

Mapping the Impact of AI and Digitalization on Travel Decision-Making: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract. *The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies is changing not only the world around us, but also the travelers' decision-making processes. This study aims to map research on AI and digitalization on travel decision-making, showing trends guiding current and future research. A total of 201 articles from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection (2020-2025) were included, covering digital platforms, chatbots, AI assistants, virtual and augmented reality, social platforms, and more. It has been discovered what journals and other publications publish the most about this topic, the geographical regions from which they come from, and other interesting insights. The paper used a bibliometric approach, with the scope of science mapping. VOSviewer has been used to perform co-occurrence of keywords, citation documents, citation sources, and citation countries. This study offers a strategic framework for understanding emerging developments, highlights unique insights in the field and lastly identifies avenues for future research.*

Keywords: artificial intelligence, digitalization, travel, decision-making, bibliometric analysis.

Introduction

There are many advancements in both the departments of artificial intelligence AI and digitalization, for the tourism and hospitality services, and they have greatly changed the entire travel decision-making processes and the way tourists think when it comes to planning and viewing tourism. Digital platforms, social media networks, mobile travel applications, chatbots, personal virtual assistants and user-generated content websites have entirely reshaped how travelers search, think, view, make decisions, compare and evaluate their travel options. These numerous technological developments have shifted or changed the travelers' minds from an easy, linear process, to a more complex, interactive, and even data-intensive experience. Travelers in this era rely on the digital and AI systems for many reasons. Although a numerous documents have been written on these issues stated above, the literature remains dispersed across multiple disciplines, resulting in fragmented insights and a lack of a comprehensive synthesis.

This paper is written to address this fragmentation and to consolidate existing knowledge, hence it adopts a bibliometric analysis methodology to better examine the impact of AI and digitalization on travel decision-making, with the scope being science mapping. This bibliometric analysis approach is going to provide a rigorous and transparent framework for the identification

and evaluation of other academic studies, enabling the structure overview of research trends, themes, and other contributions. Also, the bibliometric analysis facilitates an examination of the main academic sources and publication outlets, shaping this research domain. This study seeks to answer three research questions. Firstly, it is asked what the main academic sources are contributing to the literature on the impact of AI and digitalization on travel decision-making after the bibliometric analysis. Secondly, it is asked, what are the main topics in the articles chosen about the impact of AI and digitalization on travel decision-making after the analysis. And thirdly, it has been asked which geographical regions contribute the highest number of publications on the impact of AI and digitalization on travel decision-making.

Through addressing these three questions, the study aims to provide a bibliometric synthesis of the existing literature, identify dominant research themes and gaps. Moreover, this study wants to better offer a clearer foundation for future research and practical innovation in the field of AI-driven and digitalized tourism decision-making. Overall, through the application of a bibliometric analysis, this paper offers a comprehensive and evidence-based overview of how AI and digitalization are shaping contemporary travel decision-making.

Literature Review

The tourism industry has evolved substantially with the advancement of digital technologies and AI. Early online travel services relied on static websites and manual processes that offered limited personalization. The introduction of more advanced digital platforms improved accessibility, flexibility, and user experience. More recently, generative artificial intelligence (GAI) has transformed the industry through AI-powered virtual assistants and personalized recommendation systems. These technologies enhance customer engagement by enabling dynamic interactions and tailored travel experiences. The rapid adoption of GAI reflects increasing consumer demand for seamless and personalized travel solutions, redefining industry standards (Ilieva, Yankova & Klisarova-Belcheva, 2024).

Singh and Munjal (2021) highlight how the hospitality and tourism industry in a specific geographical area is adopting digital technologies for customer engagement, marketing, and influencer-driven promotions, while still emphasizing the importance of human touch and traditional marketing. Zhao et al. (2024) also agree with the fact that tourism industry is changing and evolving, with the help of digitalization. They also argue that social media shapes the travelers' decisions, especially the Generation Z.

