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## WHAT DRIVES ESG IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY: A BIBLIOMETRIC AND THEMATIC REVIEW

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### Abstract:

Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) research has expanded rapidly in tourism and hospitality, yet the antecedents of ESG remain conceptually fragmented. This review addresses that gap through a combined bibliometric and thematic approach. Drawing on 137 Scopus articles and a focused thematic sample of 26 studies, it maps the intellectual structure of ESG antecedent research and synthesizes the main drivers of ESG development. The findings show that the field remains rooted in sustainability, corporate social responsibility, stakeholder theory, governance, and performance-related concerns, while antecedent-focused work is only beginning to consolidate. Five antecedent clusters are identified: digitalization and technology enabled capacities; internal organizational capabilities, leadership, and people systems; governance, strategic orientation, and firm-level design; stakeholder, market, and institutional pressures; and place-based governance, community embeddedness, and societal innovation. Taken together, these clusters show that ESG in tourism and hospitality is shaped by interacting organizational, strategic, technological, institutional, and socially embedded conditions rather than by a single explanatory pathway. The review advances a more explanatory understanding of ESG and outlines priorities for future research.

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### Keyword:

Bibliometric Analysis; ESG; ESG Antecedents; Tourism and Hospitality; Thematic Review



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## Introduction

Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues have become increasingly central to the strategic landscape of tourism and hospitality (Lin et al., 2024). Firms in this sector face particularly visible environmental pressures, social scrutiny, and governance risks, while their operations remain deeply embedded in destinations, communities, labor systems, and reputation-sensitive markets. Against this backdrop, ESG is no longer viewed merely as an extension of corporate responsibility. Back et al. (2024) identify ESG as a visible and expanding area of hospitality and tourism research. Helfaya and Bui (2025) likewise connect ESG to longer-term sustainability and strategic direction, while Kumar (2023) shows that sustainability disclosure becomes more salient under conditions of uncertainty. In the hotel context, Wut et al. (2025) further link ESG commitment to strategic posture and firm performance. Together, these developments suggest that ESG has become part of how firms respond to stakeholder expectations, manage scrutiny, and position themselves within a more demanding sustainability environment.

This growing interest has been accompanied by a broader empirical literature. Recent studies have linked ESG to disclosure behavior, firm performance, capital market outcomes, governance quality, and sustainable development across tourism and hospitality settings. Kumar (2023), for example, examines sustainability disclosure under economic and political uncertainty, while Dempere and Modugu (2022) relate ESG performance to destination competitiveness in the airline industry. Helfaya et al. (2026), in turn, show that board characteristics and stakeholder orientation are associated with ESG disclosure. At the same time, the field continues to draw heavily on earlier traditions of corporate social responsibility, stakeholder management, and sustainability. Freeman's (1984) stakeholder perspective remains a key intellectual anchor, and recent studies such as Shin et al. (2025) and Helfaya and Bui (2025) continue to work within a conceptual space shaped by responsibility, legitimacy, and sustainable development. As a result, the literature has developed more fully around the consequences, visibility, and governance of ESG than around the conditions through which it takes shape.

This imbalance leaves an important question unresolved. When ESG is examined mainly through disclosure, performance, or other downstream effects, the processes through which it is enabled, constrained, or redirected remain only partially specified. In tourism and hospitality, ESG does not emerge automatically from normative commitment or external pressure alone. Lunkes et al. (2025) show that hotel digital responsibility and online stakeholder feedback shape ESG practices in ways that extend beyond formal reporting. Saputra et al. (2024) similarly find that digitalized management systems and sustainable management strengthen ESG performance in hotel settings. Wang et al. (2026) identify AI adoption as another enabling condition, while Zheng et al. (2025) show that transformational leadership, organizational culture, and employee behavior also influence ESG outcomes. Taken together, these studies

suggest that ESG is shaped by interacting organizational, strategic, technological, and contextual conditions that require more systematic synthesis.

Research on these antecedents has begun to emerge, but unevenly and across fragmented lines of inquiry. Existing studies span digital transformation and AI adoption (Wang et al., 2026), leadership, governance, and human resource systems (Arici et al., 2025; Kao et al., 2024), as well as institutional pressure, policy uncertainty, and community embeddedness (Hu et al., 2025; Kumar, 2023; Le, 2026). Yet this work remains dispersed across thematic areas and publication outlets. It is therefore still difficult to determine how antecedent-oriented studies are situated within the wider ESG literature, which explanatory streams are beginning to consolidate, and where the main gaps remain.

To address this problem, this study undertakes a combined bibliometric and thematic review of antecedent-oriented ESG research in tourism and hospitality. It is guided by three questions: What thematic structure and intellectual foundations characterize this body of research? What major antecedent clusters can be identified across the literature? What gaps and future directions emerge from current research on the drivers of ESG development in the sector? By answering these questions, the study clarifies how antecedent-focused ESG research has evolved, how it is currently organized, and why it matters for the next stage of tourism and hospitality scholarship.

