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# Social media in travel: A bibliometric analysis

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**Abstract**

This study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of academic research on social media usage in the travel process, utilizing 2010 documents extracted from the SCOPUS database. The objective of the present study is to analyse documents on the use of social media in travel through bibliometric methods. The data gathered from the database were visualized by using Vosviewer programme. The findings reveal a consistent increase in scholarly attention to this topic since 2007, with the highest publication activity observed in 2023. Keyword analysis highlights "social media," "tourism," and "user-generated content" as central themes, reflecting the pivotal role of digital platforms in transforming travel behaviours and decision-making. Influential contributors, including Rob Law and Zheng Xiang, were identified, with significant citation metrics underlining their impact on the field. Major journals such as *Tourism Management* and *Journal of Travel Research* emerged as leading sources shaping the academic discourse.

**Key Words:** social media, tourism, travel, bibliometric analysis, SCOPUS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In order to remain current in an era of rapid technological advancement, traditional communication and information dissemination methods have been superseded by novel technologies that facilitate the ever-evolving landscape of information and communication. (Cömert, 2021: 5). The most prevalent modes of communication on the internet are social media applications (Çetinkaya, 2019: 9). The social media network, which is one of the new communication networks of our age and widely used worldwide, has become a communication tool used by both individuals and businesses (Sezgin, 2023: 5). The advent of mobile technologies and high-speed internet has led to a notable increase in the utilisation of social media (Kesici, 2019: 317). In January 2023, the number of active social media users totalled 4.76 billion (We Are Social, 2023). Social media applications are becoming one of the most significant tools of the Internet age. When used intensively and efficiently, they have the potential to play an exceptional role in the growth of the tourism industry. (Tasnim, 2020: 2).

The use of social media communication applications is becoming increasingly prevalent on a daily basis, both in terms of communication and commercial purposes. One of the primary areas where these communication resources are employed is in the context of tourism activities. The sharing of images, videos and information on social media has been observed to stimulate interest and curiosity among tourists (Kuzucanlı & Barakazı, 2023: 293). Consequently, organisations and companies operating within the tourism sector utilise social media applications to disseminate information about their offerings to prospective tourists and to influence their travel decisions (Abbasi et al., 2023: 1).

The integration of digital technology into the tourism industry has led to the creation of new experiences for tourists and an increase in revenue for the tourism sector. The use of mobile devices, internet connection and social media has been a significant factor in the digital transformation of travel and the subsequent evolution of the tourism industry in recent years (İli & Büyükbaykal, 2022: 307). The digitalisation of tourism has facilitated the online sharing of tourists' experiences on social networks. Concurrently, tourism stakeholders have been able to utilise social media tools to sustain their promotional and marketing activities, enhance brand awareness, and expand the number of current and prospective customers (Benyon et al., 2014: 521). In order to gain a competitive advantage, an increasing number of travel suppliers are utilising new social media platforms to develop a variety of innovative products, services and travel infrastructure. For example, since February 2020, Alibaba's online travel platform, Fliggy, has launched approximately 29,000 travel live stream platforms, which have been viewed over 250 million times (Yanhao, Mustafa, & Ling, 2024: 2).

Bibliometric methods, also known as scientific mapping, facilitate the assessment of bibliographic data by identifying the prevailing trends associated with a given research topic. These methods allow for the generation of insights within the context of specific themes and topics that align with the prevailing research trends (Balyalı & İlhan, 2023: 118). In the field of bibliographic studies, a range of analytical techniques are employed, including citation analysis, institutional analysis, author analysis, subject analysis and co-citation analysis (Kahraman, 2022: 210).

The proliferation of academic journals has made it essential to evaluate fields quantitatively in order to map progress. Furthermore, it is apparent that bibliometric studies have become a prevalent methodology in a multitude of research fields, including tourism and hospitality. Despite the existence of a multitude of studies pertaining to social media in the context of hospitality and tourism, there is a notable absence of research specifically examining the utilisation of social media in the travel process. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyse studies on the use of social media in travel through bibliometric methods. In this regard, a bibliometric investigation of the utilisation of social media in the travel process will facilitate the identification of current trends and the mapping of future developments.