The tourism sector is always evolving; implementing new technologies and bettering itself to keep the customers and to gain new ones. At the moment, tourist destinations are trying to add agents that are able to offer personalized services to the guests, this implementation shall generate a better tourist experience. Chatbots could assist tourists while they plan their trips, and during their decision-making process. Some destinations are going an extra step forward, and developed a human-chatbot tour guide, that is powered by AI (Orden-Mejía et al., 2025). Luo et al. (2025) examined how GenAI influences information search behavior. In this study, the authors have confirmed that utilitarian travel motivations and higher level of task-oriented customization can produce an incremental effect that enhances the adoption of GenAI in the decision-making contexts, where is usually less effective but still important.

The search for travel ideas and inspiration occurs during the initial phase of the travel process. Despite its importance, the conceptual understanding of travel inspiration remains underdeveloped. Drawing on insights from psychology and marketing research, travel inspiration can be understood as a motivational state that encourages potential tourists to transform newly

acquired ideas into concrete travel decisions. This process involves two interconnected stages, being inspired by external stimuli and being inspired to act upon them. As such, inspiration may serve as a cognitive shortcut in tourist decision-making, particularly in destination choice contexts. From a managerial perspective, tourism marketers can stimulate inspiration by presenting unexpected or not as well advertised destinations and experiences, facilitating a smoother transition from idea generation to booking (Dai, Wang & Kirillova, 2022). Tanković, Bilić and Sohor (2022) argue in their paper that social networks are used in many situations, to plan trips and understand more about destinations. The authors are also stating that most destinations are open to digitalization, and have a presence on the social networks, since this helps them in gaining visibility. Stojanovic, Andreu, and Curras-Pérez (2022) state in their work that user-generated content and destination-generated content positively impact guests' behavior for the destination's brand equity.

There are many chatbots used worldwide; ChatGPT is a very well-known one and is mainly used because it offers conversational AI capabilities. It is powered by GPT 4 and is available on iOS, Android, and the web, with both free and subscription plans. Copilot is powered by GPT 4 and Codex, and it operates on MS environment, iOS, Android and web. Gemini is a search-enhanced conversational AI with advanced text, image, and voice interaction capabilities, supporting multimodal inputs. It runs on Google Workspace, iOS, Android, and web, and is available with limited access through Google services. Claude focuses on understanding and generating complex text. It is available as Claude via web and Slack integration, with free and subscription plans. Perplexity is an AI-powered search engine providing direct, human-like answers with sourced information, operating on iOS, Android, and web with free access. It supports text queries or other inputs and outputs text responses, summaries, translations, and accurate information. In last, there is HuggingChat, a conversational AI supporting various tasks (Ilieva, Yankova & Klisarova-Belcheva, 2024).

Damanik, Tarigan and Oh (2020) examine the impact of social media on tourist decision making processes by applying the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action) model as an analytical framework. They have collected their data through an online questionnaire administered to a sample of respondents, focusing on their social media engagement and travel behaviors, and the data was analyzed using statistical testing techniques. The findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in influencing tourist decision-making across all stages of the model that they have implemented. Their end results highlight the importance of strategic social media use in tourism marketing, suggesting that well-designed promotional content aligned with consumer expectations can enhance destination visibility and support integrated tourism planning. Also, Stappung et al. (2023) discuss that in the past few years the travel industry has changed, and they have integrated new technology, that has improved the travelers' experiences, one of those changed was the implementation of virtual and augmented reality, for virtual tours.

People's decision-making is influenced by many criteria, some of them being the alignment of a destination with their personal hobbies, passions, and preferred activities. Moreover, ease of access and navigation also plays a big role, encompassing transportation convenience, easy communication, and lastly but not the least compliance with regulatory requirements. Plus, financial considerations strongly affect destination choice, particularly overall trip financials and the perceived value for the overall cost. All these key criteria are questions, or points people ask ChatGPT regarding their travels (Stergiou and Nella, 2024). Internet celebrities' trustworthiness and expertise in short travel videos significantly influence audiences' visit intentions (Li and Sun, 2024). Al Jassim et al. (2023) state that the ones in charge of hotel management need to understand

how well the business will go, in order to better serve the customers. In their study, their main objective was to assess the performance of hotels, in a geographical area, through the development of an AI based model. In another recent study, the impact of AI-generated tourism videos has been discussed. They reveal that AI generated videos differ from human-generated ones in many areas (Seo et al., 2025). Safari and Moradi (2025) argue that cultural tourism businesses could use social platforms to have more sales, a better tourist experience and to grow in the industry.