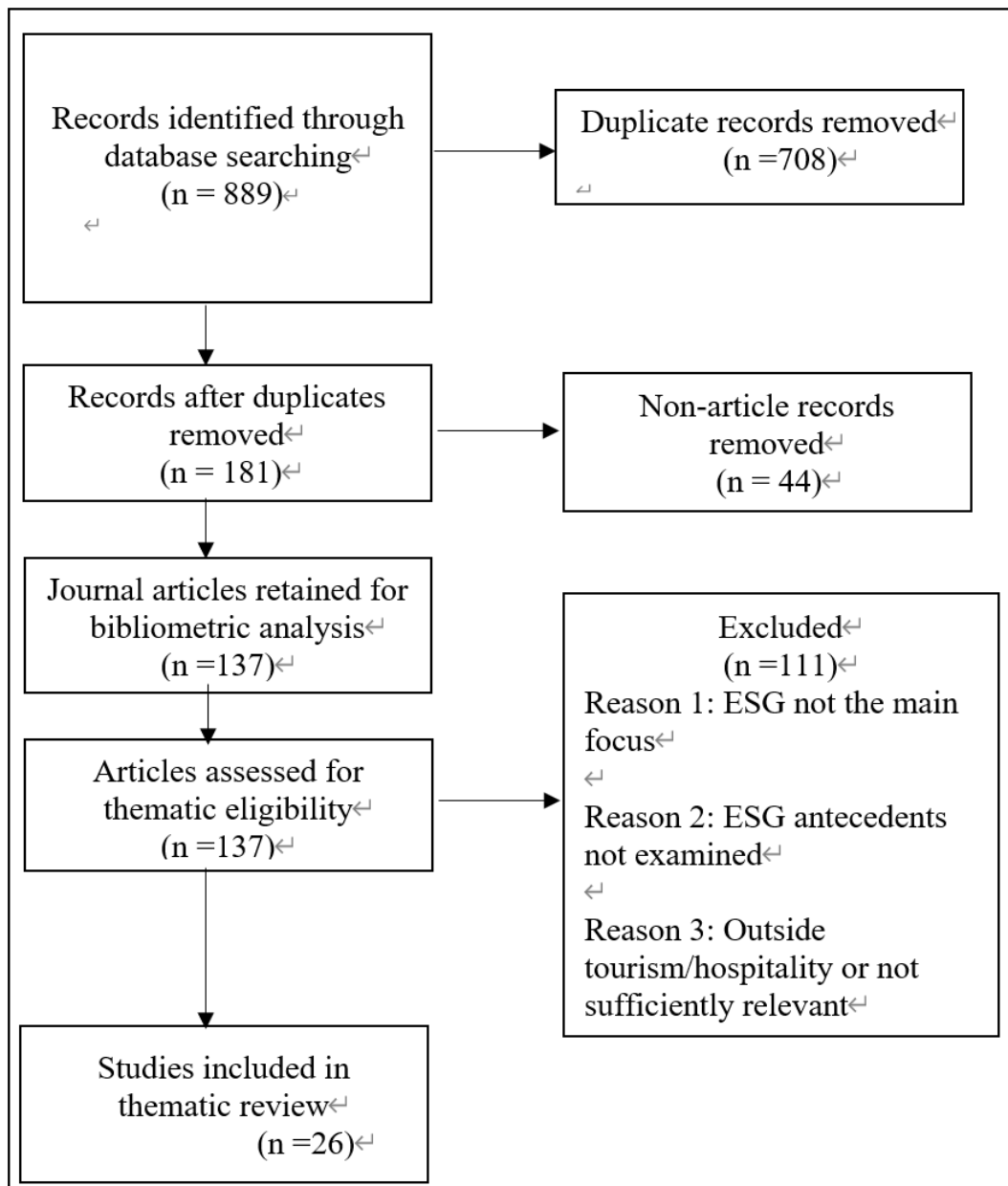
## **Methodology**

### ***Data Source, Search Strategy and Study Selection***

The literature search was conducted in Scopus because of its broad coverage of journals in tourism, hospitality, sustainability, and management, as well as its suitability for bibliometric analysis. Before the final search was implemented, several exploratory searches were carried out to compare the scope of ESG, CSR, sustainability, and antecedent-related terms in tourism and hospitality research.

The final search combined three groups of terms: ESG-related terms, antecedent-related terms, and tourism and hospitality terms. ESG-related terms included “ESG,” “environmental social governance,” and “environmental, social and governance.” Antecedent-related terms included “antecedent,” “driver,” “determinant\*,” “predictor\*,” “motivation\*,” “pressure\*,” “influence\*,” “capabilit\*,” and “stakeholder.” Sector terms included “tourism,” “hospitality,” “hotel\*,” “lodging,” “resort\*,” and “travel.” The search was applied to title, abstract, and keyword fields and limited to English-language journal articles.

The search returned 889 records. After duplicate removal, 181 records remained. A further 44 non-article records were excluded, resulting in 137 journal articles for the broader bibliometric dataset. The study selection process is summarized in Fig. 1.



**Figure 1. PRISMA-Informed Study Selection Process**

The 137 retained articles were then assessed for thematic eligibility to identify studies directly relevant to the review objective. Screening was based on title, abstract, author keywords, and indexed keywords, with closer examination where necessary. Studies were retained for thematic review when ESG was treated as a focal construct, when antecedents or enabling conditions of ESG were examined, and when the empirical or conceptual setting fell within tourism, hospitality, hotel, travel, or closely related service contexts. Studies were excluded when ESG was not the main analytical focus, when antecedent-related factors were not examined, or when the study fell outside the tourism and hospitality domain. This process resulted in a final thematic sample of 26 studies. The study selection procedure followed the logic of PRISMA 2020, adapted to reflect the dual-sample design of the review (Page et al., 2021).

## ***Research Design and Analysis***

This study combines bibliometric analysis with systematic review to examine antecedents of ESG in tourism and hospitality. The design serves two purposes: to map the broader structure of antecedent-oriented ESG research, including its dominant themes, intellectual foundations, and publication outlets, and to synthesize studies examining the drivers and enabling conditions of ESG development. The review was conducted in two stages. The broader bibliometric dataset of 137 articles was used to map the field at an aggregate level, while the final thematic sample of 26 studies was used for focused synthesis.

The broader bibliometric dataset was analyzed in VOSviewer to examine the structure of antecedent-oriented ESG research in tourism and hospitality (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Three forms of analysis were conducted: keyword co-occurrence, co-citation, and source analysis. These analyses identified the main thematic clusters in the field, its intellectual foundations, and the distribution of publications across journals.