The aim of this study is to compile academic studies published in the SCOPUS database on the use of social media in the tour / holiday / travel process. Present study tries to answer the following research questions:

- Which keywords are most preferred?
- Who are the authors with the most documents?
- How many studies were conducted each year?
- Who are the most cited authors?
- Which documents are the most cited ones?
- Which sources (journals or publishers) are on the stage?
- How many times has the subject been discussed in different types of academic studies?

## 2. LITERATURE

### 2.1. Social media in the context of travel

It is evident that travellers employ technology and social media platforms extensively during their holidays, from the initial planning stages to the provision of feedback upon their return (Çakmak & Demirkol, 2017: 220). In addition to disseminating information, tourists utilise social media platforms to share their experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011: 1369), and these platforms are a popular resource for travellers, facilitating the search, organisation and sharing of travel stories and tourism experiences (Leung et al., 2013: 4). The use of social media platforms has a significant impact on the behavioural intentions and subsequent actions of tourists. These channels are utilised extensively by tourists for the purposes of travel planning (Tolossa et al., 2023: 557). Indeed, social media has transformed the manner in which tourism content is created, consumed and disseminated. Consequently, consumers access information via social media in order to plan their trips, including details such as destinations, accommodation, restaurants, tours and attractions (Jiménez, Carmona, & Moral, 2024: 1).

Social media is regarded as a source of information that influences travel decisions, particularly in relation to personal travel experiences and recommendations (Kang & Schuett, 2013: 93). Simms (2012) posits that travellers are increasingly utilising online user-generated content as a resource for holiday planning (p. 82). Prior to undertaking a journey, travellers frequently utilise social media applications (Amaro et al., 2016: 3). The travel planning process is becoming increasingly influenced by electronic word-of-mouth provided by social media, which is reaching an increasing number of users (Nezakati et al., 2015: 121). The utilisation of social media for the purpose of acquiring information is becoming increasingly prevalent in the context of everyday life, due to the high frequency of interactions between users and the inherent trustworthiness of information sharing (Fardous, Du, & Hansen, 2019: 3). Naidu (2019) asserts that social media sites exert a significant influence on tourists' decision-making processes, particularly with regard to the search for travel-related information and the subsequent making of purchasing decisions. Liu, Mehraliyev, Liu and Schuckert (2020) investigated the role of social media in tourists' choices during the travel decision-making process. The findings revealed that tourists frequently use social media platforms to obtain information and conduct research before or during their trips.

The use of social media by tourists allows for the real-time sharing of information, videos and photos pertaining to their travel experiences, both during and after their journeys. In these posts, tourists disseminate information regarding their experiences and opinions about their travels (Arica et al., 2022f: 1567). Tourists require the ability to access information and travel services from any location and at any time during their journey (Sigala, 2019: 54). Fardous, Du and Hansen (2019) argue that social media applications are utilised during travel for the purposes of trip rescheduling, information sharing, news updates and communication with others (p.8). Mobile technology is utilised by travellers to actively search for information, share experiences and network during their travels (Yoo & Gretzel, 2016: 192). During their journeys, tourists disseminate their photographic records and experiences to their families and travel companions via social media applications (Hussain, Li, & Wang, 2018: 8).

Following the completion of their journey, travellers utilise social media to disseminate information about their experiences. This is done in the form of comments, reviews, photographs or images (Amaro et al., 2016: 4). In particular, social media is utilised in the post-trip phase to disseminate experiences and photographs to friends and other travellers (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012: 21). The term "post-travel experience sharing" denotes the extent to which tourists engage in electronic word-of-mouth activities, specifically their inclination to disseminate their travel experiences

through social media applications. This participation contributes to the generation of travel reviews and recommendations (Sotiriadis, 2017: 182). It is notable that social media applications utilized by travellers both before and during their journeys are also frequently employed after their return. Travellers disseminate information and experiences accrued during the travel process via social media platforms, with the dual objective of disseminating information to other travellers and establishing social relationships with other social media users.

### 2.2. Bibliometric analysis

The term "bibliometrics" is defined as the method used to examine scientific information sharing tools, such as published journals and books, with mathematical and statistical techniques (Ulu & Akdağ, 2015: 7). The bibliometric method yields certain results by determining a number of parameters, including the journal in which the article is published, the year of publication, the research approach, the data collection method and sample group, the country and city where the data were collected, the number of authors, the author names, author titles, and so forth (Çiçek & Kozak, 2012: 736). Bibliometric studies help us to evaluate scientific studies, see who has done the most work in a field and see how it relates to other areas of science. (Yılmaz, 2017: 66). They facilitate the assessment of scientific studies belonging to a specific discipline, country, or country group, institution, or individual, and provide insights into the current state of research (Şakar Denktaş & Cerit, 2013: 38).