ChatGPT has rapidly become very popular, due to its natural language understanding and contextual capabilities, and is increasingly seen as a disruptive technology across industries, including the sector of hospitality and tourism. Its implementation could profoundly alter how travellers seek information, the way they decide, and how tourism administrations design, sell, and tailor their services. Gursoy, Li and Song (2023) examine the pros of GPT technology along with its possible cons for the hospitality and tourism area, assesses its applicability at various steps of the travel journey and decision-making, and suggests a future research agenda to guide further innovations in leveraging GPT to better the tourism experiences. Sorcaru et al. (2025) argues that AI-powered voice assistants could influence family ecotourism, through the tourism journey, from their decision-making process to their loyalty, they have chosen to do a study on families that traveled to Romanian ecotourism destinations; the families have completed online surveys before, during and after the trip. This research confirms the theory that AI voice assistants have a positive effect. Moreover, Dey, Mathew, and Srivastava (2021) found that tourists with higher need for uniqueness want unique destinations and activities.

In today's digital era, clients' decision-making is influenced by social platforms and other presence online, and one of main ones being the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This aspect plays a key role in the choices within the tourism sector. It is well known that there are advances in AI, and thus a new form, algorithmic aWOM, has emerged, delivering tailored recommendations through data-driven algorithms rather than just human users. In a recent paper's conclusion about the eWOM, one can discover that while it continues to be a vital source of information for travellers, algorithmic word-of-mouth has the potential to have a say in the decision-making process. For aWOM to be effectively integrated, it is very important that the online platforms are objective and thus this will enhance users' trust (Sâsâeac et al., 2025).

Soares et al. (2025) suggests that the e-WOM could generate both favorable and unfavorable attitudes, however these attitudes do not directly influence the destination choice. Expected social rewards, e-WOM itself, and even subjective norms have a direct impact on ones decision-making process in choosing a destination, emphasizing the role of positive feedback. A recent study talks about social media's influence on tourist destination choice and proposes a flexible model called "Social Media Azevedo-Ferreira" to organize the factors and variables that shape decision-making across different contexts and user types. It suggests that destination managers should create authentic, culturally expressive, and engaging content highlighting health, climate, and cost factors, while strategically selecting diverse endorsers, such as celebrities and digital influencers, based on their target audience and market context (Azevedo-Ferreira & Zouain, 2024). Putri and Yasri (2020) also have a study that examines how social media and word of mouth influence destination image and, in turn, how destination image affects tourists' decisions to visit a specific place.

Methodology

As defined by Borromeo et al. (2026), bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research method that uses statistical tools to assess academic literature. The present study adopts a bibliometric analysis approach, with an emphasis on science mapping. This methodological choice is appropriate given

the study's objective to explore the structure and evolution of research in the domain. Science mapping provided an objective and data-driven framework for identifying themes, relationships and clusters over time, it enables the visualization of dominant streams, emerging themes, and linkages within the field, offering an overview.

Also stated by Borromeo et al. (2026), a bibliometric analysis focuses mainly on publication and citation patterns, not on evaluating the internal validity. Consequently, an additional formal quality appraisal of the included papers was not conducted. This choice is consistent with established bibliometric guidelines; hence the absence of traditional quality assessment is acknowledged as a methodological characteristic of bibliometric studies and is seen as a limitation of the research.

As shown in another recent paper from Donthu et al. (2021), there are four bibliometric research stages, starting with defining the aim of the research, following the collection of data on the relevant literature, moving on to the analysis and visualization and ending with the interpreting the findings and results, all seen in the present paper. Key bibliometric techniques used in our research are co-occurrence of keywords, citation documents, citation sources, and citation countries. Though, it is important to be mentioned that the results of a bibliometric analysis should be viewed considering the inherent constraints that it has; the selection of keywords, the database source and the methodological constraints (Khare and Jain, 2022).

