



INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TRAVEL CONTENT ON TRAVEL INTENTION: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of research on the influence of Social Media Travel Content on Travel Intention within the hospitality and tourism domains. Using a quantitative approach, the study examines 390 Scopus-indexed publications published between 2010 and 2026 and analyses their distribution across countries, institutions, sources, authors, citations, and thematic structures. The bibliometric procedures were conducted using Biblioshiny, an R-based interface that enables systematic, transparent, and unbiased mapping of existing literature. The findings reveal a rapid growth in scholarly output, particularly after 2016, highlighting the rising importance of digital communication, user-generated content (UGC), and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in shaping traveller behaviour. Malaysia, India, and China emerged as the most productive countries, while journals such as Sustainability (Switzerland) and the International Journal of Data and Network Science contributed significantly to the field. Co-occurrence and thematic analyses identified key research hotspots, including purchase intention, consumer behaviour, social media engagement, destination image formation, and influencer marketing. The study also highlights foundational and emerging themes crucial for future inquiry. Overall, the review synthesizes fragmented insights, provides a clearer understanding of research evolution, and outlines future directions for both scholars and policymakers to strengthen theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions in digital tourism research.

Keywords: *Bibliometric analysis, social media, Travel Content, Travel Intention, Tourism, Scopus, RStudio*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become one of the most influential communication channels in the smart tourism era, fundamentally transforming how travellers search for, evaluate, and consume travel information. With 74% of travellers relying on other consumers' online comments when planning leisure trips (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008), user-generated content (UGC) and user-generated reviews (UGRs) now play a pivotal role in shaping tourist perceptions and behaviour (Ye et al., 2011). The interactive nature of social media



facilitates continuous information exchange—through posting, commenting, liking, forwarding, and sharing—resembling a community of practice built on reciprocal knowledge sharing (Zhang & Watts, 2003). Such exchanges enhance the visibility, credibility, and influence of travel-related content.

Tourism, being an information-intensive industry (Sheldon, 1997; Werthner & Klein, 1999), is especially affected by the rise of UGC. Travellers increasingly depend on online information to reduce uncertainty, as travel products cannot be evaluated beforehand (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007). Platforms such as TripAdvisor have reshaped planning by offering peer-generated insights that often surpass traditional sources in trustworthiness (O'Connor, 2008; Akehurst, 2009). Furthermore, the growing preference for individualised travel makes real-time, easily accessible online information vital at all stages of the travel journey (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Beyond information provision, social media content also triggers psychological responses influencing travel intention. Exposure to appealing travel experiences often evokes upward social comparisons and envy (Gaviria et al., 2021), which in turn increases the desire to travel (Hajli, Wang, & Tajvidi, 2018; Liu, Wu, & Li, 2019). Travel-related envy is particularly common on social networking sites (Krasnova et al., 2015), highlighting the emotional mechanisms underlying intention formation.

Given the credibility attributed to peer-generated content (Fotis et al., 2012) and the prominence of social media in search results (Gretzel, 2006), even passive users are influenced by online travel content (Cox et al., 2009). Overall, social media travel content has become a critical driver of modern travel intention, combining informational, emotional, and social dynamics that shape tourist decision-making.

This study examines research trends on Social Media Travel Content and Travel Intention within the hospitality and tourism sectors through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis. Using a quantitative approach, it systematically reviews past literature to map the evolution of scholarly work between 2010 and 2026. The primary aim is to identify the most influential countries, prolific authors, leading journals, highly cited articles, and key research themes by analysing publications, citation patterns, and keyword structures. Additionally, the study provides guidance for future research and policy development while offering insights into ongoing contemporary issues. The analysis is conducted using Biblioshiny, the web-based interface of the R bibliometrix package, which enhances the rigor and objectivity of the review by minimizing subjective bias.

The research is guided by three key questions:

1. What are the dominant characteristics of Social Media Travel Content and Travel Intention literature during 2010–2026?
2. What major trends and core thematic areas define this field in hospitality and tourism research?



3. What insights can be derived from existing studies, and what priorities should shape future research agendas?

The first question is addressed through descriptive statistics covering, affiliations, geographic distribution, publication output, and citation performance. Metrics such as publication frequency, citation count, and overall research productivity help identify leading countries, institutions, and authors. The second question focuses on synthesizing diverse research streams and identifying future directions thematic mapping derived from keyword analyses.