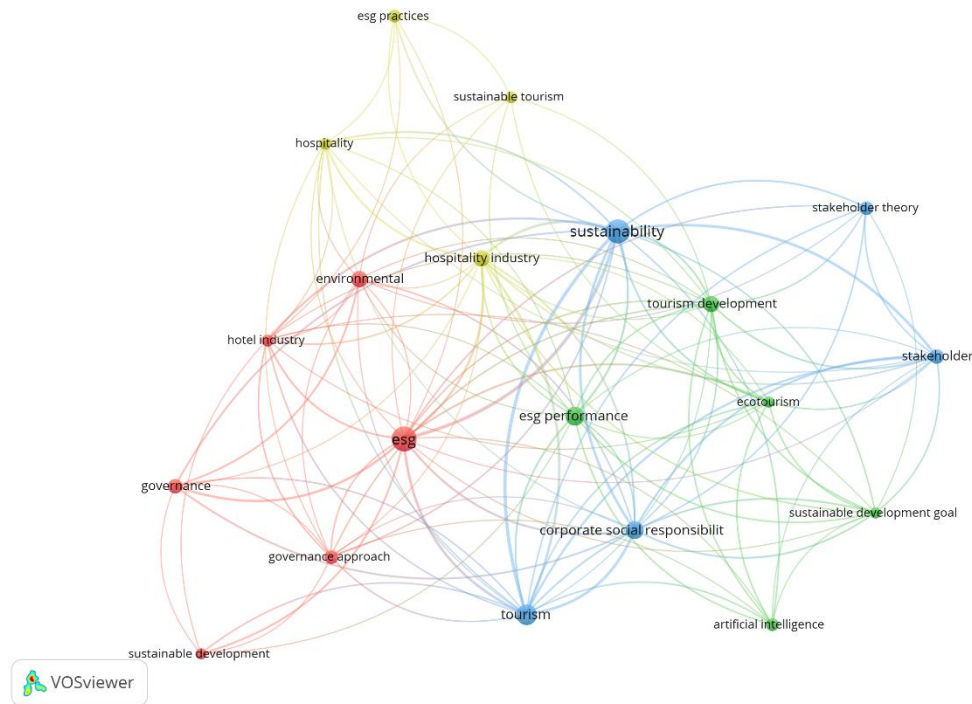
The thematic analysis was conducted on the final sample of 26 studies. Each study was coded according to the form of ESG addressed, the antecedent focus, the tourism or hospitality context, and the main explanatory logic used. Through iterative comparison, recurring antecedent patterns were identified and grouped into broader categories. This process generated the thematic structure of the review, including digitalization and technology-enabled antecedents, internal organizational capabilities and people systems, governance and strategic orientation, stakeholder and institutional pressures, and place-based or community-embedded conditions.

## **Bibliometric Overview**

### ***Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis***

Keyword co-occurrence analysis was used to examine the thematic structure of antecedent-oriented ESG research in tourism and hospitality. Based on the 137 articles in the broader bibliometric dataset, the network reveals a field organized around several related but distinct clusters. At its center are sustainability, ESG, and tourism, indicating that this literature remains anchored in a broad sustainability agenda rather than in a narrowly bounded ESG stream.

As shown in Fig. 2, one prominent cluster groups ESG, governance, governance approach, environmental, hotel industry, and sustainable development. This cluster reflects a governance-centered line of inquiry in which ESG is linked to board characteristics, governance mechanisms, reporting practices, and governance-aligned CSR (Arici et al., 2025; Helfaya et al., 2026). The inclusion of hotel industry within the same cluster suggests that governance-oriented ESG research in this field is closely tied to sector-specific implementation concerns.



**Figure 2. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network**

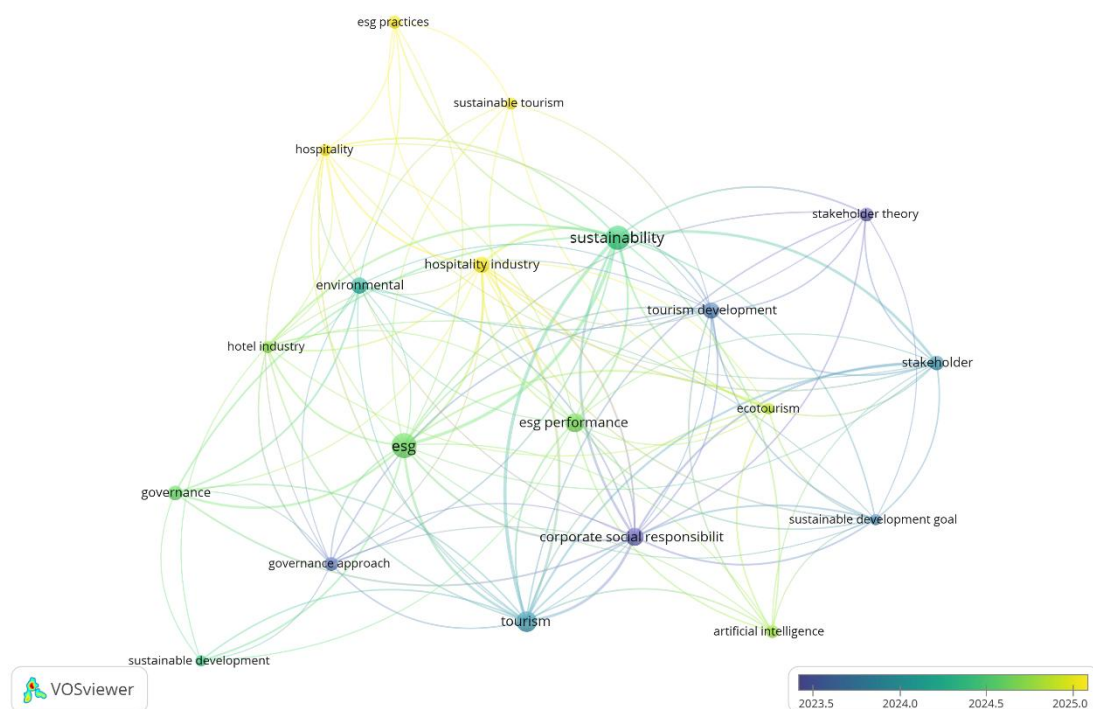
A second cluster links tourism development, ESG performance, ecotourism, sustainable development goal, and artificial intelligence. ESG is connected more directly to development outcomes, performance improvement, innovation, and managerial tools. The presence of artificial intelligence is especially notable because it points to the growing role of digitalization in the antecedent literature. Wang et al. (2026) and Wang and Zhang (2025) treat AI and digital innovation as drivers of ESG performance, while Lunkes et al. (2025) and Saputra et al. (2024) connect digital responsibility and digitalized management systems to ESG practices and sustainability outcomes.