A structured data collection process was implemented for this bibliometric study. The literature search was conducted in the WoS Core Collection database, selected for its comprehensive scholarly publications. The search strategy combined topic and all-field keywords related to AI and travel decision-making. The initial query included topic: "AI" or all fields: "artificial intelligence" and all fields: "travel assistance" and (all fields: "decision-making" or "decision" or "travel decision"), which yielded million records.

To enhance relevance and contextual specificity, the keywords "tourism" and "digitalization" were subsequently incorporated into the search string. The time frame was restricted to articles and conference proceedings only from 2020-2025, resulting in 6,801 documents. Afterwards, only studies written in English were considered, and non-English publications were excluded to ensure consistency in quality and scope. Only subject categories that were related to Hospitality, Tourism, Management, Business, Communication and Information Systems were included.

Lastly, titles and abstracts were read to ensure alignment with the study's objective, namely AI and digitalization on travel decision-making within the tourism domain. It is important to be mentioned that, duplicate records were removed. Studies were excluded if they lacked substantive focus on tourism, digitalization, or AI, or if their relevance to travel decision-making was marginal. After the filtering process, a final dataset of 201 studies was retained.

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer. The software was employed to generate and visualize bibliometric networks. Cluster structures were examined to identify dominant research themes and conceptual grouping in literature. The next section presents a detailed analysis of the resulting clusters and their interpretations.

Results and Discussions

This section of the paper represents the findings of the bibliometric analysis conducted to better examine the impact of AI and digitalization the travel decision-making process, with its scope being mapping. The analysis synthesizes insights from the selected studies to show a comprehensive overview of co-occurrence of keywords, citation documents, citation sources, and citation

countries. To support a structured and visual understanding clusters were generated with the help of VOSviewer. The resulting network of relationships not only shows the structure of the field but also discovers theoretical frameworks and the broader discourse on travel decision-making.

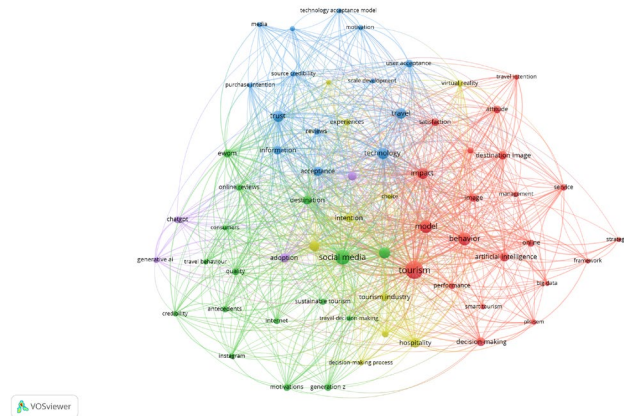


Figure 1. Co-occurrence of keywords

Source: Authors' elaboration, done with the help of VOSviewer.

Figure 1 represents the generated clusters of co-author keywords through network analysis in VOSviewer, where the minimum threshold of keyword co-occurrences was set at five (Van Eck and Waltman, 2014). The results show that, out of the 1,143 keywords identified, only 65 met the threshold. The analysis resulted in 65 items grouped into five clusters.

For Cluster 1 (red), there were 21 items, and its theme appears to be related to tourism and the tools used in the context of behavior. The top ten keywords are suggestive of this focus: “tourism”, “behavior”, “model”, “impact”, “artificial intelligence”, “destination image”, “decision-making”, “image”, “satisfaction”, and “attitude”. Through the examination of the network, a clear path can be observed between tourism, behavior, and artificial intelligence. On one side of the cluster are image, impact, and model, while on the other side appear smart tourism, online, and frameworks. This suggests the contextual environments in which specific themes are studied and how distant certain topics are from one another. For example, destination image is an important topic in tourism studies; however, in relation to artificial intelligence, it appears to be less extensively researched.

For Cluster 2(green), there were 16 items and is characterized by more active user technology, with a strong focus on tourism experience. The keywords with the highest occurrence include: “social media”, “experience”, “destination”, “eWOM”, “generation Z”, “motivations”, “quality”, “antecedents”, “online reviews”, and “internet”. This cluster is more niched than the first, with studies primarily centered on the role of social media in tourists’ experiences. Interestingly, eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) has a high occurrence but is positioned closer to Cluster 3 in the network visualization.

Cluster 3(blue) has 14 items, with the most frequent keywords being: “technology”, “trust”, “travel”, “acceptance”, “information”, “user acceptance”, “reviews”, “source credibility”, “media”, and “motivation”. The resulting theme is concerned with the role of technology and information within the tourism context. This suggests that studies in this cluster are more focused on the tourist–technology relationship. Notably, this cluster does not include more advanced or emerging technologies.

For Cluster 4 (yellow), 10 items were found, and its theme continues to focus on tourism technology, but at the industry or sector level. The most frequent keywords were: “word-of-mouth”,

“hospitality”, “intention”, “tourism industry”, “experiences”, “information technology”, “virtual reality”, “choice”, “decision-making process”, and “determinants”. Within this cluster, virtual reality is first to emerge as a technology-related concept.

Cluster 5(purple) contains only four items: “adoption”, “perceptions”, “ChatGPT”, and “generative AI”. This cluster is concerned with the adoption of ChatGPT and generative AI in tourism and their relationship with consumers. This can be observed in the visualization, where the adoption is set between AI, related keywords and consumer related concepts.

Overall, the keywords co-occurrence analysis shows a stronger inclination towards social media and information, however, the emergence of other more advanced technologies is slowly rising in tourism literature. It is indeed, a very interesting analysis, giving lots of insights.

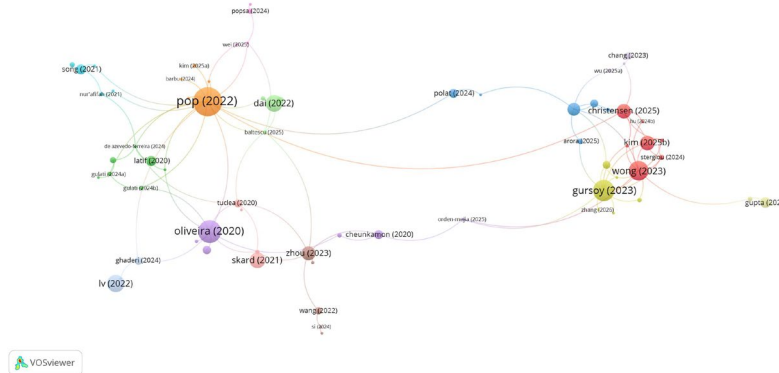


Figure 2. Citation documents

Source: Authors' elaboration, done with the help of VOSviewer.

Figure 2 shows the highest cited papers and their authors. The analysis resulted in a total of 68 published papers that tackled the digital technologies in tourism. At the top, one can see Pop et. al (2022) paper had a citation count $n=387$, followed by Oliveira, Araujo and Tam (2020) with $n=239$ and Gursoy et. Al (2023) with $n=204$.

They analysis highlighted a connection between social media, information, and tourism experience, the figure displays the top 3 papers, and the findings from the keywords analysis are illustrated. Through the image, one can look at the top three papers, and the keyword analysis is explained. For example, Pop et. al (2022) paper is titled “The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Travel Decisions: The Role of Trust in Consumer Decision Journey”. The authors posit that social media influencers have changed consumer behavior in relation to tourism. Many consumers follow different influencers and make decisions regarding potential travel destinations. Through their research, using SmartPLS coupled with customer journey theory, they found a positive effect of consumers’ trust in social media influencers. This positive effect impacts each step of the customer journey, leading to the conclusion that tourism marketers should use social media influencers to increase destination desirability.