The study's objectives correspond to these questions. The first objective seeks to identify key authors, institutions, countries, and influential publications using descriptive bibliometric techniques via Biblioshiny. The second objective examines research trends and thematic structures using conceptual maps generated from author keywords. Together, these objectives enable a deeper interpretation of existing scholarship and help establish a roadmap for future research.

Data for this study were sourced exclusively from the Scopus database, one of the world's largest repositories of peer-reviewed literature. A structured search was conducted using a combination of keywords related to social media, user-generated content, eWOM, and travel intention. The final search string—applied on November 2, 2025—combined terms such as “social media,” “UGC,” “online travel content,” and “travel intention,” among others. This search yielded a total of 390 relevant articles published between 2010 and 2026. All retrieved records were carefully screened, analyzed, and organized to derive meaningful insights for the present study.

Results and Discussions

Publications and Citations Pattern

Table 1 provides an overview of the key descriptive bibliometric characteristics of research published on *Social Media Travel Content* within the timespan 2010 to 2026. The dataset includes a total of 390 articles, indicating a substantial and growing body of scholarly work in this domain over the past decade and a half.

Table 1: Descriptive Features of Social Media Travel Content

Description	Results
Timespan	2010 to 2026
Total no. of Articles	390
Authors of multi-authored documents	1340
Sources	203
Document average age	3.23
Author's Keywords	1053



Average citations per documents	39.28
Co-Authors per Documents	6.59

The field demonstrates a strong culture of collaboration, as reflected by the presence of 1,340 authors, all of whom contributed to multi-authored documents. The absence of single-author works suggests that research on social media and travel intention typically relies on interdisciplinary or team-based inquiry. This is further highlighted by the relatively high co-authors per document ratio of 6.59, showing that, on average, each article is produced by a sizeable research team. The articles are published across 203 different sources, demonstrating that interest in this topic spans multiple journals, conferences, and publication platforms. This dispersion across a large number of sources also reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the topic, involving tourism, marketing, communication studies, information systems, and social sciences.

The document average age of 3.23 years indicates that the majority of contributions are recent, suggesting that the field is dynamic and continues to evolve rapidly in response to technological and behavioural changes in digital communication and consumer decision-making. Authors have used 1,053 distinct keywords, signifying a wide range of themes, concepts, and approaches addressed in the literature. This richness of keywords points to the conceptual diversity and broad research scope within the field.

Finally, the research output shows strong academic influence, with an average of 39.28 citations per article. Such a high citation rate reflects the growing scholarly and practical relevance of studies examining how social media travel content shapes tourists' attitudes, perceptions, and travel intention.

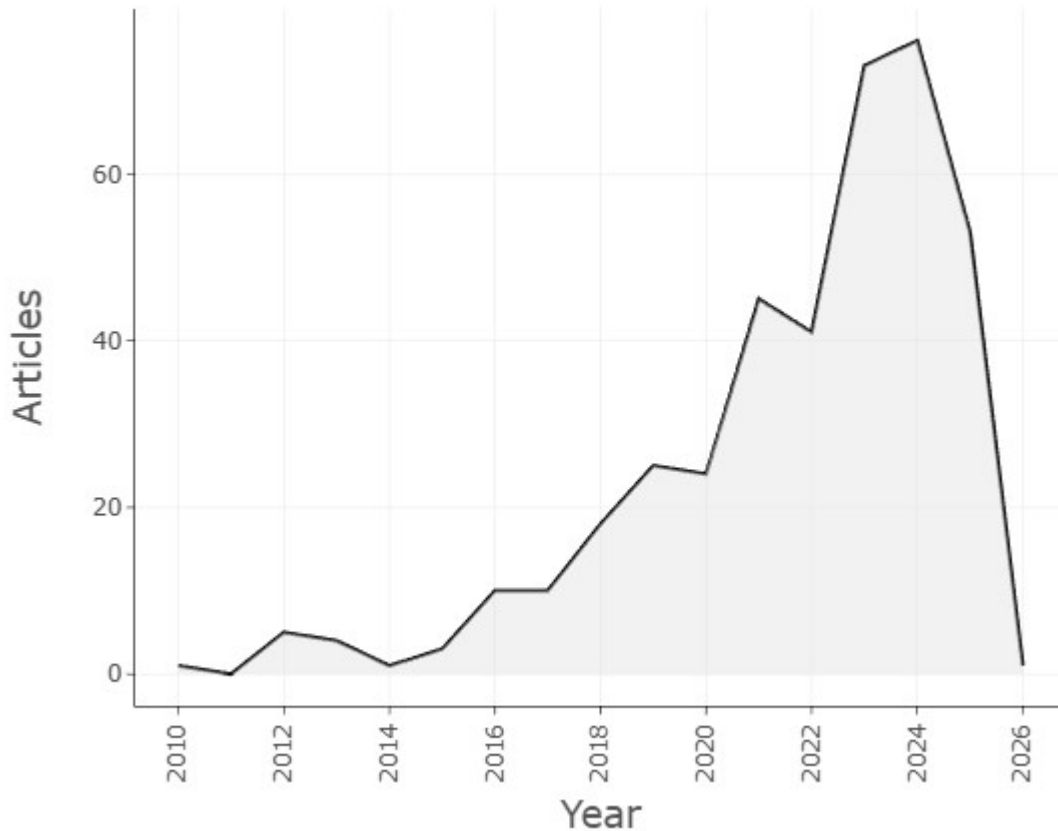


Figure 1: Annual Scientific production

The figure illustrates the annual scientific production on the theme *Social Media Travel Content* from 2010 to 2026. The overall trend shows a significant and sustained increase in scholarly output over the years, reflecting growing academic interest in understanding the influence of social media on travel behaviour and decision-making.

During the early period (2010–2015), publication levels remained very low, with only a few articles appearing each year. This slow start suggests that research on social media's role in shaping travel intention was still emerging. Beginning around 2016, the number of publications shows a steady increase, indicating that scholars began to recognise the rising importance of digital content and social media platforms in tourism.

A marked expansion occurs between 2020 and 2024, where publication counts rise sharply. This period corresponds with the post-pandemic shift in consumer behaviour, digital dependence, and accelerated adoption of social media platforms for travel information and inspiration. The peak occurs around 2023–2024, when the number of published articles reaches its highest level, demonstrating that the topic has become a mainstream research area across tourism, marketing, and communication disciplines.



The slight decline observed in 2025–2026 may be attributed to incomplete data coverage for recent years, a common feature in bibliometric datasets where the latest publication counts are still updating. Therefore, these years should be interpreted cautiously, as the downward trend does not necessarily indicate reduced scholarly interest.

Prominent features of Social Media Content Literature in the fields of Hospitality & Tourism

a) Top Performing Affiliations, Countries, Institutions and Journals

Table 2 presents the ranking of the most productive countries contributing to research on *Social Media Travel Content*. The ranking is based on publication frequency and highlights the geographical distribution of scholarly interest in this rapidly expanding field.

Rank	Country	Frequency
1	Malaysia	161
2	India	156
3	China	137
4	Indonesia	104
5	USA	88
6	Jordan	78
7	South Korea	42
8	Saudi Arabia	37
9	Iran	32
10	Pakistan	32

Malaysia emerges as the leading contributor with 161 publications, indicating a strong academic focus on digital tourism, social media behaviour, and travel intention studies within Malaysian institutions. India follows closely with 156 publications, reflecting the country's growing emphasis on tourism research and digital consumer behaviour. China, with 137 publications, ranks third, demonstrating substantial research engagement likely driven by its large digital user base and rapid technological advancements.

Indonesia (104 publications) and the United States (88 publications) also appear among the top contributors, showing both regional interest in Southeast Asia and strong global academic involvement from the U.S. The presence of countries such as Jordan (78), South Korea (42), Saudi Arabia (37), Iran (32), and Pakistan (32) indicates that research on social media's influence on travel intention has gained traction across diverse socio-cultural and economic contexts.

Overall, the table reveals that the field is not dominated solely by Western nations but is strongly represented across Asia, highlighting the region’s active role in shaping global discourse on digital tourism.

The figure 2 illustrates the top ten academic institutions based on the number of articles published on *Social Media Travel Content*. It highlights the institutions with the highest research productivity in this domain, showcasing their relative contribution to the scholarly landscape.