A third cluster centers on tourism, corporate social responsibility, stakeholder, and stakeholder theory. This cluster shows that ESG research in tourism and hospitality still develops in close dialogue with earlier CSR and stakeholder traditions rather than replacing them. That continuity is visible in studies that explain ESG practices through employee CSR attitudes, stakeholder orientation, governance legitimacy, and community engagement, even when ESG terminology is used explicitly (Kao et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2025).

A fourth cluster includes hospitality, hospitality industry, ESG practices, and sustainable tourism (Au Yong et al., 2025; Le, 2026). This grouping points to a more practice-oriented stream, particularly in hospitality settings, where ESG is discussed through implementation, managerial adaptation, and context-specific sustainability responses. Studies on hotel digital responsibility, tourism SMEs, and place-based sustainability initiatives reflect this applied orientation (Lunkes et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025).

In conclusion, the clusters show that antecedent-oriented ESG research is emerging within, rather than outside, a broader literature still shaped by sustainability, CSR, governance, and performance concerns.

While Fig. 2 captures structural relationships among keywords, Fig. 3 shows their temporal distribution by average publication year. Terms such as stakeholder theory, stakeholder, and corporate social responsibility appear earlier, whereas ESG practices, sustainable tourism, artificial intelligence, and digital innovation are associated with more recent publications (Rahman et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2026). The overlay map therefore points to a gradual shift from CSR and stakeholder foundations toward a more implementation ESG agenda marked by digital transformation, applied sustainability, and emerging managerial technologies.



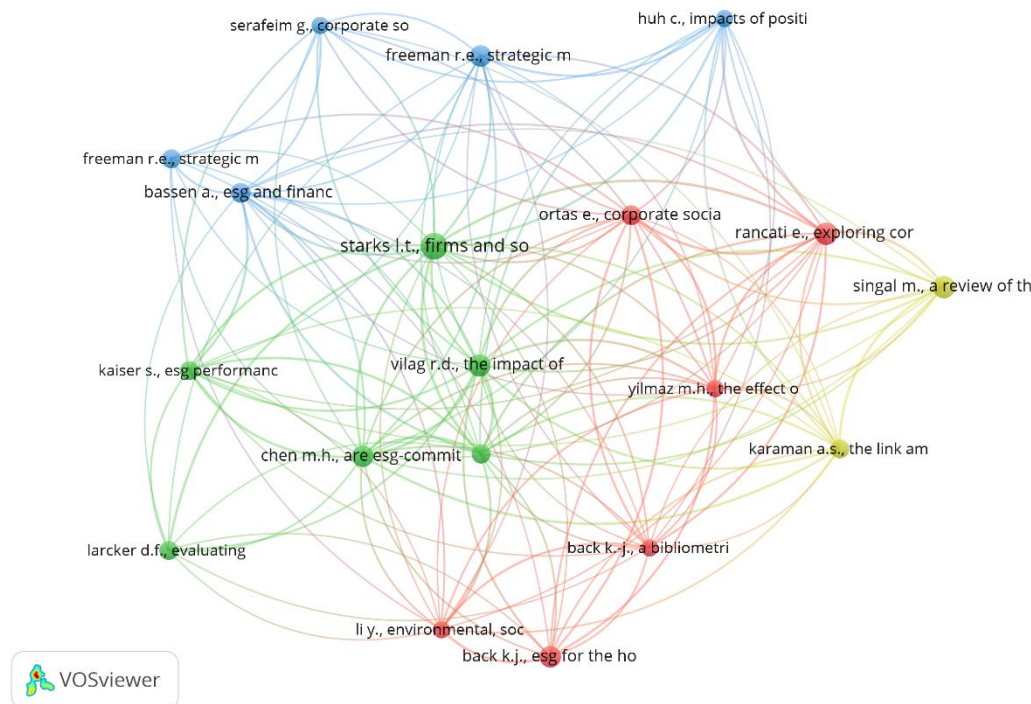
**Figure 3. Overlay Visualization of Keyword Co-Occurrence**

### *Co-citation Analysis*

Co-citation analysis was used to identify the intellectual foundations of ESG antecedent research in tourism and hospitality. Whereas keyword analysis captures the field's thematic vocabulary, co-citation analysis reveals the references most frequently cited together and, by extension, the traditions that later studies draw upon (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The resulting structure is not organized around a single theoretical core. Instead, it reflects the convergence of stakeholder theory, CSR scholarship, governance research, and a more recent body of tourism and hospitality-specific ESG work.

As shown in Fig. 4, the co-citation map reflects the continued influence of CSR and business case scholarship. This part of the network shows that tourism and hospitality ESG research remains closely linked to earlier debates on responsible conduct, firm value, strategic positioning, and reputational advantage. That continuity is visible in studies connecting ESG

to sustainable development goal adoption, disclosure behavior, and firm performance (Helfaya & Bui, 2025; Kumar, 2023; Wut et al., 2025). It also appears in research where ESG is examined through sustainability-related outcomes rather than as a distinct explanatory construct, as in Dempere and Modugu (2022) and Kumar (2023).