Moving on, the second document, written by Gursoy et. al (2023) is titled:” ChatGPT and the hospitality and tourism industry: an overview of current trends and future research directions” The paper is a conceptually based study that examines how ChatGPT and other AI technologies affect, and could affect, the tourism industry. One of the main highlights is how consumers search for information. Tourists already use digital tools at different stages of travel, and the use of AI is becoming more predominant, especially in the pre-travel stage. The paper positions AI to offer more customized tourism experiences, particularly with chatbots. While not without its drawbacks, AI is costly to deploy, and further research is needed regarding tourists’ acceptance of GPT-based

technologies. Lastly, The Oliveira paper, like others, focuses on digital tools in tourism; however, it specifically explores the drivers that motivate tourists to share their travel experiences on social media. On one side, personality traits and perceived enjoyment were two important factors influencing travel sharing. On the other side, security and privacy concerns were key factors discouraging sharing. Notably, as technology and internet use have advanced, concerns regarding privacy have also increased.

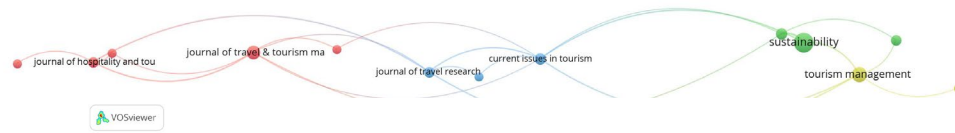


Figure 3. Citation sources

Source: Authors' elaboration, done with the help of VOSviewer.

Figure 3 shows the leading journals in tourism and digital technology studies. A total of 14 journals were generated and all of them with a focus on tourism research. Sustainability ranked first with a total of 14 documents, and 153 citations. Second was Tourism Management with $n=8$ papers. Followed by Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing ($n=7$), Current Issues in Tourism ($n=5$) and Tourism Management Perspectives ($n=5$). Ranked lastly was Tourism Review with only $n=3$ papers. By looking at the cluster network, it can be noticed the position of the journal relative to one another. What this tells us, is that for example, Sustainability and Tourism Management have more co-citation, meaning their papers are frequently co-cited, whereas papers from Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing are less cited in Sustainability or Current Issues in Tourism. This generally stems from different topics or angles studied.

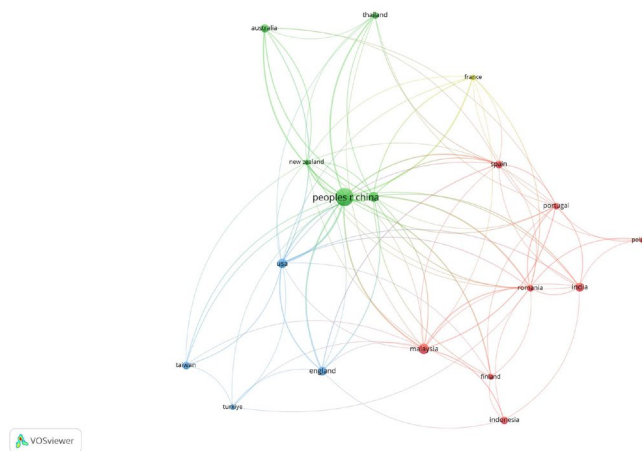


Figure 4. Citation countries

Source: Authors' elaboration, done with the help of VOSviewer.

Figure 4 reveals the contributions of various countries in tourism literature regarding digital technologies. A total of 19 countries had published, highlighting widespread interest in this topic. The highest contributor was People Republic of China, with a total of $n=54$ papers. Followed by Malaysia ($n=19$), South Korea ($n=17$), and USA ($n=15$), representing the top 5 leading countries. Although USA produced fewer documents, it had higher citations count, $n=1009$, compared to $n=505$ and $n=619$, Malaysia and South Korea respectively. The lowest producer was Türkiye with only $n=5$ documents.

As a conclusion, the results stated in the paragraphs and figures above, highlight a dominant focus on social media and information in travel decision-making research, with emerging attention to advanced AI technologies. Fourteen tourism-focused journals and 19 contributing countries were identified, led by China (n=54) and Malaysia (n=19), indicating both widespread interest and high-impact contributions shaping the field. The analysis done above illuminated prevailing thematic trajectories within the contemporary world. Notably, robust linkages emerge among social media, tourism experiences, underscoring an emphasis on the ways digital platforms mediate travelers' knowledge, perception and thus, decision-making processes. Also, the progressive appearance of advanced digital technologies as prominent keywords signals an expanding academic engagement with AI, highlighting how transformative travel behavior is.

