

2 Thematic social media research trends in hospitality and tourism: A bibliometric approach 2019-2020

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Introduction

Social media plays a significant role on travel decisions as travelers interact with others, provide reviews, and share experiences. As such, social media research is becoming increasingly popular in the hospitality and tourism contexts. Bibliometric analysis provides a retrospective review of published articles on a particular topic and suggests thematic trends based on this review. In recent years, more bibliometric studies have investigated the progression in social media publications and have suggested future research avenues on this topic (Nusair *et al.*, 2019; Chu *et al.*, 2020; Nusair, 2020). The increase in the total number of social media publications calls for more bibliometric research in order to find out the state-of-the-art research direction (Mehraliyev *et al.*, 2019). In this regard, this article utilized keyword and co-word analysis to examine the topical development in this area of research.

Despite the propagation of the social media topic, there are insufficient bibliometric studies that broadly integrate the growing body of articles published in this discipline (Nusair *et al.*, 2019). The increase in social media research signifies a robust rationale to perform bibliometric research to project patterns and paradigm changes in recent years. Past bibliometric studies have identified the major themes of social media research that have emerged over the past two decades. As a matter of fact, most bibliometric articles were limited to articles published prior to 2019. However,

in the two years 2019-2020, research in this field has witnessed tremendous thematic progress in theory and practice. While it is challenging to identify progress on a yearly basis (Kapoor *et al.*, 2018), this study utilized bibliometric analysis to reveal social media topical advancement in those two years. As such, this chapter offers a broad analysis of the recent social media literature combining co-word analysis and thematic keyword analysis between 2019-2020. The chapter concludes with proposals to the most recommended future topics for social media research in hospitality and tourism.

Specifically, the objectives of this research are to investigate co-word analysis of social media research between 2019 and 2020, examine whether keywords effectively provide a summary of the content of the article, and propose topical trends to guide future social media research.

Literature review

An increasing number of bibliometric research studies have been published over the past twenty years in the domain of hospitality and tourism (Leung & Law, 2007; McKercher, 2008; Bowen & Whalen, 2017; Mariani *et al.*, 2018; Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2019; Nusair *et al.*, 2019; Nusair 2020). These studies provided overviews of topical developments in the hospitality and tourism context. For example, Bowen and Whalen (2017) conducted a review to assess the current trends which shape the tourism industry. Their study revealed several topics including 'social media' as an emerging trend in the same context. However, following a systematic literature review approach, it was found that there is a lack of bibliometric analysis papers on social media in the hospitality and tourism domain; a relatively limited number of publications were identified (McKercher, 2008; Leung *et al.*, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Leung *et al.*, 2017; Lu *et al.*, 2018).

For example, Leung *et al.* (2013) conducted content analysis and reviewed 44 social media publications in hospitality and tourism studies published between 2007 and 2011 to examine the impact of social media studies. Moreover, Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) identified a wide variety of research topics and offered a broader view of social media and its influence on tourism. By analyzing 279 articles from different sources published between 2007 to 2013, the results revealed 'user-generated content' to be the most widely used term in social media studies. Furthermore, additional investigations were conducted to discover a larger scale of evolving trends in social media published articles. The first research paper in social media

to use co-citation and co-word analyses was Leung *et al.* (2017) study which covered a 9-year time span (2007-2016). A systematic bibliometric analysis was conducted to address the influence of social media using 406 articles. The results revealed a rapid growth of 'social media' topics in the period of 2012-2016. Similarly, Lu *et al.* (2018) used literature review analysis method to chart the progress of research between 2004 and 2014 in this field. After analyzing 105 social media papers published in seven journals, the report illustrated that social media research is progressing, yet remains in its initial stages, which calls for additional attention from social media scholars.

Notably, the evolving growth of social media research has recognized the need for more literature reviews to evaluate the thematic trends in social media research and to identify new emerging topics. As a result, several additional systematic reviews were conducted (Nusair *et al.*, 2019; Mehraliyev *et al.*, 2019; Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2019; Chu *et al.*, 2020; Nusair, 2020). A comprehensive approach to explore the future course of social media research has been provided by Nusair *et al.* (2019). Systematic literature reviews in past research focused on peer-reviewed journals, field scholars, universities, and collaborations in inter-country studies. The study concluded with new emerging themes of research between 2011 to 2016 including: 'big data', 'netnography', 'Travel 2.0' and 'Web 2.0'. In addition, Mehraliyev *et al.* (2019) explored the growth in social media studies by conducting authorship and co-authorship analyses of 385 published papers. The study analyzed the most productive authors, their academic qualifications, regional differences, and universities networks. Furthermore, the Mirzaalian and Halpenny (2019) study is the first systematic literature review that applies social media analytics. This article reviewed hospitality and tourism studies using social media analytics collecting articles from five international electronic bibliographic databases from the previous 18 years. The findings revealed that a significant increase in social media literature reviews was noticeable since 2014. The study suggested an expansion of several approaches used in the same context.

Additionally, few recent systematic reviews of social media studies have been conducted in hospitality and tourism (Chu *et al.*, 2020; Nusair, 2020). For instance, Chu *et al.* (2020) is considered the first literature review paper on social media that covered the role of social media advertising in tourism research, provided an evaluation of the current literature, and suggested an avenue for future research in this discipline. It covered a 15-year timeframe (2004–2019) analyzing a collection of 192 articles based on eight main variables: year of publication, journal, country studied, research topic,

social media types. Finally, Nusair (2020) provided a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to expose the fast growth in social media publications between 2002 and 2018. This study, in particular, reported the thematic trends in this area of research, by conducting co-word network analysis and thematic keyword analysis using a large sample of 601 studies. The study marked social media research between 2007-2012 as the beginning of a promising new area of research. Emerging trends were identified in the period (2013-2018) such as 'big data', 'e-tourism', 'green experience' and 'smart tourism'. Also, some interesting keywords related to social media emerged in the maturity stage along with social media platforms such as 'Expedia', 'Foursquare', 'Flickr', 'Pinterest', 'Couchsurfing' and 'Twitter'.

Drawing on previous literatures, there has been a noticeable growth in social media studies, however, there is a call for in-depth analysis of literature in the context of social media. In addition, several approaches were adopted in the past research, but none has examined how keywords provide a general summary of the articles' content. Thus, this study performed a bibliometric analysis and used co-word analysis and thematic keyword analysis for the purpose of reviewing social media literature progression in the tourism and hospitality domain. It is the first article to examine whether articles' keywords reflect the content of journal articles, by reviewing 276 published social media articles from hospitality and tourism journals over the two years (2019-2020). The study also aims to offer an outlook of social media trends in the years between 2019 and 2020 and an agenda for future research in the hospitality and tourism context.

Methodology

This study identified publications on the topic of social media in hospitality and tourism. To this end, a comprehensive systematic literature review was performed. In January 2021, the database of Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC, *version 2019*) was searched to identify social media publications between 2019 and 2020. The ABDC database includes a wider range of publications compared to other databases (Mura & Sharif, 2016). A total of 44 keywords from previous social media bibliometric publications were selected to spot articles (Nusair, 2020). Our search results reported 275 social media articles published in 39 journals. A research associate checked the validity of the search outcome.

Coding was completed in four steps: