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Review

Social media marketing and tourism purchase intention: Bibliometric S–O–R synthesis and workforce implications

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Abstract: Social media marketing can shape tourism purchase decisions through traveller-generated information, influencer communication, and interactions with service providers, although these sources do not necessarily generate the same form of trust. This study integrates bibliometric analysis of 162 Web of Science articles published during 2015–2024 with a theory-driven stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework. A structured selection process reduced 286 identified records to 162 eligible articles after duplicate removal, title-and-abstract screening, and in-depth eligibility assessment. The corpus covers 534 authors and 93 journal titles. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identified 477 distinct terms; applying a minimum occurrence threshold of five retained 35 keywords, organized into four clusters with 142 links and a total link strength of 326. The conceptual synthesis differentiates perceived user-generated content quality, influencer credibility, and provider interactivity as stimuli; provider trust and customer engagement as organism-level states; and intention to purchase a specified tourism service as the response. Eight theoretical propositions articulate direct and indirect relationships, including boundary conditions concerning review valence and the relevance of an endorsement to the provider. Implications for human resource management focus on frontline digital communication competence, service knowledge, responsible empowerment, and cross-functional coordination. Bibliometric network patterns describe the structure of scholarship, whereas the proposed behavioral pathways are developed theoretically and remain hypotheses for subsequent empirical testing.

Keywords: co-occurrence; user-generated content; influencer credibility; provider trust; customer engagement; frontline service capability

1. Introduction

Tourism purchase decisions often require consumers to commit resources before they can evaluate the experience being offered. Social media places provider descriptions, traveller accounts, and creator endorsements within the same search and comparison environment. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) examine social media in online travel information search, and Leung et al. (2013) review its applications in tourism and hospitality. The managerial question is therefore more specific than whether social media attracts attention: under what conditions does the information encountered provide a credible basis for choosing a particular tourism provider?

Different forms of communication can answer different parts of this question. Traveller reviews describe prior experience; influencers interpret and recommend; providers explain offers and respond to enquiries. Yet attention to a destination, confidence in a creator, and willingness to book a provider are distinct judgments. Treating them as interchangeable makes it difficult to explain why persuasive

content sometimes generates interaction without advancing a purchase decision. This article addresses that conceptual problem alongside the bibliometric task of organizing research on social media marketing and tourism purchase intention.

For tourism services, however, online communication is not detached from service operations: frontline employees interpret enquiries, clarify terms, and enact the commitments made by a provider. Research on service climate and employee service performance indicates that organizational practices and staff capabilities matter for customers' service experiences (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Bowen & Schneider, 2014). Digital communication competence, task-relevant training, and appropriately bounded decision authority therefore provide a service-workforce context for provider interactivity and provider trust. This article considers that context as a managerial and theoretical boundary of implementation, not as an additional construct, empirical result, or causal path in the proposed consumer-level S–O–R model.

Bibliometric analysis is useful for describing the distribution of research activity, but its descriptive indicators should be distinguished from evidence about consumer-level causal processes. Following the guidance of Donthu et al. (2021), this article uses publication and source-level indicators as a contextual overview, then turns to the substantive literature to develop theoretical propositions. In this design, bibliometric performance analysis motivates the research problem; it does not test the proposed paths.

Earlier research places the study within a developed field rather than an uncharted one. Sánchez Jiménez et al. (2024) examine social-media scholarship in hospitality, while Javed et al. (2025) review tourism and hospitality influencer research. These works contextualize the contribution but are not retrospectively inserted into the 2015–2024 corpus. The present synthesis is distinctive in separating confidence in an information source from trust in a particular provider and in connecting that distinction with service workforce capabilities.

The study connects two levels of analysis. First, the historical bibliometric corpus describes publication activity and journal participation at the field level. Second, the conceptual synthesis explains why quality, credibility, interactivity, trust, and engagement should not be collapsed into a single communication-effectiveness measure. The transition between levels rests on close reading and theoretical reasoning, not on a claim that publication frequencies estimate behavioral effects.

Three research questions organize the inquiry: RQ1, what does the selected bibliometric corpus reveal about publication growth and journal participation? RQ2, which substantive distinctions in tourism communication, provider trust, and engagement emerge from the theoretically relevant literature? RQ3, how can these distinctions inform testable S–O–R propositions and implications for service workforce management? These questions keep the descriptive bibliometric overview separate from the proposed consumer-level mechanisms.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Social media marketing in tourism

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) distinguish social media from related ideas such as Web 2.0 and user-generated content. Social media marketing is understood here as the use of social platforms for provider-related communication and interaction. Independent traveller reviews form part of the surrounding information environment, although they are not necessarily activities controlled by the tourism firm. This distinction matters when interpreting user-generated content as a marketing resource.

Traveller contributions, engagement, information diffusion, and targeted communication identify different aspects of the social media environment. They

are treated here as organizing topics rather than interchangeable indicators of one construct. Bronner and de Hoog (2011) examine the participants, motivations, locations, and substance of vacation-related electronic word of mouth. Their focus draws attention to the heterogeneity of traveller communication: a peer contribution can be useful without being favorable, and its independence cannot be inferred solely from its format.

Dwivedi et al. (2015) discuss social media marketing and advertising, while Aral et al. (2013) provide a framework for research on social media and business transformation. Their broader perspectives help position tourism communication within business research. Sector-specific interpretation remains necessary: results derived from another industry cannot automatically establish the same effect for tourism services.