Conclusions

This study provides an interesting synthesis of the current literature on the impact of artificial intelligence AI and digitalization on the travel decision-making process through a very meticulous bibliometric analysis supported by an in-depth analysis; clusters were generated by the authors with the help of VOSviewer and then analyzed one-by-one. The review examined 14 key journals and 19 countries contributing to this vast research domain; they all highlighted global interest and scholarly engagement. These specific findings indicate that research in this area dominated by talks surrounding social media, reflecting the key role of digital platforms for the people that travel and their decision-making process and thus their experiences. Social media not only serves as a key source of travel information, but also mediates the interactions between travelers and destinations, influencing the perception of people, their expectations and even their choices. At the same time, there is seen a great focus on the even more advanced and new technology, trending these days, such as AI driven recommendation systems, predictive analytics, and others; a great example of what people consult when traveling would be a chatbot. The AI is gradually gaining attention in the tourism and hospitality sector of research and real life and demonstrated the field's shift or change towards more innovative and data-driven approached, in contract to a more linear one.

The analysis done revealed that the leading journal produced a total of 14 documents, with a total of 153 citations, indicating both quantity and impact in the dissemination of artificial intelligence AI and digitalization research in the tourism field. Geographically, China contributed the highest number of publications, scoring the total number of 54 documents, followed by Malaysia with 19, a great difference between the two, then South Korea with 17, and the United States with 15. While the United States of America produced fewer documents compared to the first in the list (China), it has achieved the highest citation count (n=1,009), exceeding both Malaysia (n=505) and South Korea (n=619). This indicated that the United States research might be small in volume, but great in achievement. On the other side, there is Türkiye, that has produced the fewer number of publications, only 5, this could highlight a disparity in research contributions. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the topic of research is highly widespread and concentrate in specific countries.

The analysis of keywords co-occurrence further highlights the thematic trends in today's literature. Strong associations have been found between the social media, information and tourism experiences, reflecting a sustained focus on how digital platforms could mediate today the traveler's knowledge and even their choices or perceptions. The gradual emergence of advanced digital technologies as keywords indicated a growing academic interest in AI-driven tools and what their potential could be to transform travel behavior, and even suggest the future of research, in the cutting-edge technologies into tourism decision-making models.

As for the future directions, the thematic insights stated above could very much even provide guidance for scholars that might seek to explore further under-researched areas. Some examples could be such as the ethical implications of artificial intelligence AI, the transparency of AI algorithms, personalized recommendations and the impact it might have, and even cross-cultural adoption of digital tools in tourism and hospitality. Moreover, as a limitation, one could say the formal quality assessment of the included studies, as stated also in the methodology. Many options could be available for the future research in this field, as trends always fluctuate, especially in such a nonlinear sector as this one, that is prone to shifts.

In conclusion, this study offers a better understanding of how AI and digitalization can influence travel decision-making, highlights the dominant research themes, influential journals, leading countries in research, and emerging trends. The findings demonstrate that while social media and information management remain key and central, advanced AI technologies are gradually gaining scholarly attention, indicating a dynamic evolution in the area of interest of the authors. This paper through the analysis done, provides a foundation for the future research, informing both the academics and the practitioners about the current trends, research gaps, and opportunities to explore further this area. Thus, this academic paper is showing its readers the transformative potential of the artificial intelligence AI and digitalization in shaping the people that travel, through their behavior, and is guiding the industry for the future studies. It should be mentioned that the findings must be interpreted while taking into consideration the limitations of a bibliometric study. Moreover, the findings derived from citation and co-citation analyses should be interpreted as descriptive indicators within the literature rather than definitive measures of scientific impact.

Lastly, a small acknowledgement shall be made. It is that this paper was co-financed by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

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