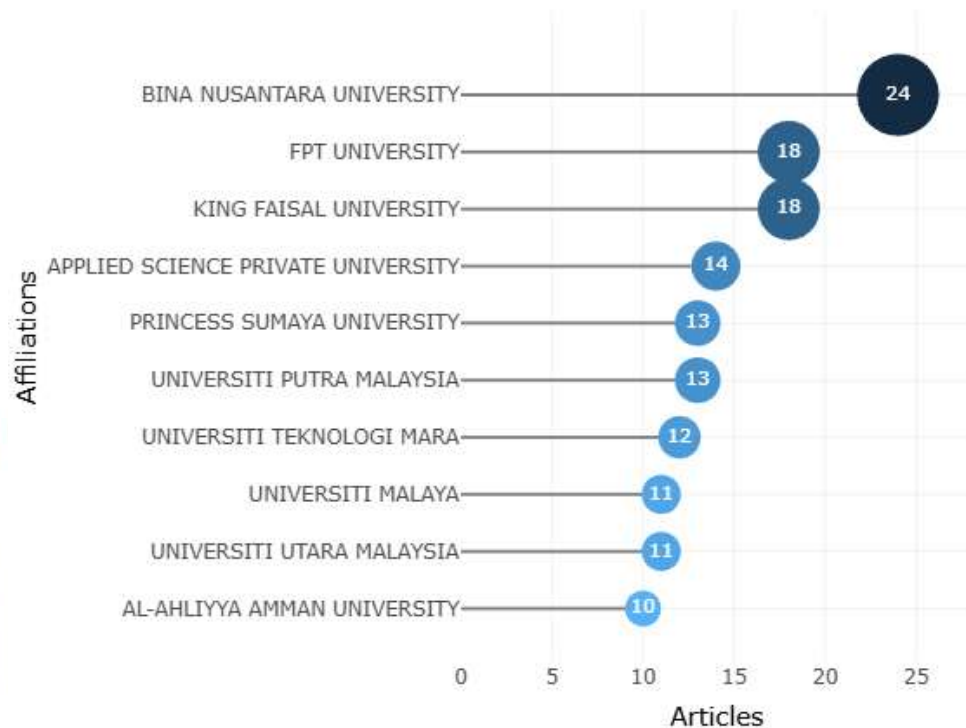


Figure 2: Top Productive Affiliations

Bina Nusantara University stands out as the leading institution, contributing 24 articles, significantly more than any other affiliation. This indicates a strong institutional focus on digital tourism, social media analytics, and consumer behaviour research in Indonesia. Following this, FPT University and King Faisal University each contributed 18 articles, placing them as major centres of research activity in Vietnam and Saudi Arabia, respectively. Their substantial output suggests the rising importance of social media research within emerging economies and technologically advancing regions. The Applied Science Private University (14 articles) and Princess Sumaya University (13 articles), both from Jordan, also show considerable engagement in this field, reflecting the growing Middle Eastern academic interest in digital marketing and tourism dynamics.



Several Malaysian institutions—including Universiti Putra Malaysia (13), Universiti Teknologi MARA (12), Universiti Malaya (11), and Universiti Utara Malaysia (11)—feature prominently in the list. This reaffirms Malaysia’s strong national presence in research related to social media and tourism, consistent with its leading country-level publication frequency. Finally, Al-Ahliyya Amman University contributes 10 articles, showcasing additional research participation from Jordan.

Overall, the figure highlights that research on social media’s influence on travel intention is widely distributed across Asia and the Middle East, with notable institutional clusters. These institutions serve as key contributors to advancing digital tourism scholarship. Bibliometric citation analysis is a useful tool to evaluate journal performance. In the broad field of Tourism and Hospitality, different journals focus on different sub-fields of tourism research.

The figure 3 presents the top academic journals and sources that have published the highest number of documents related to *Social Media Travel Content*. It highlights the leading publication outlets contributing to the development of this research field.