2.2. Purchase intention and relational mechanisms

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's stated willingness or plan to purchase a defined tourism service. Ajzen (1991) distinguishes behavioral intention from behavior and explains intention in relation to attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Accordingly, intention to book should not be treated as completed booking. The proposed model uses a specified service and provider so that the outcome has a consistent referent.

Trust and engagement represent different mechanisms. Provider trust concerns confidence that the tourism provider will honor its service commitments. Customer engagement concerns cognitive, affective, and behavioral investment in interaction with that provider. Hollebeek et al. (2014) offer a relevant conceptualization of consumer brand engagement in social media. A visible interaction count alone is insufficient to establish either construct.

Lou and Yuan (2019) examine informative content value, influencer characteristics, and trust in branded posts. Sparks and Browning (2011) investigate online reviews, trust, and hotel booking intentions. Kim and Ko (2012) examine social media marketing activities and customer equity in luxury fashion. These studies provide complementary foundations, but their different contexts and trust referents must remain visible when developing a tourism-specific extension.

2.3. Bibliometric scope and corpus construction

The bibliographic search was conducted in the Web of Science Core Collection (WoS CC) on 15 September 2024, covering publications from 2015 through the retrieval date in 2024. The executed Topic-field query was TS = ("social media marketing" AND "purchase intention" AND tourism). In WoS, the Topic (TS) field searches article titles, abstracts, Author Keywords, and Keywords Plus (Clarivate, n.d.). The results were refined to English-language documents classified as journal articles, producing 286 records at the identification stage. The terms consumer behavior and tourism services were applied as substantive eligibility criteria during screening rather than as additional terms in the electronic search. Thus, the reported 286 records refer to the Topic query together with the publication-year, language, and document-type refinements.

The screening sequence consisted of three successive decisions. First, the 286 identified records were checked for duplicate entries using DOI, article title, author information, publication year, and source journal. This process removed 32 duplicates (11.19%), leaving 254 records. Second, titles, abstracts, and keywords were reviewed against the predefined substantive scope. Sixty-six records were excluded: 27 did not focus on social media marketing, 23 fell outside the tourism or tourism-services context, and 16 lacked an appropriate connection to consumer behavior or purchase intention. The remaining 188 records proceeded to in-depth eligibility assessment. Third, the full text and bibliographic suitability of each remaining study were evaluated. Twenty-six records were excluded: 11 because

their substantive focus did not align with the research question, nine because the application context was outside the defined scope, and six because their bibliographic information was insufficient for the planned analyses. The final corpus comprised 162 articles, corresponding to 56.64% of the initially identified records. **Figure 1** and **Table 1** present the selection process and its stage-specific counts.

Bibliographic information was standardized before analysis. DOI and title information supported duplicate identification, while author-name forms and source-journal titles were harmonized for descriptive counting. The author total denotes distinct standardized author-name entries across the final corpus, rather than the sum of authorship appearances over all articles; name variants were reconciled using the available bibliographic identifiers and affiliation context where applicable. This procedure yielded 534 distinct author entries. Journal coverage was calculated by counting unique normalized source-journal titles, yielding 93 distinct journals. For publication-year and journal-frequency summaries, the article was the counting unit: each of the 162 eligible articles contributed once to its publication year and once to its source journal (full counting). Equivalent keyword expressions, abbreviations, and singular/plural variants were harmonized when they denoted the same concept (for example, "social media marketing"/"SMM" and "purchase intention"/"buying intention"), without merging conceptually different constructs.

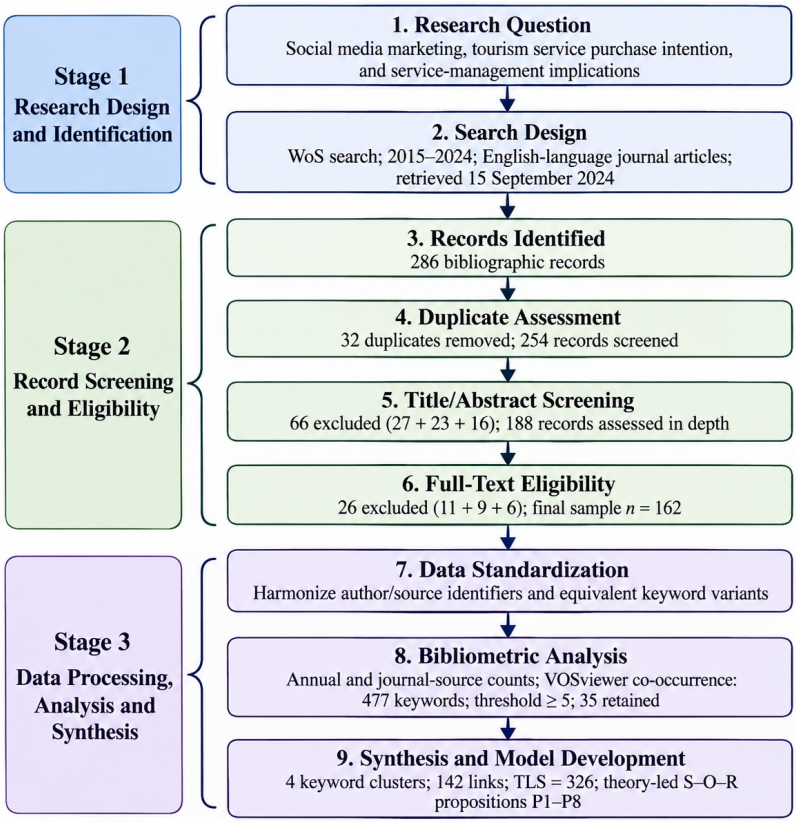


Figure 1. Research identification, screening, data standardization, and analytical workflow (WoS retrieval: 15 September 2024).

