



Digital Marketing Strategy and its Impact on Image and Traveler Decision: A Bibliometric Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map the development of the literature on digital marketing strategies in the tourism sector, with a focus on their impact on destination image and tourist decisions. Using a data-driven bibliometric approach based on Scopus data from 2009 to 2025, a total of 288 articles were analyzed to identify publication trends, dominant keywords, leading authors and institutions, as well as remaining research gaps. The analysis results show a significant increase in the number of publications post-2018, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated digital transformation in the tourism sector. Data visualization via VOSviewer identified 14 main clusters, with five dominant themes covering digital strategies, e-WOM, consumer behavior, Generation Z engagement, and destination sustainability. The most productive journal is Sustainability, with significant contributions from authors and institutions in Indonesia, India, and Portugal. This study also identified important gaps, including a lack of research on consumer engagement, the use of advanced quantitative methods such as PLS-SEM, and the limited representation of developing country contexts in the existing literature. These findings make a significant contribution to mapping the literature and guiding strategic directions for future research, particularly research focused on the utilization of advanced technologies, content personalization, and a deep understanding of digital traveler behavior.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, advancements in information and communication technology have accelerated rapidly, driving significant transformations across all sectors, including the tourism sector. This transformation has given rise to tourism marketing in the form of digital marketing. Currently, the most effective and interactive approach to managing tourism promotion is digital marketing. This is because digital marketing has a much broader reach and encompasses digital content, social media, and data-driven marketing systems; by utilizing digital marketing, tourism destinations can directly establish more personalized and real-time communication with potential tourists. In this context, digital marketing can have a significant impact on shaping a destination's image. Digital marketing has become a central driver for the tourism sector, strengthening brand awareness and shaping consumer intention through tools like e-WOM and social media (Awad & Alharthi, 2025). This research investigates the effect of digital publicity and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on destination image and tourist trust (Herstanti, Suhud, & Handaru, 2025). The study explores the impact of social comparison on travel decision-making, revealing how compulsive social media use influences tourist behavior (Kumar, 2025).

Studies on the role of digital marketing in tourism continue to increase year after year. This indicates that digital marketing in the tourism sector is growing rapidly, with numerous publications on digital marketing and tourism in which researchers have explored various content strategies, e-WOM (electronic word of mouth), and user-generated content (UGC). However, there are still few studies that discuss the development of a systematic mapping of the field in terms of research structure and trends. Existing research tends to be case studies or limited experiments.

Current digital marketing strategies undoubtedly have a significant impact on how a tourism destination's image influences tourists' visit decisions. Therefore, this study aims to analyze scientific publications using a bibliometric approach on documents indexed in the Scopus database. The data used consists of journals from 2009 through mid-2025. This research study will answer the main question:

RQ1: What are the trends in scientific publications related to digital marketing strategies in the context of tourism from year to year?

RQ2: What are the main themes, dominant keywords, and interconnections between concepts frequently examined in studies related to digital marketing, destination image, and tourist decisions?

RQ3: Who are the most influential authors and publication sources in this field according to bibliometric analysis?

RQ4: What are the research gaps and future research directions that can be developed in studies on digital marketing and tourism destination image?

This study is expected to make a significant contribution by providing a research map and insights for academics and practitioners in understanding the academic landscape related to digital marketing and tourism. Additionally, the

results of this research mapping are expected to serve as a foundation for evidence-based destination marketing strategies.

The structure of this study includes: the methods section explains the stages of data collection and bibliometric data analysis; the results and discussion section outlines the findings for each research question; and the final section contains the conclusions and recommendations for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Marketing in Tourism

Digital marketing has become a key strategy in the tourism sector due to its ability to reach a wide audience and enable real-time interaction between destination managers and potential tourists. Rapid advancements in information and communication technology have driven the transformation from traditional marketing toward a more interactive and data-driven digital marketing approach. According to Awad and Alharthi (2025), digital marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing *brand awareness* and shaping consumer intent through various digital platforms. In the context of tourism, the use of digital marketing enables the delivery of information that is more personalized, effective, and targeted. The integration of social media, digital content, and data-driven systems facilitates tourism stakeholders' understanding of travelers' preferences and behaviors.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) and Social Media

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) is the process of disseminating information, opinions, or consumer experiences through digital media. In the tourism sector, e-WOM has a significant influence on tourists' perceptions and decisions. Research by Herstanti et al. (2025) indicates that e-WOM has a positive effect on destination image and traveler trust. Additionally, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have become primary channels for disseminating tourism information through engaging visual content. Kumar (2025) explains that social media usage can influence travel decisions through the process of social comparison. This highlights that e-WOM and social media play a strategic role in shaping the behavior of modern travelers.

Destination Image

Destination image refers to the perception that tourists hold of a tourist destination, which is shaped by information, experiences, and media exposure. A positive destination image is crucial in attracting tourists and influencing their decision to visit. Zhang and Wang (2023) state that destination image acts as a mediating variable in building tourist trust. Meanwhile, Lin and Chen (2024) add that destination image also influences tourist loyalty through emotional attachment. Therefore, an effective digital marketing strategy must be able to build a strong and consistent destination image.

Tourist Behavior and Visit Decisions

Tourist behavior is influenced by various factors, both internal and external, including digital experiences, perceptions, and information obtained through online media. Sharma and Sharma (2023) reveal that digital experiences such as *virtual tourism* can influence visit intentions through the formation of destination image. Additionally, online reviews and user-generated content (UGC) also play a significant role in influencing travelers' decisions. Tichaawa and Mhlanga (2023) demonstrate that customer reviews can significantly impact brand image and visitation decisions. Thus, understanding traveler behavior is key to designing effective marketing strategies.

The Role of Generation Z in Digital Tourism

Generation Z is a group born in the digital era and exhibits high engagement with technology and social media. This group tends to rely on visual and interactive content when seeking tourism information. Dedeoğlu and Alrawadieh (2023) explain that Generation Z exhibits unique digital engagement patterns, influenced by their need for information and entertainment. Basaran (2025) also found that platforms like TikTok have a significant influence on shaping Generation Z's travel intentions. Therefore, generation-based market segmentation is crucial in digital tourism marketing strategies.

Bibliometric Analysis in Digital Marketing Research

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method used to evaluate the development of scientific literature based on publication data such as authors, keywords, institutions, and research trends. This method provides a comprehensive overview of developments in a research field and helps identify research gaps. In the context of digital tourism marketing, bibliometric analysis allows researchers to understand the structure and direction of research development, including dominant themes such as digital strategies, e-WOM, consumer behavior, and sustainability. Additionally, this method helps identify topics that have been rarely studied.

METHODOLOGY

This research is an exploratory study using a quantitative bibliometric approach that provides a comprehensive overview of research developments and helps identify unexplored areas. This approach aims to map the scientific literature on digital marketing strategies in the context of tourism, particularly regarding destination image, which can influence tourists' decisions. This study uses the Scopus database; Scopus was selected as the data source due to its broad scope and status as one of the most comprehensive and internationally reputable sources of scientific references.

The initial data analysis for this study consisted of scientific publications. The keywords used included: digital marketing, tourism, destination image, and travel. Data searches used Boolean operators such as "AND" to filter results so that they only included documents discussing the topic of digital marketing, and "OR" to obtain a broad set of publications covering various similar terms related

to tourism, destination image, and tourist behavior. The search strategy was applied to the title, abstract, and keywords fields in Scopus to filter a broad yet relevant body of literature aligned with the research topic. This study selected only peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure the validity and quality of the data used.

The search results were then exported in CSV format to facilitate analysis using bibliometric software such as VOSviewer. Bibliometric mapping techniques, such as co-occurrence analysis and clustering, were applied to explore the thematic structure and the direction of literature development in the fields of digital marketing and tourism.

The analysis was conducted using two main approaches: first, Performance Analysis to measure scientific productivity based on the number of publications, active authors, affiliations, and journal sources. Second, Scientific Mapping to analyze conceptual structures through keyword co-occurrence, clustering, overlay, and density visualization. Additionally, co-authorship analysis was performed to examine collaboration networks among authors and institutions.

A limitation of this study lies in the data constraints, as the data is derived solely from a single database (Scopus). However, the use of a bibliometric approach is a strength of this study, as it provides an objective and systematic mapping of trends and research structures in the field of digital tourism marketing—an approach that has not been extensively employed in previous studies.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