In order to gain insight into the advancements within a given field or the content of academic journals, bibliometric methods can be a valuable tool for researchers (Ülker, Ülker & Karamustafa, 2023: 798). Bibliometric studies are employed in a multitude of disciplines, including tourism and hospitality. The application of bibliometric methods in the field of tourism and hospitality has been employed to examine a number of pertinent issues, including artificial intelligence (Knani, Echchakoui & Ladhari, 2022) smart tourism (Johnson & Samakovlis, 2019), social media (Nusair, Butt, & Nikhashemi 2019), sustainable tourism (Geng et al., 2024), gastronomy (Naruetharadhol & Gebsombut, 2020), eWOM (Donthu et al., 2021) and memorable tourism experience (Öncülokur et al., 2023; Sihombing & Antonio, 2022).

The studies examined in bibliometric analyses are accessed from indexes and databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, Dimensions, Google Scholar, Lens and PubMed (Moral Muñoz et al., 2020: 3). The advent of globally accepted scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science have facilitated the acquisition of large-scale bibliometric data. The utilisation of bibliometric software, including Gephi, Leximancer, and VOSviewer, enables the analysis and visualisation of such data. Consequently, there has been a notable surge in interest in bibliometric analysis studies (Donthu et al., 2021: 286). The advantage of VOSviewer software is that it provides visual presentation in high quality (Ongun, 2023: 82) The free VOSviewer software is capable of generating maps based on a number of different variables, including keywords, citations, collaborations and countries. The VOSviewer program provides a comprehensive examination of bibliometric maps through a detailed viewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010: 524).

## 3. METHOD

The current research was conducted to determine the status of the studies in the international literature on the use of social media in the travel process. In this context, the academic documents reached as a result of the search criteria in the SCOPUS database, which include some statements related to social media and travel process, were examined. VosViewer, which is used as a data mapping programme, and Microsoft Excel and Word programmes that enable the shaping of tables and graphs were used.

A scopus database search was conducted at 01.12.2024. Academic documents other than English language was excluded. Also, documents that were not still finalised were not Included In this study. A total of 2010 documents were Identified. Frequency and visualising analyses were conducted; citation analyses were carried out using the VosViewer programme. Table 1 shows the research corpus with Its details.

**Table 1** Search string

| | |
|---|---|
| Search String | TITLE-ABS-KEY("social media" AND travel OR holiday OR trip) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBSTAGE,"final" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA,"SOCI" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA,"BUSI" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA,"MULT" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE,"English" ) ) |
| Database | Scopus |
| Identification Screening | A total of 2038 documents were identified.<br>Irrelevant documents were excluded (n=28) |
| Included | A total of 2010 records were added into final corpus. |

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Keyword analysis: frequencies and co-occurrences of the keywords

Keyword analysis is a method of visualising the frequency, relationships and clustering of keywords related to a particular topic in academic literature. Keywords that were used at least 10 times in the publications are shown in the figure 1 The keyword 'social media' is positioned centrally and represented by the largest node. This indicates that 'social media' is the most significant keyword in the literature analysed in the study and has strong links with other concepts. Keywords such as 'tourism', 'user-generated content' and 'destination marketing' are other important nodes in the centre. The lines between nodes represent the strength of the relationship between two keywords. The density and thickness of the lines indicate how strong the co-operation or citation frequency between keywords is. The keyword analysis via Vosviewer shows that the most frequently used keywords (social media, tourism and user-generated content etc.) also have the strongest links.

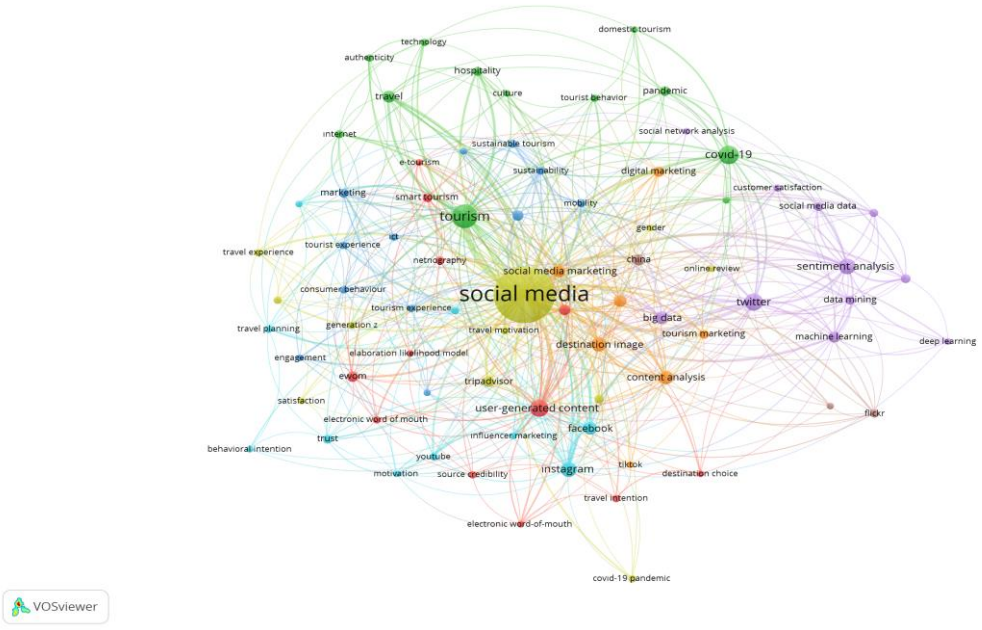



**Figure 1** Co-occurrence of the keywords and the links between them

Besides the connections of the keywords, frequency of a keyword gives clue about the importance of the item in the research field. Table 2 shows the most frequently used keywords. The terms social media (n=652), tourism (n=118), covid-19 (n=73), twitter (n=61) and user-generated content (n=59) are the five most preferred keywords for the academic documents.

**Table 2** Frequency of the keywords

| Keyword | Frequency |
|---|---|
| social media | 652 |
| tourism | 118 |
| covid-19 | 73 |
| Twitter | 61 |
| user-generated content | 59 |
| Instagram | 45 |
| destination image | 43 |
| content analysis | 37 |
| big data | 35 |
| Facebook | 34 |
| travel | 32 |
| social media marketing | 31 |
| destination marketing | 30 |
| trip advisor | 28 |
| machine learning | 28 |

## 4.2. Document numbers by authors, years and type

Travel and the use of social media relationship has been studied since the beginning of the millennium. There are some featured authors who have studied the topic for more than once. Rob Law (n=22), Zheng Xiang (n=11), Ulrike Gretzel (n=11), Estela Marine-Roig (n=10) Huy Quan Vu (n=10) are the authors who contributed to or publish the largest number of documents as shown in table 3.

**Table 3** Document numbers by authors

| Author's Name | Document Number |
|---|---|
| Law, Rob | 22 |
| Xiang, Zheng | 11 |
| Grezel, Ulrike | 11 |
| Marine-Roig, Estela | 10 |
| Vu, Huy Quan | 10 |
| Chung, Namho | 8 |
| Li, Gang | 8 |
| Wong, Ipkin Anthony | 7 |
| Buhalis, Dimitrios | 6 |
| Fesenmaier, Daniel R. | 6 |

A chronological analysis of the publications reveals that the first study aligning with the predetermined search criteria was published in 2007, marking the inception of a sustained increase in the number of documents released on an annual basis since that year, as illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4** Document numbers by years

| Year | Frequency | Year | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | 1 | 2016 | 82 |
| 2008 | 1 | 2017 | 116 |
| 2009 | 4 | 2018 | 139 |
| 2010 | 4 | 2019 | 165 |
| 2011 | 6 | 2020 | 227 |
| 2012 | 32 | 2021 | 257 |
| 2013 | 36 | 2022 | 267 |
| 2014 | 43 | 2023 | 287 |
| 2015 | 74 | 2024 | 269 |

A total of 2010 documents were found as a result of the Scopus database search. Most of the documents consist of articles, book chapters and conference papers. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the document types and their numbers.

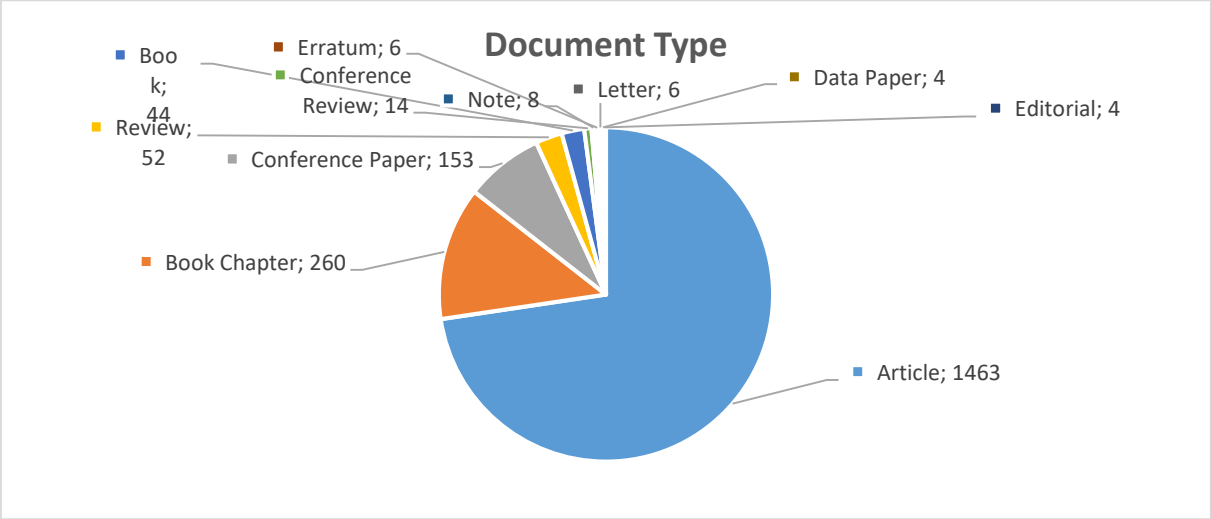



**Figure 2** Distrubition of the document types

## 4.3. Citations of author and document analysis

A citation analysis of authors is a significant metric, as it demonstrates the frequency of citations to authors included within a specified data set. It is crucial to ascertain authors who have made substantial contributions to the field of research and identify the authors who are frequently cited by other researchers. The result of the analysis showed that Zheng Xiang (2669 citations), Rob Law (2602 citations) and Ulrike Gretzel (2376 citations) are among the most cited authors with each more than 10 documents in total. But in the 4th place, Sam Ford (1948 citations) come with only one document. This finding shows that producing more than one document may not be the only criteria for being a prolific author in a research field. Figure 3 and table 5 show the result of the author citation analysis. Besides the number of the citations an author has received, the total link strength of the author also gives clue about the important authors. In Figure 3, the authors with strongest link are highlighted. The lines between the nodes express the attribution relationship between the documents. Along with the most cited authors, Dimitrios Buhalis, Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen, Daniel Leung are among the authors who have high link strength even if they are not most cited authors.