**Figure 4. Co-Citation Network**

Governance forms a further core strand in the co-citation structure. References linked to board characteristics, governance mechanisms, reporting architecture, and governance-aligned CSR occupy a visible place in the network, indicating that governance is part of the field's explanatory base rather than a secondary theme. This is reflected in studies on CEO duality, board diversity, entrepreneurial orientation, governance-aligned CSR, and ESG reporting practices, all of which position governance as a condition shaping how ESG is interpreted, disclosed, or prioritized within firms (Arici et al., 2025; Khalilzadeh et al., 2025).

Fig. 4 also indicates that a more distinct tourism and hospitality-specific ESG knowledge base is beginning to emerge. References associated with hotels, tourism firms, airlines, and tourism SMEs appear alongside recent bibliometric and review studies, suggesting that the field no longer relies solely on concepts imported from management, finance, or CSR scholarship. Back et al. (2024) show this consolidation at the bibliometric level, while recent empirical studies indicate that ESG is increasingly examined through sector-specific settings, organizational forms, and contextual pressures (Rahman et al., 2025). What is emerging, therefore, is a more defined body of work attentive to the sector's particular operational, social, and institutional conditions.

Overall, the co-citation map points to a layered intellectual structure in which CSR, governance, and more recent tourism and hospitality studies jointly shape the field. Antecedent-focused ESG research in tourism and hospitality remains relatively nascent and is still

embedded in a literature dominated by responsibility, legitimacy, governance, and performance concerns (Saputra et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2025).

### Source Analysis

The distribution of publication outlets provides further insight into how ESG research in tourism and hospitality has evolved. Rather than concentrating in a narrow set of journals, the literature is dispersed across tourism and hospitality journals, sustainability outlets, and broader strategy and CSR venues (Chua & Han, 2022). This suggests that the field has developed through exchange across adjacent areas of scholarship rather than within a single consolidated publication domain.

As shown in Table 1, the largest number of articles in the broader bibliometric dataset appeared in Sustainability (Switzerland), followed by International Journal of Hospitality Management and Tourism Economics. The prominence of Sustainability (Switzerland) indicates that tourism and hospitality ESG research is often positioned within wider debates on environmental responsibility, governance, and sustainable development, while the visibility of core tourism and hospitality journals shows that ESG has also secured a place within the mainstream literature of the field (Back et al., 2024).

**Table 1: Leading Publication Outlets in The Broader Bibliometric Dataset**

Journal	Articles	Citations	Orientation	Role in the literature
Sustainability (Switzerland)	12	85	Sustainability and environment	Broad sustainability outlet with the highest publication volume in the dataset
International Journal of Hospitality Management	9	77	Tourism and hospitality	Core hospitality journal with substantial sector specific ESG coverage
Tourism Economics	7	41	Tourism and hospitality	Established tourism outlet with recurring ESG related contributions
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	6	173	Tourism and hospitality	High visibility tourism journal with strong citation performance
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	6	30	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	Strategy, CSR, and management
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	5	141	Tourism and hospitality	Core sustainability focused tourism journal with strong influence

Journal	Articles	Citations	Orientation	Role in the literature
Business Strategy and the Environment	4	8	Strategy, CSR, and management	Cross disciplinary outlet connecting ESG with governance and strategy
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	4	32	Tourism and hospitality	Applied hospitality journal with growing ESG relevance
Journal of Travel Research	3	44	Tourism and hospitality	High impact tourism journal with selective but influential ESG publications
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	3	20	Tourism and hospitality	Sector specific journal with focused hospitality and tourism contributions
Journal of Risk and Financial Management	3	16	Finance and risk	Emerging outlet connecting ESG with financial and risk perspectives
Tourism Management	3	79	Tourism and hospitality	High impact tourism journal with strong citation influence despite lower volume

Source: Compiled From the Scopus Dataset (N = 137).

The outlet profile also reveals an overlap with management and responsibility journals. The presence of Business Strategy and the Environment and Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management suggests that part of this literature remains closely connected to broader debates in CSR, sustainability, and governance scholarship rather than constituting a fully separate line of inquiry of its own (Kumar, 2023; Wut et al., 2025; Guzzo et al., 2020; Guix et al., 2018).

In summary, the source profile shows that ESG antecedent research in tourism and hospitality has developed across sector-specific, sustainability, and broader management outlets. The publication structure therefore reflects the hybrid intellectual space in which this literature continues to evolve.

## Thematic Findings on Antecedents

### *Digitalization and Technology Enabled Antecedents*

Recent research positions digitalization as an important antecedent of ESG development in tourism and hospitality (Saputra et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2025). Across this literature, ESG outcomes are shaped not only by firms' sustainability orientation, but also by their ability to build digitalized management systems, adopt intelligent technologies, and embed responsibility into digitally mediated organizational and stakeholder processes (Wang &

Zhang, 2025; Tong, Yan & Manta, 2022). Digitalization therefore functions as part of the infrastructure through which ESG priorities are translated into practice (Işık et al., 2025).

One line of research focuses on digitally enabled managerial systems. In the hotel sector, Saputra et al. (2024) show that accounting digitalization transformation and sustainable management are positively associated with ESG performance. Their findings indicate that digital transformation strengthens coordination, monitoring, and sustainability-oriented decision-making, thereby providing a managerial basis for ESG implementation (Lin et al., 2025).

A second line highlights advanced technologies, especially artificial intelligence. Wang et al. (2026) find that AI adoption improves ESG performance among Chinese listed tourism enterprises, with customer base diversification and corporate reputation acting as important transmission mechanisms. Similarly, Wang and Zhang (2025) show that generative AI strengthens ESG performance in Chinese tourism SMEs by enhancing innovation and collaboration in digital supply chains, with customer involvement further reinforcing this effect. Together, these studies suggest that technology adoption supports ESG by extending firms' adaptive, relational, and innovation capacities.