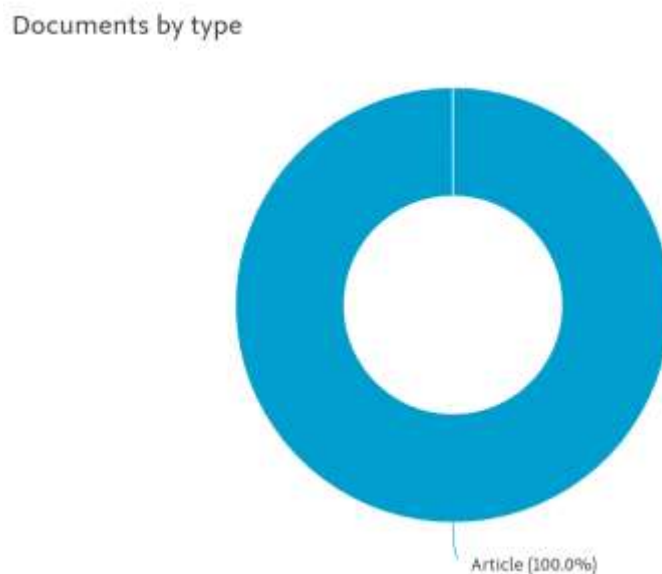


Figure 1. Composition of Document Types Used in the Analysis (Articles 100%)

This section provides an overview of the characteristics of the scientific publications analyzed. All 288 documents obtained from the Scopus database consist entirely of scientific journal articles, with no conference proceedings,

reviews, editorials, or other types of documents included. This indicates that the findings of this study are based on peer-reviewed literature, which is considered to represent scientifically validated knowledge. Figure 1 shows the composition of documents by type. This distribution also indicates a strong focus within the scientific community on formal publications in journals. Figure 1. This illustrates the composition of documents by type. This distribution also highlights the scientific community's strong emphasis on formal journal publications.

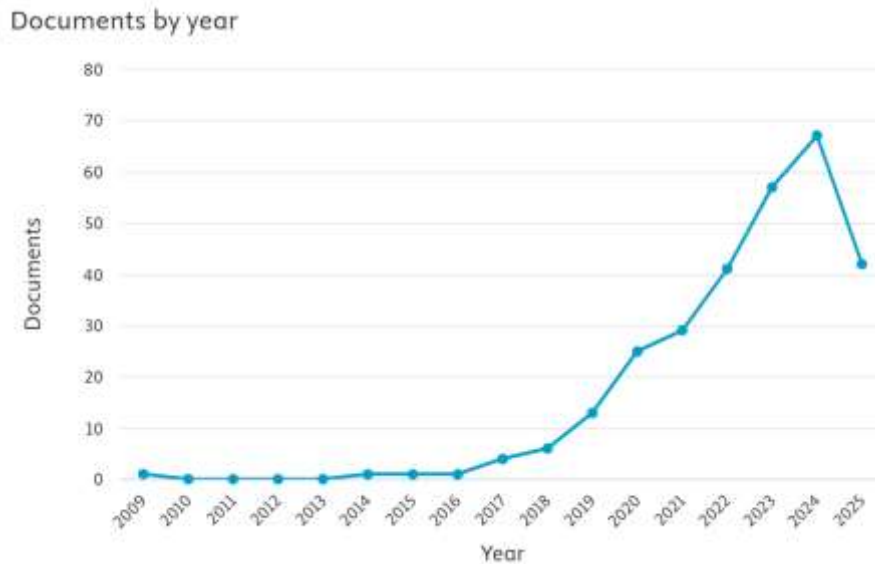


Figure 2. Number of Scientific Publications Related to Digital Marketing and Tourism per Year (2009-2025)

Based on the figure showing the number of scientific publications related to digital marketing in tourism which is the result of a Scopus-based data search a total of 288 documents relevant to the topic were identified, covering digital marketing, destination image, and tourist decision-making in tourism visits. The distribution of publications per year in Figure 2 illustrates a trend of journal publications showing a specific increase from 2018 to 2024. During the initial period from 2009 to 2016, the number of publications was relatively low and stagnant, with only 0 to 1 document per year. However, starting in 2017, there was an increase to 4 documents per year, followed by a sharp surge in 2020 to 25 documents. This certainly reflects a growing academic interest in the topic of digital marketing in tourism; the COVID-19 pandemic has also undoubtedly served as a catalyst for accelerating digital transformation, including within the tourism sector. Meanwhile, the decline in the number of publications observed in 2025 is likely due to the data collection period having been conducted before the current year concluded, and thus does not yet reflect the full annual total.