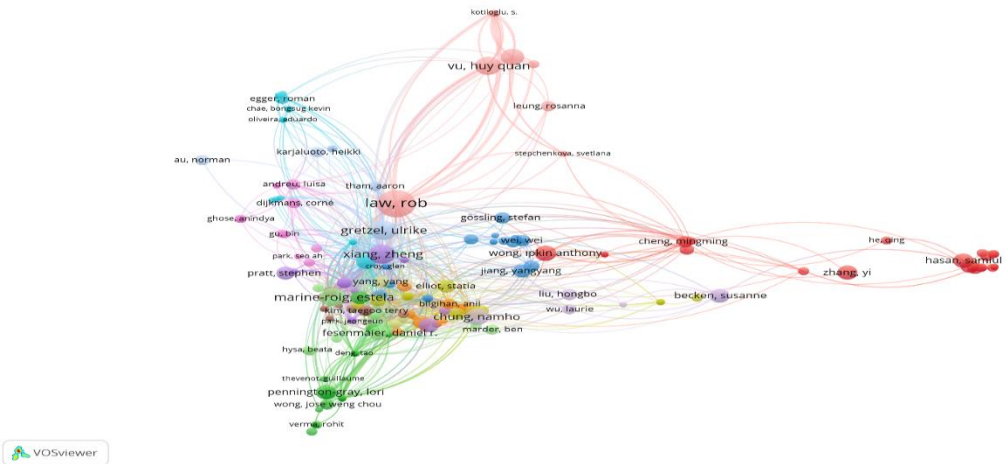



**Figure 3** Total link strength of the authors

**Table 5** Citation numbers of authors

| Author's Name | Citations | Total Link Strength |
|---|---|---|
| Xiang, Zheng | 2669 | 215 |
| Law, Rob | 2602 | 208 |
| Grezel, Ulrike | 2376 | 185 |
| Sam Ford | 1948 | 0 |
| Dimitrios Buhalis | 1592 | 111 |
| Julian K. Ayeh | 1146 | 29 |
| Norman Au | 1022 | 4 |
| Daniel Leung | 1015 | 77 |
| Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen | 958 | 75 |
| W. Lance Bennett | 871 | 0 |

The objective of conducting citation analysis on documents, akin to the approach employed in the analysis of author citations, is to elucidate pivotal documents within the pertinent academic discipline. The sole distinction between the citation analysis of documents and the analysis of author citations is that the former focuses on identifying academic studies rather than individual authors. Also, figure 4 shows the connection web of the documents, each document with its first author information.

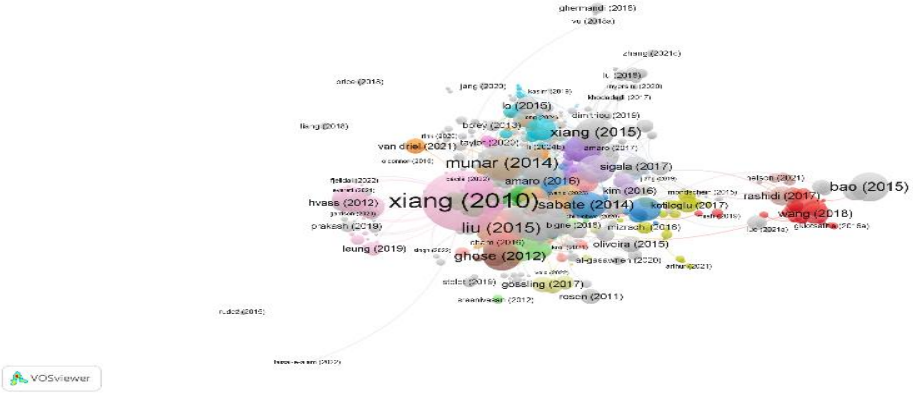



**Figure 4** Citation and total link strengths of documents

Table 6 presents a selection of key documents relevant to the research area, along with detailed information concerning these documents.

**Table 6** Citations of authors with document information

| Document | Author(s) | Citations | Published Year | Document Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role of social media in online travel information search | Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. | 1989 | 2010 | Article |
| Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture | Jenkins, H., Ford, S., Green, J. | 1948 | 2013 | Book |
| Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality: A Literature Review | Leung, D., Law, R., van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. | 1016 | 2013 | Review |
| The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics | Bennett, W.L., & Segerberg, A., | 871 | 2012 | Book |
| Fast policy: Experimental statecraft at the thresholds of neoliberalism | Peck, J., & Theodore, N. | 769 | 2015 | Book |
| Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media by 2014, Article, 762 citations | Munar, A.M., & Jacobsen, J.K.S. | 762 | 2014 | Article |
| What makes a useful online review? Implication for travel product websites | Liu, Z., Park, S. | 748 | 2015 | Article |
| Do We Believe in TripAdvisor? Examining Credibility Perceptions and Online Travelers' Attitude toward Using User-Generated Content | Ayeh, J.K., Au, N., Law, R. | 578 | 2013 | Article |
| Geographical tracking and mapping of coronavirus disease COVID-19/severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) epidemic and associated events around the world: How 21st century GIS technologies are supporting the global fight against outbreaks and epidemics | Kamel Boulos, M.N., Geraghty, E.M. | 490 | 2020 | Article |
| Recommendations in location-based social networks: a survey | Bao, J., Zheng, Y., Wilkie, D., Mokbel, M. | 472 | 2015 | Article |

## 4.4. Number of citations and published documents by sources

The recognition of prominent scholarly publications and other relevant sources in which academic research is disseminated can facilitate the conceptualisation phase of research endeavours for researchers. To this end, an analysis of citations was conducted to ascertain the most prominent sources, with the criteria including publications with at least one publication and a minimum of 50 citations within the designated field. Followings were found to be the sources that published the most documents: Tourism Management (43 documents, 7354 citations), Journal of Travel Research (45 documents, 2837 citations), Plos One (54 documents, 2165 citations), Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing (27 documents, 2828 citations), Current Issues in Tourism (43 documents, 1548 citations) and Sustainability-Switzerland (72 documents, 1497 citations). Also, these sources are the most cited ones besides having the strongest total link strengths (see table 7 and figure 5).