Source: Authors' research procedure.

Table 1. Web of Science retrieval, screening, data preparation, and bibliometric analysis parameters.

Study component	Search, screening and analysis specification
Database / retrieval date	Web of Science Core Collection; retrieval date: 15 September 2024
Publication window and filters	2015–2024 (cut-off: 15 September 2024); language = English; document type = Article (journal articles)
Topical search logic	"Social Media Marketing" AND "Purchase Intention" AND "Tourism"; consumer behavior and tourism-services relevance assessed at screening
Executed WoS Topic query and field	TS = ("social media marketing" AND "purchase intention" AND tourism); Topic searches titles, abstracts, Author Keywords and Keywords Plus
Initial identification	286 bibliographic records
Duplicate removal	32 removed (11.19% of identified records); 254 retained
Title / abstract / keyword screening	66 excluded: outside social media marketing (27); outside tourism context (23); unrelated to consumer behavior / purchase intention (16); 188 retained
Full-text eligibility assessment	26 excluded: insufficient substantive fit (11); outside contextual scope (9); inadequate bibliographic metadata (6)
Final sample	162 journal articles; retention rate 56.64% of initial records
Corpus coverage	534 distinct standardized author-name entries; 93 distinct normalized source-journal titles
Metadata harmonization	Author-name and journal-title normalization; semantic harmonization of equivalent Author Keywords, including abbreviations
Publication counting	One record per article per publication year and source journal (full counting)
Keyword analysis	VOSviewer 1.6.20; co-occurrence; unit = Author Keywords; full counting; 477 distinct terms before threshold
Inclusion threshold	Minimum document-occurrence threshold = 5; 35 keywords included
Network structure	4 clusters; 142 links; total link strength = 326
Visualization reporting	Annual and journal-source figures are shown descriptively; keyword-network structure is reported with quantitative indicators and interpretation rules in Sections 2.4 and 3.3.

The eligibility criteria prioritize substantive alignment rather than mere word matching. Consequently, the corpus is defined by the intersection of the search concepts, publication window, language and document-type criteria, and sequential relevance assessment. The resulting profile supports research-field description, whereas the subsequent S–O–R propositions are grounded in theoretical synthesis and are not estimates derived from bibliographic links.

2.4. Descriptive analysis and conceptual synthesis

Descriptive publication performance was examined through article-level full counting. The annual series for 2015–2024 contains 2, 2, 6, 9, 12, 11, 28, 24, 38, and 30 articles, respectively (total n = 162); the 2024 observation reflects the retrieval cut-off of 15 September. Five leading source journals contributed 12, 7, 6, 6, and 5 articles, respectively, accounting for 36 records (22.22%). Keyword co-occurrence was analyzed in VOSviewer 1.6.20 using Author Keywords as the unit of analysis and full counting, in which each article contributes one occurrence of a given keyword and one co-occurrence to a keyword pair present in that article. After harmonization, 477 distinct keyword labels were recorded; a minimum occurrence threshold of five selected 35 for network analysis. The resulting network contained four clusters, 142 links, and a total link strength of 326. These values characterize co-occurrence in the bibliographic records and are not behavioral effect estimates.

The results are presented according to the specified units and counting rules: annual publication counts, journal-source frequencies, and aggregate keyword co-occurrence measures. The co-occurrence network is characterized through threshold-eligible terms, clusters, link counts, and total link strength (Sections 2.4 and 3.3). Substantive research themes are interpreted through close reading of the cited literature rather than inferred from network color, relative position, or visual

proximity alone.

The bibliometric analysis and conceptual synthesis perform complementary roles. Descriptive indicators and keyword network structure identify publication trends and related areas of scholarly attention. Substantive studies from tourism, digital marketing, and service management are subsequently interpreted to distinguish the quality and valence of user-generated information, source credibility, provider-specific trust, and engagement. Co-citation analysis and bibliographic coupling are useful complementary techniques, but neither is used here to assert additional quantitative findings or clusters. The theoretical propositions are developed from cited literature rather than inferred from network proximity.

Following conceptual review principles (Jaakkola, 2020), the synthesis defines constructs, specifies plausible mechanisms, and articulates boundary conditions and competing explanations. The focal constructs are organized within stimulus–organism–response logic. Bibliometric analysis provides a structured account of the research domain; the conceptual model offers a research agenda for future consumer- and workforce-level empirical investigation.

Figure 1 presents the research workflow, from search design and identification of 286 records through removal of 32 duplicates, exclusion of 66 records at title/abstract screening, assessment of 188 studies, exclusion of 26 records at the full-text stage, and inclusion of 162 articles. Bibliographic standardization, descriptive profiling, and keyword co-occurrence analysis then provide the empirical foundation for theoretical integration. The workflow separates the stages of evidence selection and bibliometric description from the conceptual development of the S–O–R propositions.

3. Results and discussion

The bibliometric results cover publication distribution, source-journal participation, and the structure of keyword co-occurrence among the 162 selected articles. These descriptive and network-based indicators inform the thematic synthesis of tourism communication, provider trust, customer engagement, and workforce-supported service interactions. They are not treated as tests of the proposed consumer-level causal pathways.

3.1. Descriptive statistics

The final dataset comprises 162 English-language journal articles published between 2015 and 2024, representing 534 authors and 93 source-journal titles. Starting with 286 identified records, the study excluded 32 duplicates, 66 records after title/abstract screening, and 26 after in-depth eligibility assessment. The 162 retained records represent 56.64% of the initial retrieval. Publication-year and journal frequencies were counted once per article.

The annual counts are 2 (2015), 2 (2016), 6 (2017), 9 (2018), 12 (2019), 11 (2020), 28 (2021), 24 (2022), 38 (2023), and 30 (2024 through the retrieval date). Together these values equal 162. **Figure 2** displays the increase in publication activity within the selected corpus, with the highest complete-year count in 2023. Because 2024 is a partial year, its value cannot be interpreted as evidence of a subsequent decline.

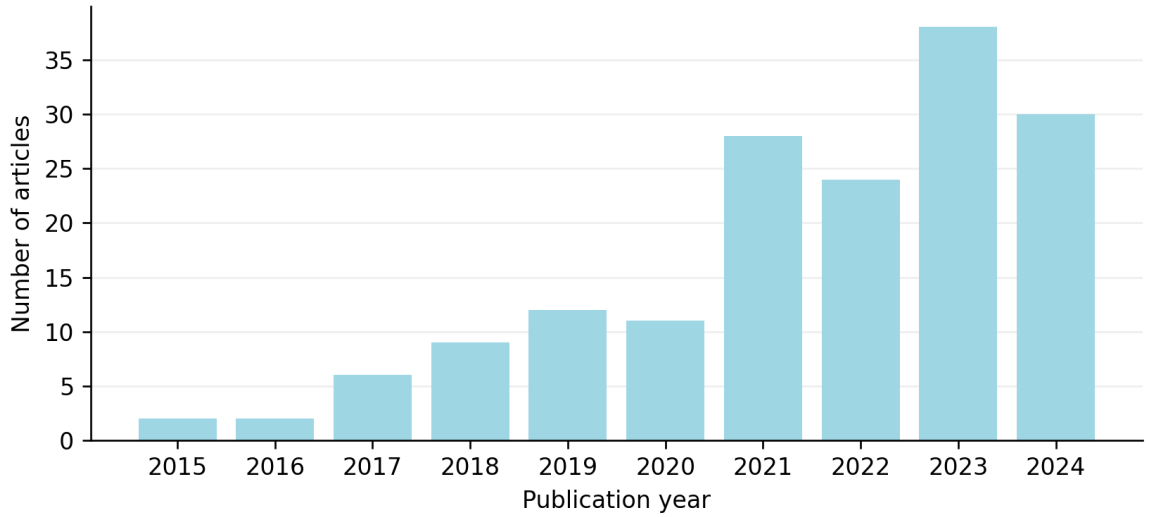


Figure 2. Annual publication counts in the selected Web of Science dataset (full counting; n = 162), 2015–2024. Counts: 2, 2, 6, 9, 12, 11, 28, 24, 38 and 30, respectively. Data for 2024 end on 15 September.
Source: Authors' bibliometric dataset.

The publication series shows a concentration of research activity in later years, with the highest observed annual count in 2023 (38 articles). The 2024 figure of 30 articles covers only records available by the search date. Temporal changes in publication volume demonstrate patterns of scholarly production within the defined search scope; they are not evidence of causal effects of social media marketing on consumer decisions.

3.2. Journal distribution

The 162 articles were distributed across 93 scientific journals. Five source titles accounted for 36 articles (22.22%): Sustainability (12), International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (7), Journal of Vacation Marketing (6), Current Issues in Tourism (6), and Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research (5). The remaining 126 articles (77.78%) appeared across other journals. This distribution reflects the interdisciplinary location of research across tourism, hospitality, marketing, and related management fields. The five leading outlets and their respective article counts are compared visually in **Figure 3**, highlighting the concentration in Sustainability while showing the distribution across the other four leading journals.

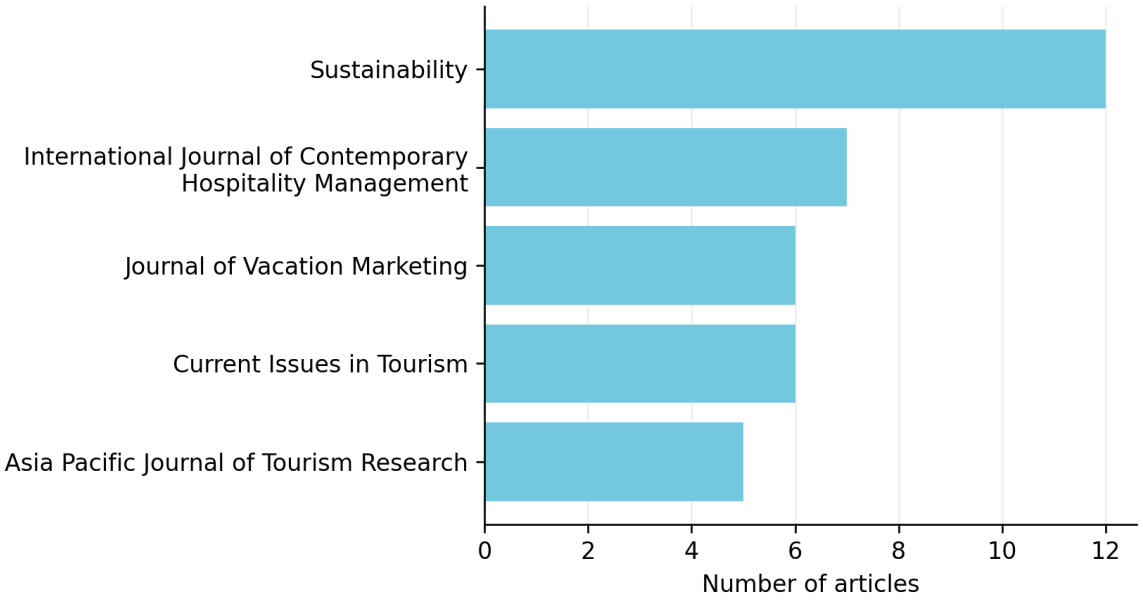


Figure 3. Article counts for five selected source journals (full counting; n = 162). *Sustainability*: 12; *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*: 7; *Journal of Vacation Marketing*: 6; *Current Issues in Tourism*: 6; *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*: 5.

Source: Authors' bibliometric dataset.

The journal distribution identifies where relevant scholarship appears without assigning theoretical meaning to every publication based solely on its outlet. For that reason, construct definitions and the proposed mechanisms rely on the substantive analysis of cited studies rather than journal titles or publication frequencies alone.

3.3. Keyword co-occurrence and research structure

The Author Keywords dataset comprised 477 distinct standardized labels before application of the frequency threshold. Under full counting and a minimum document-occurrence threshold of five, 35 keywords entered the co-occurrence network. The resulting network comprised four clusters, 142 links, and total link strength of 326. Keyword occurrence is the number of included articles in which a term appears; a link connects a pair of keywords appearing together within the same article, and its strength represents their co-occurrence count. Total link strength sums the strengths of a term's connections to other selected terms. In a VOSviewer network display, node size represents occurrence frequency, line thickness indicates link strength, and color distinguishes algorithmically derived clusters. None of these measures is interpreted as a directional or causal effect between tourism-consumer constructs.

The network provides a quantitative basis for recognizing related strands of scholarship, but the existence of four clusters does not establish causal links between constructs or demonstrate that every cluster corresponds to a uniquely identifiable theory. Themes such as social media communication, traveller-generated content, trust, engagement, and purchase intention are interpreted alongside substantive studies rather than assigned solely from visual proximity. The descriptive keyword statistics are therefore kept distinct from the consumer-level associations proposed in Section 4.

Conceptual themes such as 'Social Media Marketing' and 'Brand Trust' are treated as interpretive categories in the literature synthesis rather than additional frequency indicators. The quantitative keyword results concern the 35 threshold-eligible Author Keywords and the network measures specified above. **Table 2** links substantive themes to the proposed mechanisms and

their conceptual boundaries without treating the grouped thematic labels as independently measured network counts.

3.4. Thematic synthesis of communication and relational mechanisms

To link network-based observations with theoretical mechanisms, the substantive literature was interpreted around three distinctions: the informational quality and valence of traveller-generated content; the credibility of influencers versus the dependability of tourism service providers; and provider trust versus customers' cognitive, affective and behavioral engagement. **Table 2** maps these themes to the proposed S–O–R relationships and states the relevant conceptual boundaries.

Tourism research provides concrete illustrations of these distinctions. Garg and Kumar (2021) study social media marketing and purchase intention in a boutique-hotel setting, while Azhar et al. (2023) examine social media marketing and the mediating roles of brand trust and loyalty in online travel purchasing. Sparks and Browning (2011) show why online hotel reviews, trust and booking intention must be considered jointly. These studies inform the interpretation of underlying mechanisms; their substantive findings are not treated as effect estimates generated by the present bibliographic data. Hollebeek et al. (2014) further clarify engagement as an investment of cognitive, affective and behavioral resources rather than a simple volume of platform interactions.

Table 2. Theory-to-model bridge from substantive research themes to proposed consumer-level relationships. Source: Authors' theoretical synthesis.

Substantive theme	Conceptual mechanism	Interpretive boundary
Traveller reviews / eWOM	Perceived UGC quality → provider trust	P1: positive association conditional on favorable, provider-relevant information
Influencer endorsement	Influencer credibility → provider trust	P2: transfer conditional on credible, provider-specific evidence
Provider interaction	Provider interactivity → customer engagement	P3: meaningful two-way exchange, not reply counts
Relational states	Provider trust; customer engagement → purchase intention	P4–P8: proposed direct and indirect propositions for future empirical testing

3.5. Proposed S–O–R model and propositions

3.5.1. Connecting bibliometric themes with theory

The bibliometric profile and keyword associations provide a structured account of the research domain, while substantive studies furnish the conceptual basis for explaining provider-specific purchase intention. Building on the online stimulus–organism–response framework of Eroglu et al. (2001), perceived user-generated content quality, influencer credibility, and provider interactivity are treated as stimuli; provider trust and customer engagement as organism-level relational states; and intention to purchase a specified tourism service as the response. The model comprises eight theoretical propositions (P1–P8). Workforce-related capabilities are discussed as organizational conditions that shape whether online service promises can be delivered in practice.

The theoretical role of each element is deliberately limited. Stimulus–organism–response supplies the ordering of environmental cues, internal evaluation, and response. UGC and influencer research inform which communication attributes deserve attention, while tourism trust and engagement research help define the internal mechanisms. The theory of planned behavior clarifies the status of intention as distinct from actual action; the present framework does not constitute a complete test of that theory. This allocation of roles avoids adding multiple theories merely to enlarge the model.

The proposed model treats trust and engagement as complementary mechanisms. Trust concerns whether the consumer considers the provider dependable; engagement concerns the attention, feeling, and effort invested in interaction with that provider. The distinction permits the possibility that a consumer is engaged by appealing content while remaining unwilling to rely on the operator. It also permits confidence in a familiar provider without extensive current engagement. The model therefore requires empirical separation of these internal states.