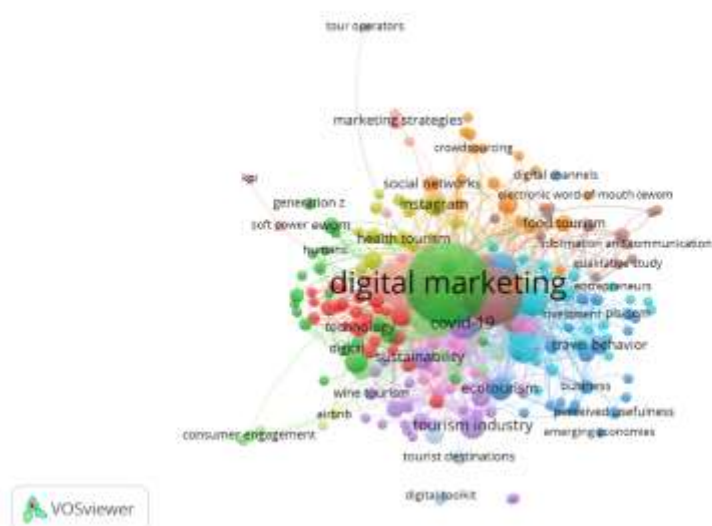


Figure 3. Visualization of Keyword Network of 288 Documents Using VOSviewer.

Conceptual structure analysis was conducted using the keyword co-occurrence method and visualized via VOSviewer. As shown in Figure 3, the VOSviewer analysis identified 14 clusters containing a total of 235 keywords that met the minimum frequency threshold. These 14 clusters illustrate the diversity and complexity of the research topic on digital marketing in the tourism sector. Figure 3 shows a visualization of the keyword network, where the size of the circles indicates the frequency of word occurrence, and the colors represent each of the clusters. The keyword “Digital Marketing” is at the center of the network, indicating the central role of this topic in the entire analyzed literature.

From the 14 clusters, five main clusters were identified. Each cluster reflects a specific research focus that is interconnected, whether in the context of strategy, tourist perceptions, digital technology, or sustainability issues. The following is a description of each main theme based on the clustering results:

Cluster 1 focuses on digital marketing strategies and social media, with dominant keywords such as “digital marketing”, “social networks”, “Instagram”, and “technology”. This cluster highlights the strong dominance of digital marketing, driven by the use of social media as an effective marketing tool. The use of platforms like Instagram in promoting tourist destinations, particularly post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Cluster 2 focuses on the importance of digital communication and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in influencing tourist interest. Keywords such as “digital channels”, “information and communication”, and “food tourism” indicate a growing reliance on digital content and online reviews, which have become key factors in travel decisions.

Cluster 3 highlights the importance of tourist behavior and consumer preferences, as evidenced by the emergence of keywords such as “travel behavior”, “perceived usefulness”, “consumer behavior”, and “business”. Topics within this cluster are often analyzed using quantitative approaches to examine the relationship between digital experiences, perceptions, and visitation intentions.

Cluster 4 is closely related to destination image and alternative tourism, including topics such as “ecotourism,” “wine tourism,” and “sustainability.” This cluster discusses the importance of destination sustainability as a key theme in digital promotion strategies, particularly through narratives and imagery built online.

Cluster 5 highlights a focus on the younger generation (Generation Z) and the importance of digital consumer engagement, through keywords such as “Generation Z”, “consumer engagement”, and “soft power”. Digital market segmentation targeting this age group is a particular focus in recent literature, as they are active users of social media platforms who are heavily influenced by online imagery and digital content.

In addition to these five major clusters, there are also nine minor clusters covering specific topics, such as the role of tour operators, the use of digital tools at destinations, and qualitative approaches in the context of emerging economies. Although specific in nature, these topics enrich the complexity of the conceptual framework within the field of digital tourism marketing. In general, this keyword structure demonstrates that digital marketing research in the tourism context does not stand alone but is interconnected with issues of destination image, tourist behavior, and continuously evolving digital technology. These findings reinforce the results of studies by Herstanti et al. (2025) and Awad & Alharthi (2025), which state that digital strategies based on visuals, online communication, and audience segmentation are key components in shaping the perceptions and decisions of modern travelers.

