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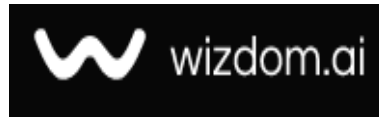
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The Role of Social Media in Influencing Tourist Travel Decisions: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

General Background: The rapid growth of digital technology has transformed the tourism industry, positioning social media as a primary source of travel information. **Specific Background:** Social media enables users to share experiences through user-generated content, reviews, and visual media, which are widely used in destination evaluation and travel planning. **Knowledge Gap:** Previous studies present inconsistent findings due to variations in research focus, methods, and contexts, indicating the need for a comprehensive synthesis. **Aims:** This study aims to systematically examine the role of social media in shaping tourist travel decision processes using a Systematic Literature Review approach. **Results:** Based on 22 Scopus-indexed articles selected through the PRISMA framework, findings indicate that social media plays a central role in information searching, destination image formation, travel intention, and final decision-making, driven by user-generated content, detailed reviews, visual elements, and online interactions. **Novelty:** This study provides an integrated synthesis of diverse empirical findings, offering a structured understanding of how social media contributes to multiple stages of tourist decision-making. **Implications:** The results highlight the importance of social media as a strategic tool in tourism marketing and suggest the need for future research to expand databases, timeframes, and contextual diversity.

Highlights

- Social media serves as a primary information source in travel planning
- User-generated content shapes destination perception and tourist intention
- Online interactions contribute to final travel decision-making stages

Keywords

Social Media; Travel Decision; User Generated Content; Destination Image; Systematic Literature Review

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Introduction

Digital technology has brought about fundamental transformations in various industrial sectors, including tourism, which has had the greatest impact. A significant paradigm shift occurred when social media became the primary source of information for planning trips. Previously, travelers relied on traditional methods such as pamphlets, travel agents, and recommendations from acquaintances. With the rapid growth of social media platforms, the way people search for, evaluate, and share travel information has changed significantly. Today, users can easily capture their travel experiences through photos, videos, and personal reviews, and share them instantly. This type of user-generated content is often considered more authentic and trustworthy compared to traditional advertising.

This shift has made social media a powerful factor in shaping destination images, influencing travelers' opinions, and even guiding their decision-making process. However, previous studies on the impact of social media on travel behavior have shown mixed results. These differences often arise from variations in research focus, methods, and contexts. Some studies emphasize the strong influence of visual content and social media influencers, while others focus more on online reviews and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Therefore, a more structured and comprehensive approach is needed to better understand how social media truly influences travel decisions. In response to this gap, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to thoroughly examine the role of social media in shaping travel decision-making.

Theoretical Framework

Social media has become a key component in various companies' marketing strategies, recognized as the most powerful tool for reaching consumers (Setiyorini & Kristiyana, 2019). These platforms facilitate promotions with a broader reach because they are accessible to a wide range of audiences without geographical barriers (Pundissing, 2021). Furthermore, social media is a powerful platform that enables user interaction through the sharing of text, photos, audio, and videos, including for promotional purposes (Narottama & Moniaga, 2022). In the tourism sector, social media plays an important role in creating more personalized travel experiences. It provides recommendations for destinations, local cuisine, and leisure activities that are adjusted to users' interests and preferences (Tussyadiah, 2020). This kind of personalization not only increases visitor satisfaction, but also strengthens customer loyalty and encourages tourists to return. In addition, social media has influenced how tourism businesses develop their strategies. Through the use of big data and analytics, companies can better understand consumer behavior, identify new trends, and evaluate their competitors (Sigala, 2021).

The decision to visit is also a crucial aspect in understanding tourist behavior. It refers to the different stages that potential tourists go through before deciding on a destination. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), decision making whether in tourism or other contexts includes recognizing needs, seeking information, assessing alternatives, making choices, and evaluating outcomes. Within the tourism context, visit decisions are shaped by tourists' evaluations of various factors related to a destination. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) explain that consumer decisions are the result of mental processes influenced by internal factors, such as motivation and perception, as well as external factors, including social influence, cultural values, and marketing efforts like social media. In this context, social media acts as an important source of information that shapes tourists' perceptions and interest in a destination. Mathieson and Wall (2020) explain that travel decisions are influenced by a mix of internal motivations (push factors) and the attractiveness of the destination itself (pull factors). Social media helps connect this information, making a place appear more appealing while also encouraging people's desire to visit. Therefore, social media is not just a promotional platform, but also plays a role in influencing travel decisions by providing information, shaping opinions, and strengthening the attractiveness of a destination.

Method (Systematic Literature Review)

This study used the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to examine previous studies on the impact of social media on tourists' travel decisions. A literature search was conducted in the Scopus database using key keywords such as 'social media', 'tourism', 'visit intention', and 'travel decision'. Article selection adopted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which consist of four phases: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. During the identification phase, 25 articles were identified from Scopus. After filtering based on publication year, document type, and language, 22 articles were selected for in-depth analysis.