All constructs refer to the same tourism provider and a specified service. This is consequential rather than cosmetic. A review about a destination may improve destination attitudes without providing evidence about the tour operator, and confidence in an influencer may remain attached to the influencer. The model predicts transfer to provider trust only when the information is diagnostic of that provider's dependability. A future study can challenge this prediction by varying provider specificity while holding message attractiveness and valence constant. The proposed relationships are summarized in **Figure 4**, which positions perceived user-generated content quality, influencer credibility, and provider interactivity as stimuli; provider trust and customer engagement as organism-level states; and tourism service purchase intention as the response. The model also distinguishes the direct propositions from the indirect pathways represented by P7 and P8.

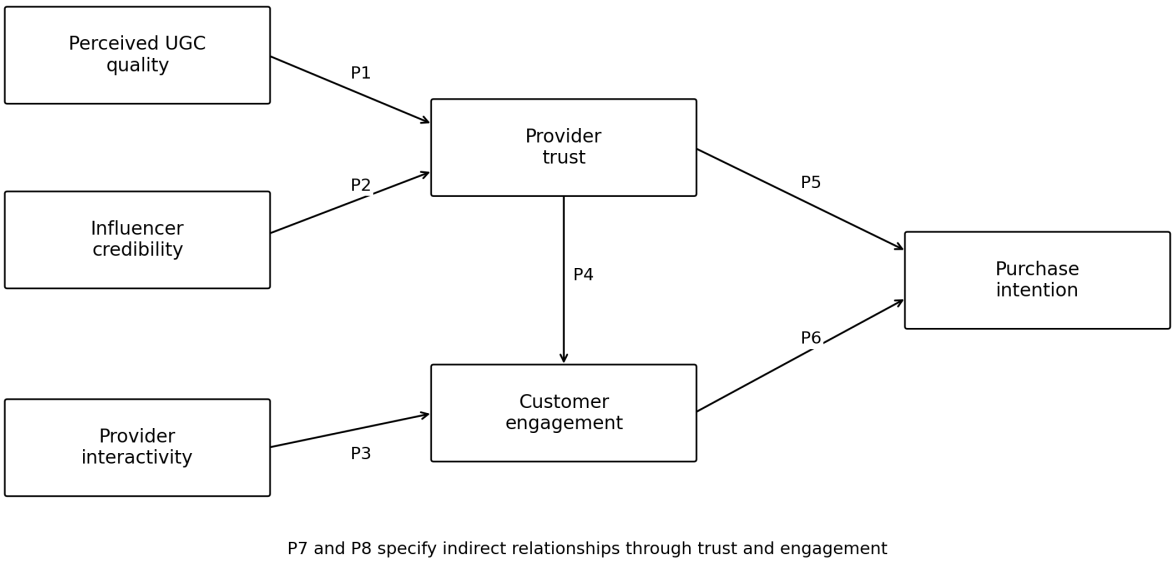


Figure 4. Proposed stimulus–organism–response model of tourism service purchase intention. All arrows denote theoretical propositions rather than estimated effects; P7 and P8 refer to indirect pathways.
Source: Authors' theoretical synthesis.

Boundary conditions: P1 concerns favorable, provider-relevant user-generated content; P2 concerns endorsements that provide credible evidence about the specified tourism provider. P7 and P8 denote theoretically proposed mediation pathways.

3.5.2. User-generated content quality and provider trust

Perceived UGC quality concerns the relevance, clarity, completeness, and perceived accuracy of traveller-created information about the service. Bronner and de Hoog (2011) establish the relevance of examining vacation-related electronic word of mouth. Sparks and Browning (2011) provide tourism-specific evidence concerning review conditions, trust, and booking intentions. The proposed extension is that useful, provider-specific traveller information may help

prospective customers judge whether a provider will fulfill its commitments.

The positive relationship is restricted to favorable or reassuring information. A clear and credible negative review can be high quality while reducing trust. For an initial empirical test, valence should therefore be held comparable, measured separately, or explicitly incorporated into the model. The proposition should not be generalized to all UGC regardless of its substantive message.

P1. For favorable, provider-relevant UGC, perceived content quality is positively associated with provider trust.

3.5.3. Influencer credibility and provider trust

Influencer credibility refers to perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the person communicating the endorsement. Lou and Yuan (2019) examine trust in influencer-branded posts. Extending this reasoning to tourism provider trust requires an additional inference: the endorsement must be perceived as informative about the provider's actual competence and reliability. A creator's expertise about photography, for example, need not establish the quality of a tour operator's refund practices.

P2. Influencer credibility is positively associated with provider trust when the endorsement is perceived as relevant evidence of the provider's dependability.

This qualification makes the trust referent explicit. An empirical study should measure credibility of the influencer separately from confidence in the provider and record sponsorship recognition. A positive source evaluation is not automatically a positive evaluation of every service promoted by that source.

Service-provider credibility also depends on the organization's ability to fulfill the commitments communicated through influencers. Frontline staff knowledge, clear escalation arrangements, and coordination across booking and service-delivery functions therefore provide an implementation context for the transfer from an endorsement to provider trust (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). These workforce conditions do not create an additional path in the consumer-level model.