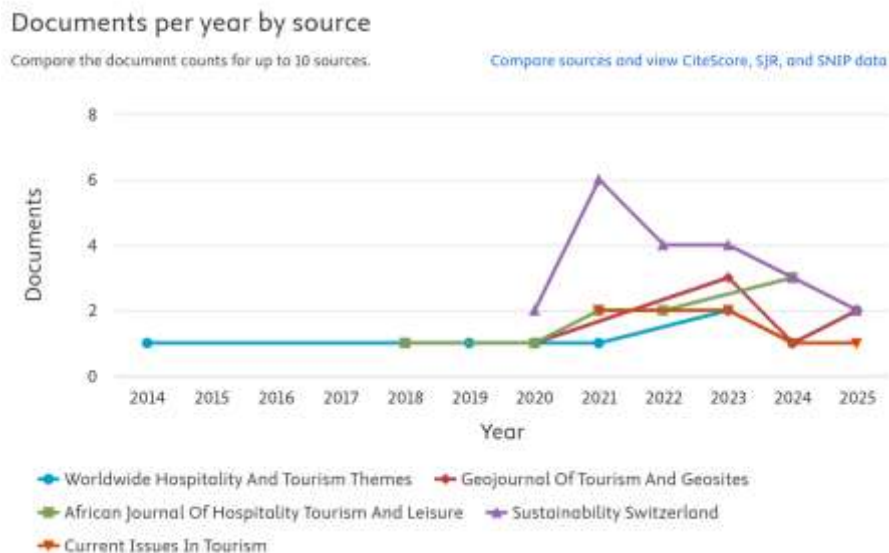


Figure 4, Publication Sources (Most Productive Journals)

As shown in Figure 4, the journal that published the most articles on this topic is *Sustainability Switzerland*, which saw a sharp increase in 2021 with 6 articles. Other notable journals include *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, *African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure*, and *Current Issues in Tourism*. These

journals focus on destination sustainability, regional development, and digital promotion strategies in tourism.

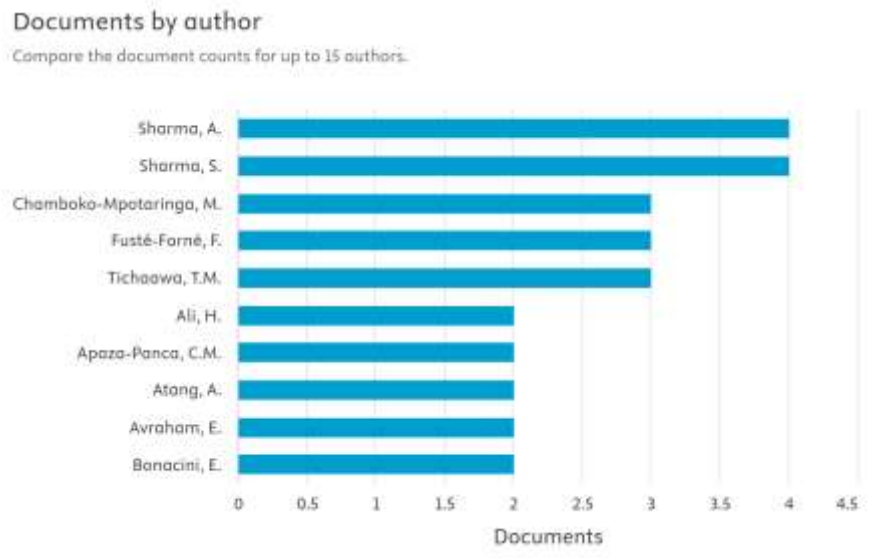


Figure 5. Most Productive Authors

Figure 5 identifies the top 15 authors. Sharma, A. and Sharma, S. are the most productive authors, each with 4 publications, followed by researchers such as Chamboko-Mpotaringa, M., Fusté-Forné, F., and Tichaawa, T.M., who also made significant contributions. Research by these authors extensively addresses visual communication, branding strategies, the use of social media in destination marketing, and tourist behavior. This indicates that topics in digital marketing within tourism are being actively and diversely researched by scholars from various regions and disciplines.

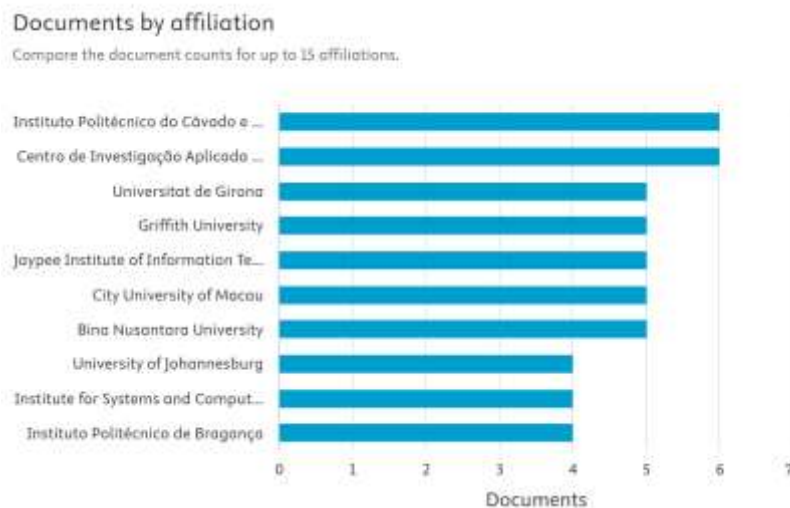


Figure 6. Most Active Academic Institutions/ Affiliations.