**Table 7** Prolific sources and their citation numbers

| Source Name | Number of Citations | Number of Publication |
|---|---|---|
| Tourism Management | 7354 | 43 |
| Journal of Travel Research | 2837 | 45 |
| Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing | 2828 | 27 |
| Plos One | 2165 | 54 |
| Current Issues in Tourism | 1548 | 43 |
| Sustainability (Switzerland) | 1497 | 72 |
| International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | 1492 | 23 |
| Journal of Destination Marketing and Management | 1019 | 16 |
| Annals of Tourism Research | 995 | 15 |
| Journal of Vacation Marketing | 677 | 19 |

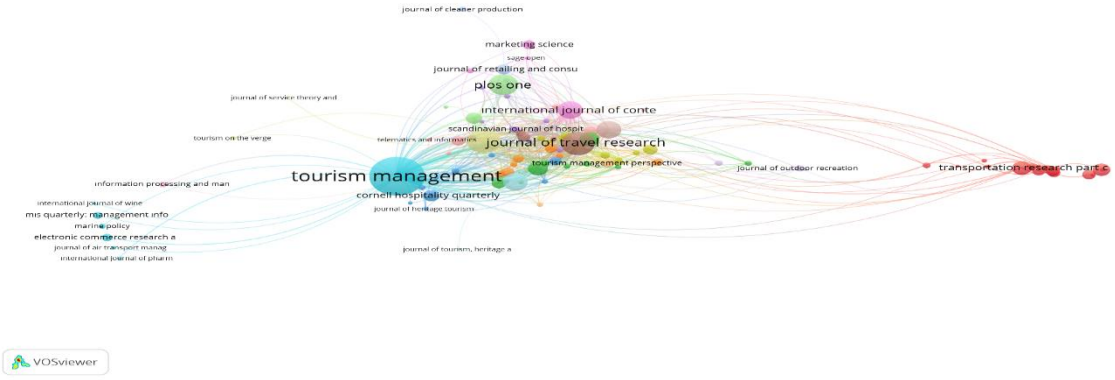



**Figure 5** Relationship between the most cited sources

## 5. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis focused on the use of social media in the travel process, revealing significant findings regarding publication trends, keyword usage, and citation patterns. A total of 2010 documents were analysed from the SCOPUS database, with studies spanning from 2007 to 2024. The analysis demonstrated a steady increase in research activity over the years, with a peak in 2023. Most of the analysed documents were journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers.

The most frequently used keywords were “social media” (652 mentions), “tourism” (118 mentions), and “user-generated content” (59 mentions). These terms were central to the research field, highlighting the pivotal role of social media in tourism and digital transformation. Other significant

keywords included “destination marketing,” “content analysis,” and “big data,” indicating a multidisciplinary approach to exploring social media’s influence in travel.

Authors such as Rob Law, Zheng Xiang, and Ulrike Gretzel emerged as leading contributors, with Law publishing 22 documents and Xiang receiving 2669 citations, the highest in the dataset. Citation analysis further highlighted the importance of robust collaborations, with authors like Dimitrios Buhalis and Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen showing strong linkage metrics despite fewer publications. Journals such as *Tourism Management* and *Journal of Travel Research* were identified as prolific and highly cited sources in the field. These journals published numerous influential articles, shaping the discourse around social media’s role in tourism.

It is imperative to recognise the fundamental limitations inherent to the present study, chiefly the utilisation of the SCOPUS database, a practice that has the potential to introduce biases, thus resulting in an analysis that may lack comprehensive rigor. To address this limitation, future researchers are encouraged to engage in explorations that extend beyond the confines of SCOPUS by conducting research in alternative international databases, including but not limited to Web of Science, Google Scholar, and national indexes in order to enhance the depth and breadth of their research findings.

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