenges mainly lie in data collection (Broadbent & Osborne, 2022). However, longitudinal studies allow for improving causal inference, assessing long-term effects, or capturing temporal dynamics (Beddoes, 2023). Additionally, Roberts and Voorpostel (2023) further supported the idea that advanced technology can aid in addressing data collection challenges in longitudinal research. Notably, when conducting longitudinal studies, several critical factors must be considered to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, including sample representativeness (Carruthers et al., 2024), dynamic changes in study subjects (Bailey et al., 2024), and methodological and logistical changes (Schumacher et al., 2021). As such, our tenth proposition:

Proposition 10. Utilize longitudinal research design with the help of advanced technology for real-time data collection.

7. Implications

This SLR contributes significantly to Indigenous tourism literature by addressing key challenges through a detailed analysis of innovation impacts. Beyond summarizing the findings, this study issues inaugural calls for research in several underexplored areas, such as the role of innovations in enhancing community well-being, education, and environmental sustainability within Indigenous tourism contexts. Additionally, we highlight the need for interdisciplinary approaches to better understand the intersection of technology and cultural preservation in Indigenous tourism.

For practitioners, the findings provide actionable insights into how different types of innovation - incremental, radical, and disruptive - can support sustainable tourism development. Tourism operators, policymakers, and Indigenous entrepreneurs can apply these insights by assessing which innovation approaches align with their cultural and geographical contexts. For instance, the Indigenous-led ecotourism venture in Kapawi, Ecuador, has successfully integrated traditional knowledge with modern business models (see Peredo et al. (2015)), while in Haida Gwaii, Canada, a community-based tourism initiative has strengthened language revitalization and economic resilience (Whitney-Squire et al., 2018). By showcasing such best practices, this study encourages practitioners to adopt strategies that not only enhance visitor experiences but also ensure long-term sustainability, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment for Indigenous communities.

For scholars, the SLR provides a timely synthesis of existing research, offering a global perspective on Indigenous tourism innovations. The use of the TCCM framework helps future researchers by categorizing prevalent theories, identifying their limitations, and suggesting new interdisciplinary approaches. This synthesis serves as a roadmap for future research, guiding scholars in choosing theoretical frameworks that are best suited for addressing emerging challenges in the field. Furthermore, by identifying methodological gaps, this SLR encourages researchers to explore novel research designs and methods that can capture the complex, multi-dimensional nature of innovations in Indigenous tourism.

8. Limitations

This SLR has a few limitations regarding the inclusion of studies on Indigenous tourism innovations. Despite some studies, for instance, non-English content and exclusive databases, their inclusions could have enhanced the comprehensiveness of the research paper. Although duplication issues are significant, this SLR only utilized popular databases like Scopus and Web of Science, EBSCOHost, and ScienceDirect but may have resulted in missing relevant studies from other sources. Grey literature was excluded due to credibility issues, even though it

may have bridged academia and industry (Stridsberg et al., 2022). Furthermore, this SLR did not address all types of innovations, such as grassroots innovations, top-down approaches, or collaborative efforts, as they do not align with Kerzner's categorization of innovations (Kerzner, 2022). As such, future research could consider incorporating specific grey literature from trusted Indigenous sources to capture industry perspectives more comprehensively and explore from examining these additional types to deepen the understanding of Indigenous tourism innovations.

9. Conclusion

The literature in this field is dispersed across various subfields and publication platforms, making it challenging for researchers to collect, synthesize, and build on previous works. To address this, this SLR analyzed 131 studies to explore how innovations in Indigenous tourism vary across regions. Existing literature has primarily focused on countries with large Indigenous populations and well-established research backgrounds such as China, Australia, and Canada.

Conversely, there has been limited focus on countries with similarly large Indigenous populations but less developed research infrastructures such as India, Vietnam, and Peru. This SLR emphasizes potential research directions aligned with the TCCM framework applied in this study. By analyzing the literature on innovations in Indigenous tourism across Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Method, this review offers insights to support a balanced, inclusive, and sustainable future for Indigenous tourism innovations.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Xuan Minh Dam: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Kim-Lim Tan:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Emiel L. Eijdenberg:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2025.101368.

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