Figure 6 shows that the Instituto Politécnico do Cávado e do Ave and the Centro de Investigação Aplicada em Gestão are the institutions that have published the most articles (6 documents each). Other institutions such as the *Universitat de Girona*, *Griffith University*, *Jaypee Institute of Information Technology*, and *Bina Nusantara University* also made significant contributions. This indicates

that Europe and Asia, particularly Portugal and Indonesia, have active research centers in the field of digital tourism marketing.

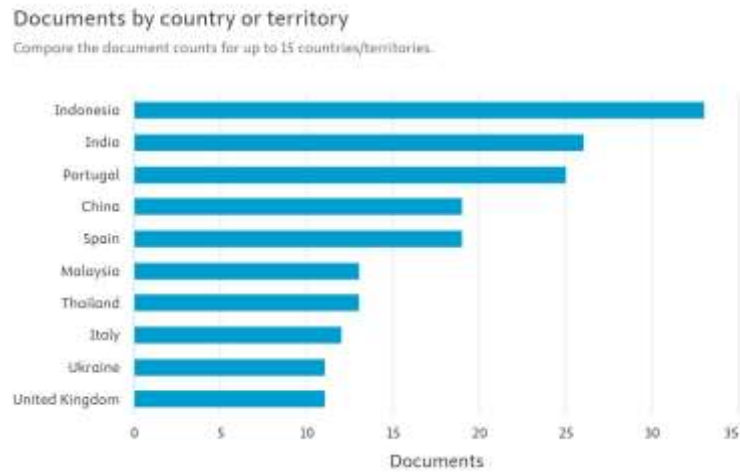


Figure 7. Country of Origin of Publication

Figure 7 reveals that Indonesia is the country with the highest number of publications, followed by India, Portugal, China, and Spain. This suggests that developing countries and major tourist destinations show a high interest in developing digital strategies for destination marketing. Specifically for Indonesia, this high contribution can be attributed to the push for digital transformation in tourism and research collaboration among domestic universities.

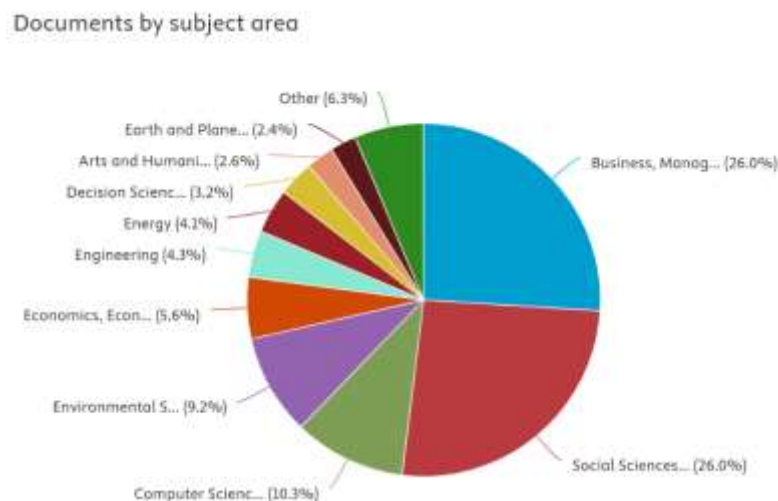


Figure 8, Subject Area

Figure 8 illustrates the disciplinary distribution analysis of the publications examined, showing that research on digital marketing in the context of tourism has a multidisciplinary character. The two most dominant fields are *Business, Management & Accounting* and *Social Sciences*, each accounting for approximately 26% of the total documents. Additionally, the fields of *Computer Science* and *Environmental Science* also hold significant shares, at approximately

10.3% and 9.2%, respectively. This indicates that research in this field does not only focus on marketing and management aspects but also involves digital technology and environmental sustainability issues. This multidisciplinary approach enriches the understanding of effective digital marketing strategies in shaping destination image and influencing tourist decisions.