3.5.4. Interactivity and engagement

Provider interactivity concerns substantive two-way communication with the consumer, including responsiveness and useful answers to service questions. The engagement conceptualization of Hollebeek et al. (2014) supports distinguishing cognitive processing, affection, and activation from simple exposure. The present proposition extends that distinction by reasoning that opportunities for useful exchange may encourage consumers to invest attention and effort in the provider relationship. This specific path remains a proposal rather than a result of the bibliometric analysis.

Substantive interactivity requires more than rapid replies. Employees must possess accurate information on availability, inclusions, restrictions, and recovery options and must be empowered to resolve routine enquiries within defined authority limits. Training and cross-functional coordination can therefore support interaction quality, although these workforce conditions are discussed as managerial implications rather than measured variables in this study.

P3. Perceived provider interactivity is positively associated with customer engagement with the provider.

3.5.5. Trust and customer engagement

The model also proposes that confidence in a provider makes further interaction more worthwhile. A consumer who expects the provider to honor commitments may be more willing to seek advice, process service information, and participate in exchanges. The direction is theoretically plausible but contestable: repeated engagement may also build trust. Temporal evidence and

comparison with the reverse ordering are therefore necessary.

P4. Provider trust is positively associated with customer engagement with the provider.

A competing interpretation is that consumers engage first and infer trust from the resulting interaction. The model's proposed ordering is most plausible when consumers make an initial reliability judgment before deciding whether to invest further effort in the provider relationship. Measuring prior trust and subsequent engagement at separate points would help distinguish this account from an engagement-first process. Without that separation, a positive association would remain compatible with both explanations.

3.5.6. Purchase intention and indirect mechanisms

Confidence in service reliability may support willingness to commit money before the tourism experience occurs. Sparks and Browning (2011) provide a relevant hotel-booking context for linking trust with intention. Engagement may separately increase the attention and involvement given to the provider's offer. However, these mechanisms do not remove constraints such as price, available dates, or travel feasibility. The engagement–intention path is a proposed extension, not a claim that the cited engagement scale-development study established this exact relationship for tourism.

From a service-operations perspective, trust in the provider is sustained when messages regarding booking conditions, service specifications, and cancellation or recovery procedures can be delivered consistently by employees. Such operational credibility provides a practical boundary for interpreting the proposed trust–purchase intention relationship.

P5. Provider trust is positively associated with intention to purchase the specified tourism service.

P6. Customer engagement with the provider is positively associated with intention to purchase the specified tourism service.

P7. Provider trust mediates the proposed relationships of favorable provider-relevant UGC quality and influencer credibility with purchase intention.

P8. Customer engagement mediates the proposed relationship between provider interactivity and purchase intention.

P7 contains two explicitly distinguishable indirect paths, while P8 contains one. The model also permits longer pathways through trust and engagement, but these should be identified as secondary analyses unless specified in advance. Neither complete mediation nor the absence of direct communication–intention effects is assumed. Future research should compare the proposed model with simpler and alternative models.

The two mediating mechanisms imply different patterns of evidence. If UGC quality predicts intention but does not change provider trust, the trust explanation would receive little support even if the campaign appears commercially successful. If interactivity increases comments but not cognitive or affective engagement, response volume would not establish the proposed engagement mechanism. These possibilities make the framework useful for discriminating among explanations rather than simply predicting positive coefficients for every path.

4. Discussion

4.1. Contribution of the bibliometric overview

The study offers three complementary contributions. First, the structured screening sequence establishes a 162-article bibliographic corpus from 286 initial WoS records, with explicit duplicate, substantive, and full-text exclusions. Second, publication and journal distributions describe the development and disciplinary spread of the research domain. Third, the keyword co-occurrence analysis

summarizes 477 distinct terms, 35 threshold-eligible keywords, four network clusters, 142 links, and a total link strength of 326. These findings motivate but do not statistically validate the distinct theoretical mechanisms in the S–O–R framework.

The proposed conceptual advance lies in separating information-source credibility from provider trust, distinguishing informative content quality from favorable review valence, and differentiating trust from engagement. The theoretical model specifies when these mechanisms may jointly inform service purchase intention and how frontline employee capabilities may condition implementation. Research-field co-occurrence is not equated with behavioral causality.

4.2. Theoretical implications

A first theoretical implication concerns the object of trust. The credibility of a communicator and the reliability of a tourism provider are located at different points in the decision process. Treating them as one construct can conceal a failed transfer: consumers may believe the creator's account yet remain uncertain about the operator's capacity to deliver. Provider specificity supplies a boundary condition that makes this transfer testable rather than automatic.

A second implication concerns the interpretation of quality. Informational quality and message valence are separate attributes. The framework consequently rejects an unrestricted positive content-quality proposition: a clear, detailed account of poor service may provide excellent information while discouraging purchase. Restricting the initial proposition to favorable provider-relevant information improves theoretical precision and suggests a direct extension to valence-sensitive research.

A third implication concerns the relationship between trust and engagement. Trust addresses willingness to rely on a provider, whereas engagement addresses investment in the interaction. Their separation explains why enjoyable participation and reliable service expectations may diverge. The framework thus encourages research to examine which mechanism is activated by a particular communication attribute instead of treating all favorable responses as manifestations of marketing effectiveness.

The proposed contribution is incremental theoretical integration rather than a claim to have discovered entirely new constructs. Its value will depend on whether the distinctions improve explanation and measurement in tourism service contexts. The model may be less applicable to repeat customers whose prior experience dominates communication effects, or to group purchases where the surveyed consumer does not control the final choice.