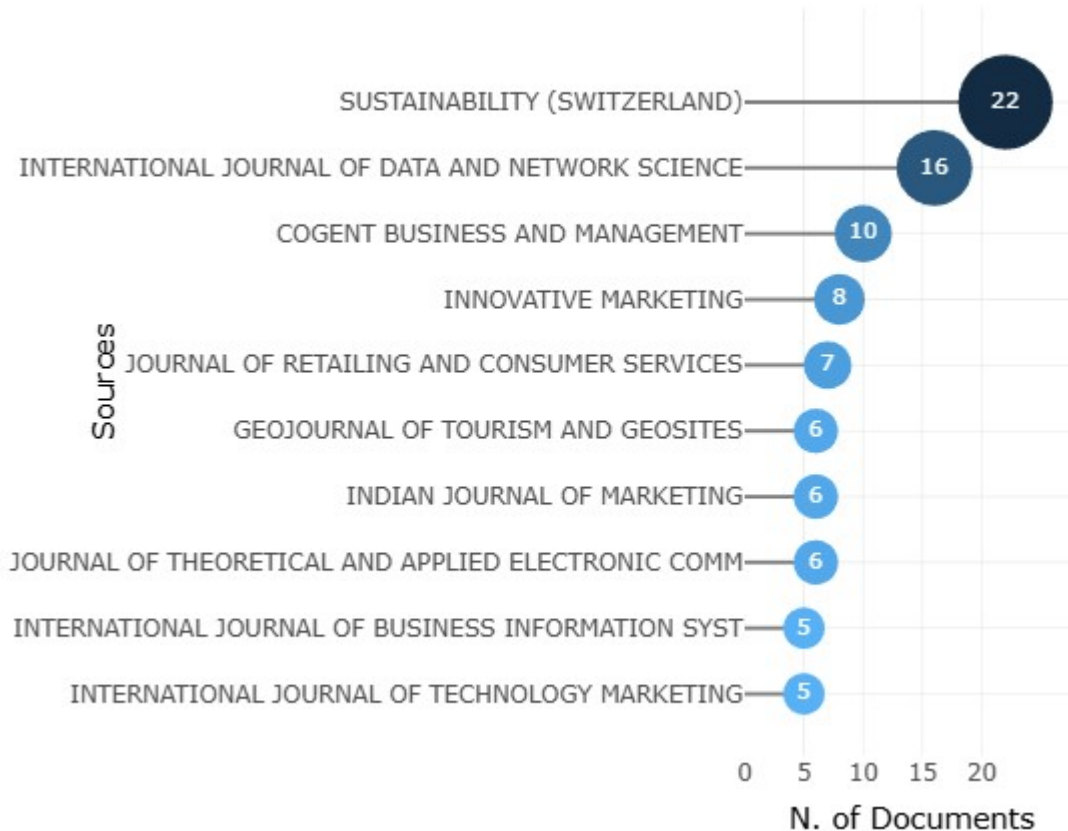


Figure 3: Top Productive Sources based on number of publications



Sustainability (Switzerland) ranks as the most influential source, with 22 published documents, indicating its strong emphasis on digital behaviour, tourism sustainability, and technology-driven consumer research. The journal's broad interdisciplinary scope makes it a frequent outlet for studies exploring the relationship between social media use and tourism decision-making.

The International Journal of Data and Network Science follow with 16 documents, reflecting the methodological trend of employing data analytics, network science, and quantitative modelling in examining social media travel content.

Cogent Business and Management (10 documents) and Innovative Marketing (8 documents) also serve as important sources, suggesting that research in this field is closely linked to business strategy, consumer engagement, and digital marketing communication.

Other journals—such as the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (7 documents), Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites (6 documents), Indian Journal of Marketing (6 documents), and Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research (6 documents)—demonstrate the multidimensional nature of this research area, covering themes like consumer behaviour, tourism geography, marketing, and e-commerce.

Additionally, journals such as the International Journal of Business Information Systems and the International Journal of Technology Marketing (each 5 documents) reflect the increasing integration of information systems and technological innovation in tourism research.

Overall, the figure shows that research on social media's influence on travel intention is published across a diverse set of journals, ranging from sustainability and marketing to information systems and tourism studies. This diversity highlights the multidisciplinary character and wide academic relevance of the topic.

b) Most Influential Research Papers

Table 3 presents the top-performing research articles in the field of social media content on visit intention, ranked according to their total number of citations, which reflects their academic influence and impact within the scholarly community. These papers collectively demonstrate how social media communication, advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influence consumer trust, brand perception, and purchase intentions across various contexts, including tourism, fashion, and digital marketing.