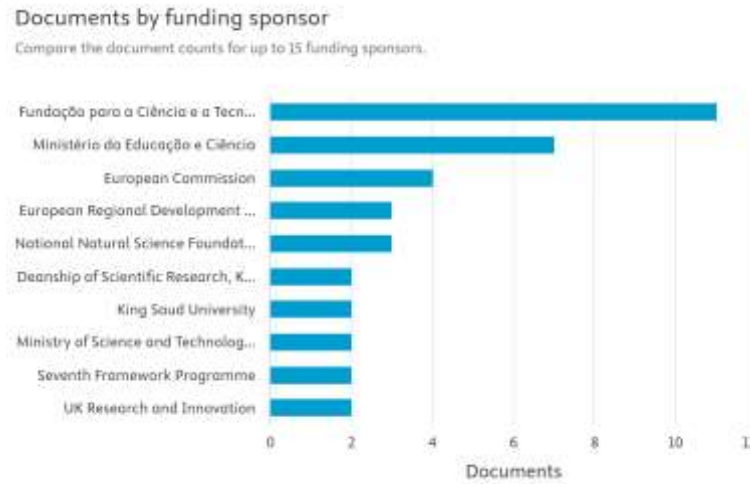


Figure 9. Funding Sources.

Research in the field of digital tourism marketing receives support from a wide range of funding sources, reflecting the global importance of this topic. The primary sponsors providing the most funding for this research are the *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* and the *Ministério da Educação e Ciência* of Portugal. Additionally, international organizations such as the *European Commission* and the *European Regional Development Fund* also make significant contributions. Several academic and research institutions from various countries, such as *King Saud University* and the *National Natural Science Foundation of China*, also serve as funding sources. The support from these various institutions underscores that digital marketing in tourism is a strategic research focus driven by the agenda of sustainable development, technological innovation, and the development of the global tourism sector.

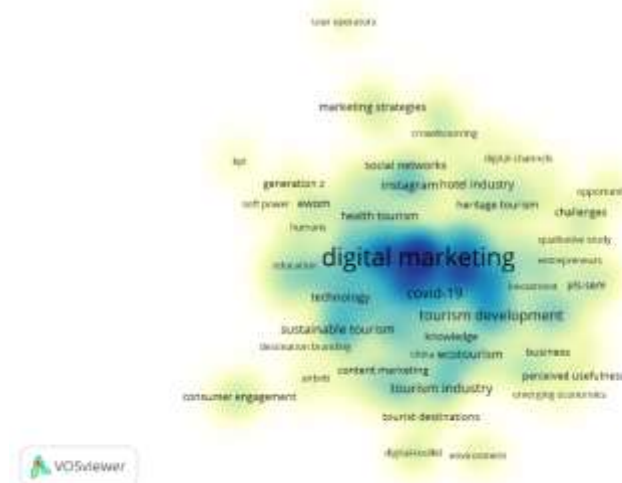


Figure 10. Density visualization

The density visualization image illustrates the density of keyword occurrences and conceptual connections within the literature. From the visualization results, “digital marketing” occupies the most central and dense position, indicating that this topic is the primary focus of digital tourism research. Other keywords showing high density include “tourism development,” “COVID-19,” “technology,” and “social media.” This indicates that academic attention over the past five years has been heavily focused on post-COVID digital strategies, the use of social media in destination promotion, as well as sustainability issues and digital transformation. However, there are several areas with low density, such as “consumer engagement,” “Generation Z,” “EWOM,” and “perceived usefulness,” which actually suggest that these themes have not yet received in-depth attention. This points to the identification of research gaps, particularly regarding digital tourist engagement, segmentation of the younger generation, and emotional and personalized approaches in digital tourism branding strategies. The low visualization for keywords related to methodological approaches such as qualitative studies and the context of developing countries also indicates that there is still significant room for further exploration.

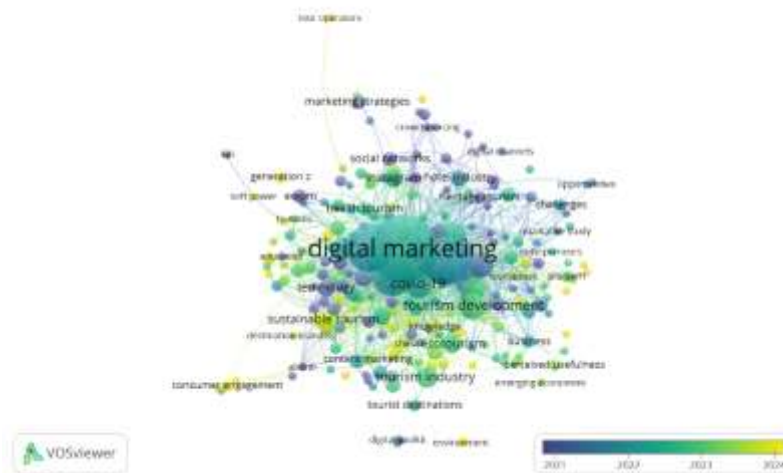


Figure 11. visualizationlization

Figure 11’s overlay visualization provides a temporal overview of the evolution of research topics. In this visualization, yellow indicates keywords that have recently gained attention in the literature, while blue represents topics that dominated in previous periods. From the overlay figure, it is evident that keywords such as “consumer engagement,” “Generation Z,” and “PLS-SEM” appear in the yellow spectrum, indicating that these topics have emerged in recent research between 2023 and 2024. This signifies a shift in research focus toward advanced quantitative approaches, such as the use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), as well as increased attention to the behavior of the digital-native generation. Additionally, this new trend reveals academic interest in approaches based on personalization, digital interaction, and user-generated content (UGC) as key strategies in shaping