A third line of work emphasizes digital responsibility and digitally mediated stakeholder feedback. In the hotel context, Lunkes et al. (2025) show that online reviews and hotel digital responsibility jointly shape ESG practices. Positive social-related comments strengthen digital responsibility, whereas negative governance-related comments weaken it; stronger digital responsibility, in turn, improves ESG practices and broader sustainability performance. This suggests that digital interfaces can also function as governance-relevant spaces through which stakeholder evaluations influence ESG responses.

Overall, these studies indicate that digital antecedents operate through three related pathways: digitalized managerial systems, advanced technology adoption, and responsibility-oriented digital governance. Together, they show that digitalization has become a substantive antecedent of ESG rather than a secondary support mechanism.

### ***Internal Organizational Capabilities, Leadership, and People Systems***

A second stream of research locates the antecedents of ESG within the internal social and organizational architecture of tourism and hospitality firms. In this literature, ESG is explained by how firms are led, how employee behavior is shaped, and whether internal capabilities are sufficient to sustain responsible practice. Recent studies identify leadership, organizational culture, human resource systems, employee attitudes, and socially embedded capabilities as important foundations of ESG development in tourism and hospitality (Kao et al., 2024; Li, Stamolampros & Zhao, 2025).

One strand emphasizes leadership and organizational culture. Zheng *et al.* (2025) show that transformational leadership strengthens employee pro-environmental behavior and, through this mechanism, improves ESG performance in tourism and hospitality organizations. They further find that adhocracy culture reinforces this effect. A related emphasis on internal guidance appears in Fang et al. (2025), who argue that leadership networks shape responsible AI innovation in Vietnamese tourism and hospitality firms. Together, these studies suggest that

leadership creates the cultural and relational conditions under which ESG-oriented conduct becomes more likely.

A second strand focuses on people systems, especially human resource management and employee orientation. In the hotel and catering service industries, Kao et al. (2024) find that human resource management measures shape employees' CSR attitudes, which in turn influence ESG and CSR practices. This shifts attention away from formal sustainability rhetoric toward the internal mechanisms through which responsible practice is reproduced in daily organizational life (Cerchione et al., 2025; Gulakdeniz & Karadas, 2025).

Beyond leadership and HR systems, recent work also points to deeper organizational capabilities. Dias et al. (2025) introduce the idea of social dynamic capabilities to explain how hospitality organizations align business strategy with social sustainability goals. Their framework highlights stakeholder collaboration, community engagement, and collaborative social transformation, extending capability beyond technical and operational resources. In a related empirical contribution, Zhang et al. (2025) identify employment level as a robust predictor of ESG performance in listed tourism firms, suggesting that internal labor capacity and organizational scale also shape the conditions under which ESG can be developed and sustained.

In summary, the literature suggests that internal antecedents of ESG in tourism and hospitality operate through three closely related mechanisms: leadership and culture, people management systems, and socially embedded organizational capabilities. Together, these studies show that ESG is built through organizational arrangements that shape employee conduct, support coordination, and embed responsibility into routine practice.

### ***Governance, Strategic Orientation, and Firm Level Design***

A third line of inquiry explains ESG development through governance arrangements, strategic orientation, and firm-level design. Across this literature, ESG is treated not as a neutral extension of business activity, but as an outcome shaped by governance choices, strategic posture, and organizational design features that determine whether sustainability is approached as long-term commitment, reporting architecture, or symbolic communication (Helfaya & Bui, 2025; Xuan et al., 2025).

One set of studies focuses on governance structure itself. Evidence from the tourism and transportation industries shows that board gender diversity is positively associated with ESG disclosure, with stronger effects under shareholder settings and in risk-exposed transportation contexts (Gerged, Tran & Beddewela, 2023). A related study in hospitality and tourism shows that CEO duality is associated with lower environmental pillar scores, while effects on the social and governance pillars are weaker (Arici et al., 2025). These findings suggest that governance antecedents shape ESG selectively across dimensions.

A second set of studies highlights strategic orientation. In Hong Kong hotels, perceived entrepreneurial orientation is positively associated with commitment to ESG practices, and this relationship is further conditioned by corporate size and strategic discretion (Wut et al., 2025). Strategic orientation therefore shapes whether ESG is treated as an area for initiative and long-term positioning rather than passive compliance.

A third set of studies examines how firm-level design embeds sustainability into corporate structures. Helfaya and Bui (2025) show that governance-aligned CSR supports SDG adoption in tourism and hospitality firms and that such adoption is associated with stronger environmental and social performance, even if short-term financial trade-offs remain. Related work on ESG initiative-led reporting practices also points to legitimacy as a central driver, suggesting that ESG becomes more durable when it is incorporated into reporting architecture and governance-relevant organizational design (Xuan *et al.*, 2025).

Overall, this literature suggests that governance, strategic orientation, and firm-level design shape ESG through three related mechanisms: governance structure influences oversight and interpretive authority over ESG priorities; strategic orientation affects whether firms frame ESG as initiative or obligation; and firm-level design determines whether ESG is embedded in governance-aligned CSR, reporting systems, and more durable organizational arrangements. In tourism and hospitality, ESG is more likely to endure when it is authorized by governance, supported by strategic orientation, and built into the formal design of the firm.

### ***Stakeholder, Market, and Institutional Pressures***

A fourth stream of research explains ESG development through external conditions rather than internal organizational arrangements. In this literature, ESG is treated as a response to institutional demands, market competition, policy uncertainty, and wider sectoral conditions (Rahman *et al.*, 2025; Peng & Kong, 2024; Hassan & Meyer, 2025).