The most highly cited paper, "*Social Media Peer Communication and Impacts on Purchase Intentions: A Consumer Socialization Framework*" by Xia Wang, Chunling Yu, and Yujie Wei (published in *Journal of Interactive Marketing*), tops the list with 760 citations, highlighting its foundational role in explaining how peer interactions on social media affect consumer purchase decisions. The second-ranked study by Ali Abdallah Alalwan (2021) in the *International Journal of Information Management* received 541



citations, underscoring the growing importance of social media advertising features in shaping consumer intentions.

Following closely are works by Nick Hajli et al. (512 citations) in the *Journal of Business Research* and Katja Hutter et al. (510 citations) in the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, both emphasizing the role of trust and user interaction in social networking environments. Notably, Rebecca Walker Naylor et al. in the *Journal of Marketing* (481 citations) and Angella Jiyoung Kim & Eunju Ko in the *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing* (477 citations) explore the emotional and relational dimensions of social media engagement in brand evaluation and luxury marketing.

The contributions by Mohammad Reza Jalilvand and collaborators appear prominently with three articles across *Internet Research*, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, and *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, collectively receiving over 1,300 citations, signifying their strong influence on tourism and eWOM-based behavioral research. Finally, the study by Hisashi Masuda et al. in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* (349 citations) highlights the emerging area of influencer marketing, emphasizing how influencer attributes affect purchase intentions.

Overall, these top ten articles form the intellectual backbone of research connecting social media engagement and consumer purchase behavior, offering theoretical and empirical insights into how digital interactions shape modern consumption patterns and brand relationships across diverse industries.

Significant Trends and Core Thematic Areas of Social Media literature in the fields of Hospitality and Tourism

a) This trend graph illustrates the evolution of key research terms related to social media content and visit intention from 2016 to 2024, highlighting how scholarly focus has shifted and expanded over time. Each bubble represents the intensity of research activity for a given term in a particular year, with larger bubbles indicating higher frequency or influence within the literature. The horizontal bars reflect the time span during which each term has been actively studied, offering a clear picture of how certain concepts have emerged, peaked, or gained continued relevance.