4.3. Managerial implications

Tourism providers can use the framework to review the information they make available and the questions they leave unanswered. Accurate descriptions of inclusions, departure arrangements, accessibility, and cancellation terms can help consumers evaluate an offer. Encouraging honest traveller accounts is consistent with this information role; fabricating independent testimonials would undermine the basis on which trust is proposed to develop. These recommendations are implications of the framework, not measured effects of an intervention in this study.

Influencer selection should consider the relevance of the creator's expertise to the service and the specificity of the evidence offered. Clear sponsorship disclosure helps consumers interpret commercial relationships. Follower volume alone should not be treated as a substitute for credible communication or provider reliability. Providers should also assess whether their responses resolve consumer uncertainty rather than measuring responsiveness only through the number or

speed of replies.

Campaign evaluation should distinguish reach, meaningful interaction, enquiries, purchase intention, and actual bookings. A booking outcome is needed to assess commercial conversion. The bibliometric findings do not provide an estimate of advertising return, and the proposed framework does not establish that one platform or influencer category is universally superior.

Human resource management implications follow from the dependence of credible digital communication on service-delivery capabilities. Providers should develop frontline employees' platform-specific communication competence, product and policy knowledge, information accuracy, and ability to explain exceptions. Training should connect social media teams with reservations, operations, and customer-service personnel so that public promises are consistent with service capacity (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Lin et al., 2017).

Managers should also define employee decision rights and escalation procedures. Empowerment may enable prompt resolution of routine service problems, while more complex matters require coordination and appropriate approval. Workforce performance indicators should assess response accuracy, substantive problem resolution, promise fulfillment, and complaint recovery rather than response speed alone. These proposals represent managerial applications of the framework, not workforce effects estimated in the bibliometric analysis.

4.4. Limitations and future research

The bibliometric findings are bounded by Web of Science coverage, the 2015–2024 publication window, English-language journal-article eligibility, and the specified thematic intersection. Accordingly, they characterize the selected literature rather than all possible scholarly work on digital tourism communication. The search cut-off in September 2024 also means that the final year reflects a partial-year observation.

The keyword network depicts patterns of recurring terminology and does not distinguish the direction or causal significance of conceptual relationships. Keyword harmonization is necessary for consistent network interpretation, while the explanatory mechanisms of consumer trust and engagement require independent theoretical justification and empirical evaluation. The integration of these two levels is an analytical contribution, not a substitute for experimental or survey-based validation.

Future bibliometric research could compare additional databases and broaden search terminology to capture related constructs such as electronic word of mouth and booking intention. Further work could also compare keyword co-occurrence structures with co-citation and bibliographic coupling networks, using transparent units of analysis, counting rules, normalization procedures, and sensitivity analyses. Such extensions would complement, rather than replace, the present study's focused results.

Future empirical work should first use expert review and cognitive interviews to establish that respondents distinguish UGC quality, influencer credibility, provider trust, and engagement. A subsequent survey should use one defined service and provider and measure prior familiarity, past experience, message valence, and sponsorship recognition where theoretically relevant. Sample size should be based on power for the intended model and meaningful effects rather than an arbitrary general rule.

A complementary multilevel study could link staff digital-service competence, empowerment, service climate, and coordination quality to customers' perceptions of response usefulness and provider reliability. Employee–customer matched data and longitudinal designs would be appropriate for

assessing the proposed cross-level mechanisms. These are future research directions; the current study does not report primary survey or experimental estimates.

A longitudinal or experimental design would provide stronger evidence of ordering than a one-time survey. Researchers should evaluate measurement validity before estimating the structural paths, report uncertainty for each indirect relationship, and compare alternative explanations such as engagement preceding trust. Actual booking can be observed in a later follow-up where consent and data access permit. None of these proposed procedures has been conducted as part of the present bibliometric study.

The most informative initial test would compare provider-specific and destination-only messages of comparable attractiveness and valence. This comparison targets the proposed transfer to provider trust rather than a general advertising response. A second study could vary the usefulness of provider replies while maintaining similar response times, separating substantive interactivity from speed. A third could follow stated intention with a later booking observation to identify where perceived control, availability, or budget interrupts conversion. These studies would test different components of the model and should not be treated as interchangeable replications.

5. Conclusion

This study systematically reduced 286 Web of Science records to a final corpus of 162 articles, covering 534 authors and 93 journals, to examine the research domain linking social media marketing, consumer decision-making, and tourism services. Descriptive analysis revealed increased publication activity in later years, while keyword co-occurrence analysis identified 477 terms, 35 keywords meeting the occurrence threshold, four clusters, 142 links, and total link strength of 326. On this research foundation, a theory-led S–O–R framework differentiates traveller-generated information quality, influencer credibility, and provider interactivity as stimuli; provider trust and engagement as mediating states; and tourism service purchase intention as the response. Eight propositions clarify direct and indirect relationships and their boundary conditions. Frontline workforce capability, training, empowered service response, and operational coordination provide practical implications for credible service delivery. The bibliometric evidence depicts the structure of scholarship; the proposed behavioral pathways define an empirical research agenda.

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Data availability statement: The analysis draws on 162 journal-article records identified through the Web of Science Core Collection search specified in Section 2.3. Search terms, eligibility criteria, screening counts, counting definitions, keyword-analysis settings, and aggregate findings are reported in Sections 2.3–3.3, **Table 1**, and **Figures 1–3**. The keyword-network indicators are presented as quantitative aggregates. Source records are subject to Web of Science access and redistribution terms; enquiries regarding the reported search and analytic

summaries may be directed to the corresponding author. No respondent-level survey or experimental dataset was generated. The proposed relationships P1–P8 are intended for subsequent empirical investigation.

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