One strand focuses on institutional and competitive pressures. Evidence from technology-based tourism SMEs in Bangladesh shows that institutional requirements and market competition both encourage ESG adoption, especially when firms possess business analytics capability (Rahman *et al.*, 2025). Using a Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, the study recasts ESG adoption as an adaptive response to environmental stimuli rather than a purely voluntary managerial choice. Multiple combinations of ESG practices, analytics capability, and competitive conditions can produce strong sustainability performance.

A second strand highlights uncertainty as a distinct antecedent of ESG behavior. Kumar (2023) finds that higher national-level economic and political uncertainty is associated with greater sustainability disclosure among tourism firms. However, Hu *et al.* (2025) show that economic policy uncertainty negatively affects ESG investment among publicly listed Chinese tourism and hospitality firms, particularly when financing constraints and managerial myopia are more pronounced. Together, these studies suggest that external turbulence may stimulate ESG disclosure while discouraging more substantive ESG investment.

A third strand broadens the analysis from firm-level pressures to sectoral and destination-level conditions. Using airline data, Dempere and Modugu (2022) show that national tourism competitiveness conditions are associated with ESG performance. ICT readiness, international openness, and favorable business environments are positively related to ESG outcomes, whereas strong government prioritization of domestic tourism and substantial investment in competing ground and port infrastructure are associated with weaker ESG performance. This shifts the discussion from direct regulation and market rivalry to the broader institutional and infrastructural conditions that shape firms' incentives and strategic positioning within the tourism system.

In conclusion, this literature suggests that stakeholder, market, and institutional pressures influence ESG through three related pathways: institutional and competitive pressures can encourage ESG adoption, especially when firms have the capacity to respond; uncertainty can reshape ESG behavior in more ambivalent ways, increasing disclosure while discouraging investment; and sectoral or destination-level conditions can strengthen or weaken ESG incentives by altering the broader opportunity structure in which firms operate. ESG thus emerges as a contingent response to political, competitive, and institutionally uneven environments.

### ***Place Based Governance, Community Embeddedness, and Societal Innovation***

A fifth and more emergent stream of research suggests that ESG in tourism and hospitality cannot always be understood through standardized corporate metrics, formal governance mechanisms, or external pressure alone. In some contexts, ESG is interpreted, negotiated, and enacted through place-based governance, community relations, and locally embedded value systems (Shin et al., 2025; Le, 2026; Pumiviset & Suttipun, 2025).

One strand foregrounds the local reinterpretation of ESG principles. In a qualitative study of tourism governance in Phu Quoc, Vietnam, Le (2026) shows that ESG norms are not transferred intact into local tourism settings, but are reworked through situated ethics, affective learning, and everyday negotiation. The study also highlights tensions between formal ESG ideals and local constraints, including affordability, regulatory opacity, and limited participation. ESG therefore appears as a set of principles filtered through local histories, development priorities, and unequal relations of voice and control.

A second strand emphasizes community embeddedness and social innovation. Shin et al. (2025) argue that hospitality and tourism ESG research has focused too heavily on internal stakeholders, while external community perspectives remain underdeveloped. Their framework identifies transformational community engagement as the most effective route to transformative social innovation, mediated by social relations, embedded resources, and collective action. A similar logic appears in Au Yong et al. (2025), whose qualitative study of cultural heritage tourism in Kota Bharu, Malaysia, documents a community driven but under-resourced ESG model shaped by grassroots practices such as composting, rainwater harvesting, tree planting, inclusive tourism access, and demands for fairer local governance. Together, these studies suggest that ESG may be produced through community relationships, trust, and collective capacity even where formal ESG language is weak or absent.

The relevance of locally grounded value systems is further illustrated in the Thai hotel context. Pumiviset and Suttipun (2025) show that Sufficiency Economy Philosophy practice positively affects business survival and that ESG responsibility both improves survival and mediates the relationship between SEP practice and survival. This finding suggests that ESG responsibility may be grounded not only in standardized corporate governance logic, but also in indigenous developmental philosophies centered on moderation, resilience, and responsible conduct.

Overall, this literature suggests that place-based governance, community embeddedness, and locally grounded value systems shape ESG through three related mechanisms: ESG principles are reinterpreted through local governance processes; community relations and collective action create the social conditions under which ESG becomes meaningful and durable; and indigenous or context-specific developmental philosophies may provide a normative basis for

ESG responsibility and its organizational consequences. ESG in tourism and hospitality is therefore not only strategic, technological, or institutionally pressured, but also socially situated, territorially embedded, and, in some contexts, culturally grounded.

## Discussion

ESG research in tourism and hospitality has expanded rapidly, but its development has been uneven. The bibliometric analyses show a literature still organized around sustainability, CSR, stakeholder theory, governance, and performance, while the thematic review indicates that antecedent-oriented research has only recently begun to take clearer shape. In this sense, work on ESG drivers has emerged within a field whose earlier priorities were responsibility, legitimacy, disclosure, and firm outcomes rather than the conditions that give rise to ESG itself (Back et al., 2024; Freeman, 1984; Ionescu et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2019).

This clarifies the gap identified at the outset of the study. Tourism and hospitality research does not lack ESG scholarship; what remains underdeveloped is a coherent explanation of how ESG is enabled, constrained, and sustained across different organizational and sectoral settings. The issue, therefore, is not the absence of ESG research, but the fragmentation of work that addresses its drivers directly.

The review points to a multi-layered explanatory structure. ESG development in tourism and hospitality is linked to digitalization and technology capacities, internal organizational capabilities and people systems, governance and strategic orientation, stakeholder and institutional pressures, and place-based or community-embedded conditions (Lunkes et al., 2025). These clusters show that ESG is neither a simple reporting practice nor a purely downstream performance construct. Rather, it is shaped through the interaction of organizational resources, managerial choices, external pressures, and socially embedded contextual conditions (Wang et al., 2026).