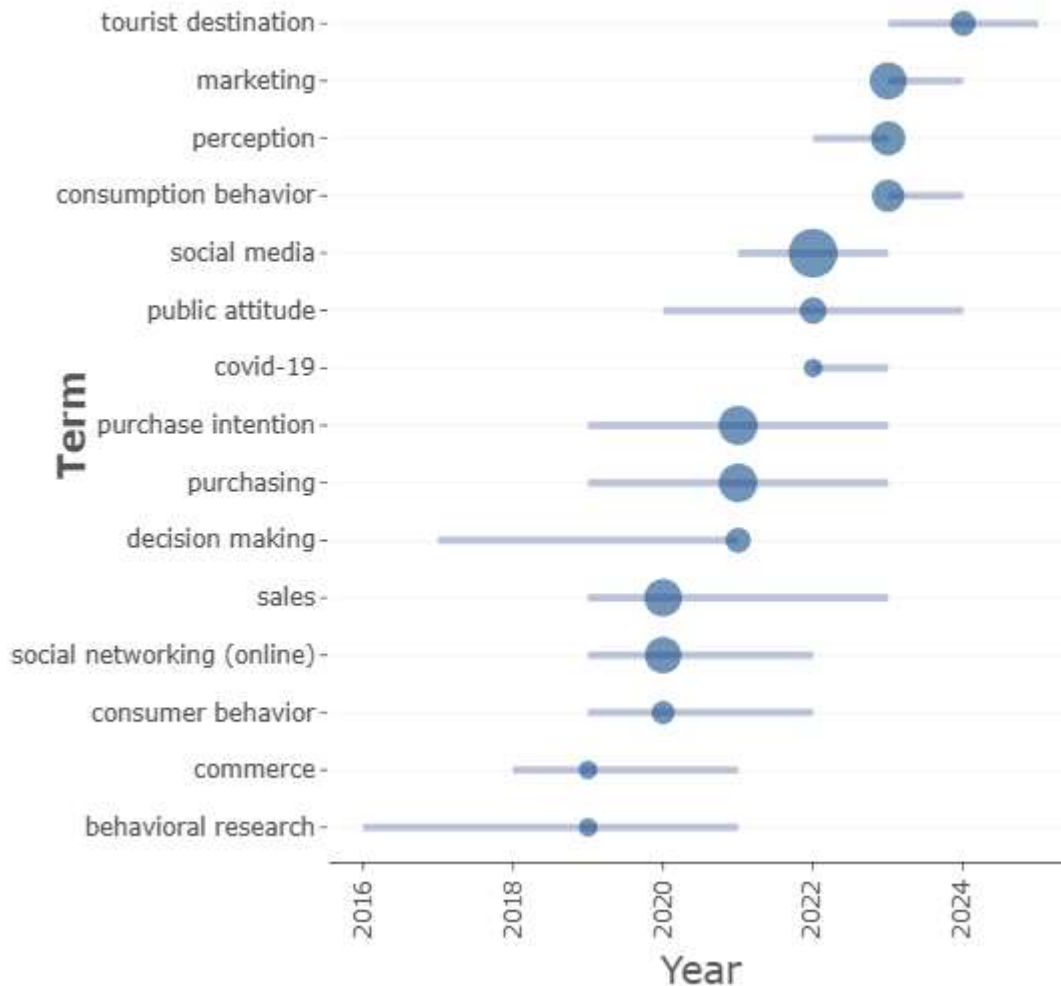


Figure 4 – Research Trend Map

Early research (2016–2018) concentrated on foundational concepts such as behavioral research, decision making, and commerce, indicating the initial exploration of consumer behavior in digital contexts. From 2019 onward, terms like consumer behavior, social networking (online), sales, and social media gained momentum, demonstrating the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping consumer decisions and visit intentions. The period between 2020 and 2022 shows a significant surge in research on purchase intention, purchasing, public attitude, and particularly social media, reflected by the largest bubble—highlighting its central role in influencing tourists’ decisions.

Post-pandemic themes such as COVID-19, perception, and public attitude gained relevance around 2021–2022, showing how the crisis reshaped tourist behavior and risk perceptions. By 2023–2024, attention shifted toward more destination-specific factors

like tourist destination, marketing, and consumption behavior, indicating a renewed research focus on how social media content drives destination image formation and visit intention.

Overall, the graph shows a clear progression from general behavioral studies to more specialized, social media-driven research, underscoring how digital content has become a dominant factor influencing consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and tourism-related decisions.