Figure 1. Research Methodology Chart



Results and Discussion

This section examines the evolution of academic publications, with Table 1 summarizing the key features of the selected studies in this systematic literature review. The table includes the authors' names, year of publication, research methods, and key findings regarding the impact of social media on tourists' travel decisions. By synthesizing previous studies, this description provides a comprehensive overview of the contribution of social media to various elements of tourism decision-making. Of the existing research, most employed quantitative methods such as surveys and statistical analysis to demonstrate the relationship between social media use and tourist behavior. Ultimately, the data in Table 1 reinforces the point that social media is now a primary source of information in the travel decision process. The combination of digital content, vibrant and dynamic interactions, and user-generated data plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perspectives and guiding their travel choices.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Studies

Author	Year	Method	Key Findings
Lv et al.	2025	Quantitative	Social media personalization influences travel planning
Wei et al.	2025	SEM	Social media attributes influence travel intention
Wang & Luo	2025	Survey	Online disclosure influences visit intention
Li et al.	2025	Experimental	Travel vlog storytelling influences motivation
Jiang et al.	2025	Quantitative	Destination reputation affects travel decisions
Wang et al.	2025	Survey	AI travel information influences planning
Rasool et al.	2025	Quantitative	UGC increases tourist engagement
Balouchi & Aziz	2024	Survey	Self-efficacy influences social media use
Susanto et al.	2024	Quantitative	Social media shapes destination perception

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Firoz et al.	2022	Survey	Promo videos influence visit intention
Yuan et al.	2022	Survey	Social media influences travel planning
Li et al.	2024	Quantitative	UGC affects destination attraction
Alvarez-Diaz et al.	2022	Survey	Cultural factors influence travel decisions
Bozic et al.	2017	Survey	Tourist motivations affect destination choice
Chan et al.	2018	Quantitative	Push-pull motivations influence visits
Deepak	2010	Survey	Heritage tourism motivation identified
Dell'Eva et al.	2020	Survey	Perception influences tourism satisfaction
Delrieu & Gibson	2017	Quantitative	Asset attractiveness affects participation
Rosário et al.	2024	Quantitative	Destination performance influences decisions
Kamolvisit	2019	Survey	Nightlife tourism affects destination choice
Kassean & Gassita	2013	Survey	Push-pull motivations influence tourism
Li et al.	2024	Quantitative	UGC attracts tourists in digital platforms

Bagian ini menyajikan hasil analisis perkembangan publikasi ilmiah mengenai dampak media sosial terhadap keputusan kunjungan wisatawan di desa wisata. Analisis tersebut menekankan pada informasi utama, seperti tahun publikasi, negara, jurnal, penulis, serta institusi paling produktif. Selain itu, topik utama diidentifikasi dari 22 artikel terpilih melalui analisis ko-oksistensi kata kunci.

Figure 2. Main Information.



The graph shows a summary of main research indicators from 2021 to 2025. It indicates that 12 articles were published across 10 different sources, with a significant annual growth rate of 62.66%. In total, 43 authors contributed to these publications, and none of the articles were written by a single author, suggesting a strong pattern of collaborative work. On average, each article involves around 3.92 authors, reflecting a high level of cooperation among researchers.

Figure 3. Most Productive Countries



Based on the illustration, the visual display shows the number of publications by country during 2021–2024, not a breakdown by SCP or MCP collaboration type. The line chart illustrates the number of articles from different countries over time. China experienced the largest publications in 2024, with publications surpassing the previous year. Malaysia showed a steady increase each year and was among the countries with the highest publication stability throughout the observation period. Indonesia only grew slowly between 2022–2024. On the other hand, Italy also saw a significant increase, especially in the final year. Hong Kong rose early in the period but then tended to plateau. The United Kingdom and the United States have only recently made significant contributions, although they are still outnumbered by other leading countries. Thailand contributes a small but consistent portion. Essentially, this figure visualizes the output of social media research in the field of cross-border tourism, with peak expansion in 2024—particularly in China. This graph highlights the temporal dynamics of publication productivity across countries, rather than patterns of international collaboration (SCP/MCP).

Figure 4. *Most Productive Journals*



Figure 4 presents a Word Cloud visualization showing the main and most frequently occurring keywords in scientific publications on the impact of social media on the tourism industry. With the largest font size, "social media" appears most prominently, demonstrating that the research focus is indeed on the function of social media in tourism. Other popular promotional terms include user-generated content, destination marketing, destination videos, visit intention, and travel decision-making. This illustrates that the research largely addresses the influence of users, destination marketing strategies, and destination promotional videos on tourists' intention to visit and the travel decision-making process. keywords include "destination image," social media "information quality," and "crisis management" indicate that the research also touches on destination image, destination risk, information quality, user engagement, and crisis management in digital tourism communications. The overall Word Cloud in Figure 4 reflects the research direction, which is guided by examining the influence of social media on destination image formation, tourist interactions, and their effects on visit intention and travel decisions.

Figure 5. *Most productive authors*



The visualization in the figure depicts the Most Frequently Cited Locally Sources, which shows the number of local citations from various sources/authors in the research dataset. The presentation method utilizes dots (bubbles) along a horizontal straight line to indicate the number of local citations for each source, where the size of the dots represents the number of citations obtained. Based on the figure, ABUBAKAR is the source with the most local citations, namely 3 times, indicated by the largest dot at position 3 on the horizontal axis. On the other hand, authors such as Ajzen, Ali, Alvarez, Aron, Assiouras, Buhalis, and Ge-Stadyk each received 2 local citations, as seen from the location of the dot at number 2 with a similar size. Meanwhile, Abbate and Abdallah Alalwan only received 1 local citation, represented by the small dot at number 1. This distribution pattern illustrates the prominence of one main source in influencing research in the dataset, while the other sources have relatively even citations of about two times. Such variations in local citations reflect the different levels of influence and contribution of each source in shaping the theoretical and empirical basis of the related discipline. Essentially, this pattern indicates a concentration of references on a few key authors, while also displaying the diversity of sources among researchers.

Conclusion

The results of this systematic literature review show that social media has a strong influence on tourists' travel decisions. These platforms do more than just provide information they also shape the image of destinations and affect how travelers perceive them. The review highlights the importance of user-generated content, visual elements, and online interactions in influencing people's intention to visit and their travel behavior.

Overall, social media has become an essential part of tourism marketing in the digital age. Future research is expected to cover a broader range of databases, use longer time periods, and examine different tourism contexts to achieve a more complete understanding.

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