These layers, however, are not equally developed. Digitalization, governance, and strategic design are receiving growing attention, particularly in studies of AI adoption, digital responsibility, entrepreneurial orientation, board composition, reporting practices, and governance-aligned CSR (Arici et al., 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2025). By contrast, place-based governance, community embeddedness, and locally grounded value systems remain less developed, despite their clear relevance to tourism and hospitality contexts, where firms are closely tied to destinations, communities, and local legitimacy systems (Le, 2026; Shin et al., 2025). The literature still privileges antecedents that are easier to formalize at the firm level, while more socially situated drivers remain comparatively underexplored.

The review also underscores the continuing influence of earlier intellectual traditions. The citation structure shows that ESG research in tourism and hospitality still relies heavily on conceptual resources drawn from CSR, stakeholder, and governance scholarship. This continuity has given ESG a recognizable language within the field, but it has also generated conceptual overlap (Pumiviset & Suttipun, 2025). In a number of studies, ESG appears alongside CSR, disclosure, sustainability, or responsible business conduct without being clearly distinguished from them. The thematic review reinforces this point by showing that the literature grouped under ESG refers to different analytical objects, including ESG performance, ESG practices, ESG responsibility, ESG disclosure, and ESG-related adoption (Kumar, 2023;

Kim, Yoon & Legendre, 2025). Greater conceptual precision would therefore strengthen future work, especially studies concerned with antecedent mechanisms.

A further pattern concerns the relationship between internal and external explanations of ESG development. Some studies emphasize leadership, organizational culture, human resource systems, digital infrastructure, and governance design, implying that ESG is largely produced through internal arrangements (Kao et al., 2024; Saputra et al., 2024). Others foreground institutional pressure, market competition, economic uncertainty, online stakeholder feedback, and destination-level conditions, highlighting the role of external environments in shaping ESG salience and response (Hu et al., 2025; Kumar, 2023). These should not be treated as competing explanations. External conditions may intensify the demand for ESG, but internal capacities and organizational design help determine whether firms respond in substantive, selective, or symbolic ways. This interaction remains insufficiently theorized and appears to be one of the most promising directions for future research.

Overall, the review points to a necessary shift in emphasis. Much of the existing literature has focused on what ESG is associated with, whether in terms of disclosure, legitimacy, or performance. The next step is to explain how ESG becomes possible. In this respect, antecedent research is not a peripheral extension of the field, but part of the explanatory foundation needed for a more mature understanding of ESG in tourism and hospitality.

## Conclusion

This review examined the antecedents of ESG in tourism and hospitality through a combined bibliometric and thematic approach. The findings show that antecedent-oriented ESG research is becoming more visible but remains embedded in a broader literature shaped by sustainability, CSR, stakeholder theory, governance, and performance-related concerns (Back et al., 2024; Freeman, 1984). As a result, research on ESG drivers in tourism and hospitality has remained comparatively fragmented, even as ESG itself has gained prominence across the field.

The review identifies five main antecedent clusters: digitalization and technology-enabled capacities; internal organizational capabilities, leadership, and people systems; governance, strategic orientation, and firm-level design; stakeholder, market, and institutional pressures; and place-based governance, community embeddedness, and societal innovation (Wang et al., 2026; Zheng et al., 2025). Taken together, these clusters show that ESG in tourism and hospitality is shaped by interacting organizational, strategic, technological, institutional, and socially embedded conditions rather than by a single explanatory pathway (Lunkes et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025). This shifts attention away from downstream outcomes alone and toward the conditions through which ESG is formed and sustained.

The review makes three main contributions. First, it situates antecedent-oriented research within the broader development of ESG scholarship in tourism and hospitality. Second, it offers a structured synthesis of the principal antecedent streams emerging from the literature. Third, it shows that ESG in this field is better understood not as a static attribute, but as a process shaped by internal capacities, external pressures, and context-specific forms of governance and social embeddedness. Therefore, the review advances a more explanatory understanding of ESG and provides a clearer foundation for future research.

## Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the review was based on Scopus and limited to English-language journal articles. Although this improved consistency in document quality and bibliometric comparability, it may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages or indexed elsewhere. This is especially relevant in tourism and hospitality, where ESG debates may also appear in regional and context specific outlets.

Second, the broader bibliometric dataset was constructed through an antecedent-oriented search strategy. This strengthened its fit with the review objective, but it also means that the bibliometric overview does not represent the full body of ESG research in tourism and hospitality. The findings should therefore be read as reflecting the structure of antecedent-oriented ESG scholarship rather than the entire ESG literature in the sector.

Third, the thematic review focused on a comparatively small set of highly relevant studies. This was consistent with the aim of producing a focused synthesis, but it also reflects the fact that explicit research on ESG antecedents in tourism and hospitality remains limited. Some thematic clusters are therefore more developed than others, while several lines of inquiry remain emergent.

These limitations also point to priorities for future research. A first priority is greater conceptual precision. The literature often moves across ESG performance, ESG practices, ESG disclosure, ESG responsibility, and ESG-related adoption without clearly distinguishing among them. Sharper conceptual boundaries would allow future studies to link antecedents more precisely to the specific form of ESG under investigation.

A second priority is stronger multi-level explanation. Much of the current literature emphasizes either internal organizational conditions or external pressures, but fewer studies examine how the two interact. Future research should investigate more directly how digital capabilities, governance arrangements, leadership systems, and organizational design shape firm responses to stakeholder pressure, market competition, policy uncertainty, and destination-level conditions.

A third priority concerns context sensitivity. The review suggests that place-based governance, community embeddedness, and locally grounded value systems remain less developed than digital, governance, and firm-level explanations. This is a notable gap in tourism and hospitality, where ESG is often embedded in destinations, communities, and culturally specific forms of legitimacy. More work is needed on how local institutions, social relations, and place-based development logics reshape ESG across different tourism settings.

Overall, the next phase of ESG research in tourism and hospitality will require greater conceptual clarity, stronger integration of internal and external explanations, and closer attention to place and context.

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