b) Thematic Map

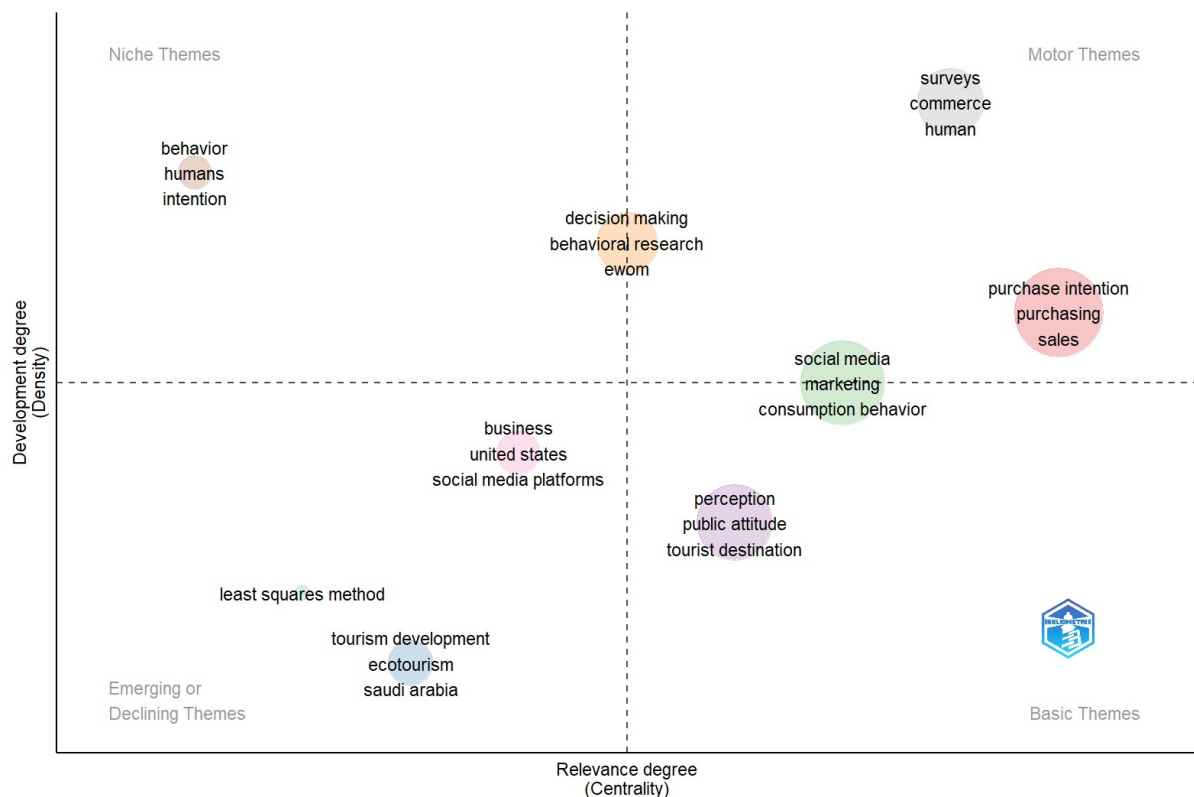


Figure 5 – Thematic Map

The thematic map provides a visual representation of the conceptual structure of research on social media, consumer behavior, and purchase intention by categorizing themes according to their relevance (centrality) and development (density). In the motor themes quadrant, topics such as *purchase intention*, *purchasing*, and *sales* appear as highly developed and central to the field, indicating that they form the driving force of current research and receive the most academic attention. Conversely, the basic themes quadrant contains concepts like *social media*, *marketing*, and *consumption behavior*, which are



highly relevant but less developed. These themes form the foundational core of the field and are widely used across studies, yet they still require further theoretical and empirical refinement. The niche themes quadrant includes terms such as *behavior*, *humans*, and *intention*, representing specialized and well-developed areas that contribute depth but remain less connected to broader research trends. Finally, the emerging or declining themes quadrant captures less-developed and less-central topics, such as *tourism development*, *ecotourism*, *Saudi Arabia*, and *least squares method*. These may represent emerging areas that have not yet matured or declining themes that are receiving reduced scholarly attention. Overall, the map demonstrates how research has evolved around a few dominant themes while highlighting opportunities for further development in foundational and emerging areas.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric review provides a holistic understanding of how social media travel content influences travel intention and how this field has evolved over the past decade. The analysis confirms that research productivity has increased substantially, driven by the global growth of social media usage, the expansion of UGC platforms, and the rising importance of digital information in tourist decision-making. The dominance of Asian countries—particularly Malaysia, India, China, and Indonesia—demonstrates shifting research leadership in digital tourism scholarship. Influential authors, institutions, and journals have contributed significantly to shaping theoretical and methodological advancements in areas such as eWOM, consumer engagement, destination image, and purchase intention. The thematic structure reveals a strong focus on core topics like social media, consumer behaviour, marketing, and travel intention, while emerging themes—such as influencer attributes, travel envy, behavioural psychology, and digital decision-making—highlight new avenues for exploration.

The study further shows that social media's role extends beyond information dissemination; it triggers emotional, psychological, and behavioural responses that meaningfully shape travel intention. The conceptual and thematic maps confirm that while some themes are well-developed, others remain under-explored, offering fertile ground for future research. The findings provide valuable insights for researchers, tourism practitioners, and policymakers by identifying research gaps and indicating where collaborative, interdisciplinary, and cross-regional efforts can enrich the field. As social media ecosystems continue to evolve, future research must adopt advanced analytical techniques, consider cultural variations, and integrate emerging digital trends to better understand how online travel content shapes tourist decision-making in an increasingly technology-driven world.



FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Future research directions for scholars and policymakers can be guided by the thematic and conceptual framework, suggesting several key priorities.

- There is a need for more extensive research on social media travel content within the hospitality and tourism sectors.
- High-quality studies can be enhanced through collaboration with globally influential and highly cited authors.
- Leading research hubs should engage with less-developed ones to strengthen their academic capacity and diversify research contributions.
- The themes identified in the conceptual framework should be treated as priority areas for future scholarly investigation.

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