destination branding. Thus, the overlay visualization indicates a research trajectory increasingly oriented toward the integration of advanced technology, the utilization of digital analytics, and the creation of more participatory and data-driven tourism experiences.

Both visualizations indicate that while significant progress has been made in digital tourism marketing research, there remains a substantial gap not yet addressed by the literature. Among these, studies on consumer engagement within the context of digital tourism remain scarce, despite the critical role digital engagement plays in shaping the perceptions and loyalty of visiting tourists (Cheng & Jin, 2023). Second, there is a lack of application of advanced quantitative research methodologies, such as PLS-SEM, in testing the complex relationships between digital marketing variables and tourist behavior (Alrawadieh & Dodeen, 2024). Third, tourist segmentation based on generations, such as *Generation Z*, has not been sufficiently explored in depth, even though this group is an active user of digital platforms (Dedeoğlu & Alrawadieh, 2023). Fourth, the context of developing countries and participatory qualitative approaches have also been relatively underrepresented in the analyzed literature.

Based on the research gaps above, there is a need to direct future research toward the following strategic areas. First, in-depth studies of *Generation Z* as digital natives are crucial for understanding how platform preferences, communication styles, and content visualization influence visitation intent and destination image. Second, a deeper exploration of *consumer engagement* within the context of digital interactions at tourist destinations is needed, with a focus on emotions, active involvement, and long-term loyalty. Third, methodological approaches such as *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* need to be expanded to explain the multivariate relationships between technological variables, perceptions, and tourist behavior. Additionally, qualitative research and contextual case studies in developing countries, such as Indonesia, are crucial for capturing local dynamics, digital culture, and the adoption of marketing technologies within the community-based tourism sector.

Fourth, future research can focus on a more in-depth approach to digital consumer behavior, the utilization of new technologies such as AI and big data, and cross-cultural studies to understand global tourist perceptions. This is important to support the development of destination marketing strategies that are more relevant, adaptive, and future-oriented.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to map the development of the literature on digital marketing strategies, specifically focusing on the tourism context, through a bibliometric analysis of 288 Scopus-indexed scientific articles published between 2009 and mid-2025. The results of this analysis indicate that digital marketing plays a crucial role in shaping destination image and influencing tourists' visit decisions. Publication trends saw a significant surge in 2018, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of digital technologies across various sectors, including the tourism sector.

A visual analysis of keywords identified 14 main clusters, five of which focus on digital strategies, e-WOM, consumer behavior, Generation Z engagement, and the sustainability of tourist destinations. This study also found that the most productive publications originated from the journal *Sustainability*, with active authors from various developing countries such as Indonesia, India, and Portugal. Furthermore, the dominance of academic disciplines reflects the multidisciplinary nature of this research, encompassing the social sciences, business, information technology, and the environment.

However, this study identifies several research gaps that require attention, particularly regarding digital consumer engagement, segmentation of digital-native generations (Generation Z), the use of PLS-SEM methods, and the scarcity of studies in the context of developing countries. Therefore, this study not only examines a comprehensive literature map but also provides strategic direction for future academic exploration and destination marketing practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and identified gaps, it is recommended that future research delve deeper into the exploration of digital consumer engagement in the context of tourism, particularly as it relates to emotional aspects, loyalty, and travelers' interactive experiences. Further studies should focus on digital-native generations such as Generation Z, given that this group possesses unique characteristics in accessing, processing, and responding to digital tourism content, particularly through visual social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. From a methodological perspective, the application of advanced quantitative approaches such as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is also highly recommended to depict the complex relationships between digital marketing variables and tourist behavior. Equally important, contextual qualitative studies in developing regions or countries, including Indonesia, need to be encouraged to capture local cultural dynamics within digital tourism marketing strategies.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Finally, future research could also focus on leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and user-generated content (UGC) to design more personalized, adaptive, and data-driven destination marketing strategies, in order to address the evolving demands of tourist behavior in the ever-changing digital era.

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