The Role of Online Social Influence on Travel Decision-Making: A Systematic Literature Review (2008–2025)

Aouad Abdesselam Belahoual [1]
University Center Nour El Bachir El Bayadh, Laboratory Sustainable Development in Highland and Desert Areas (Algeria)
a.aouad@cu-elbayadh.dz
ORCID iD: 0009-0000-9588-8564

Mehor Hadj M'hamed [2]
University Center Nour El Bachir El Bayadh (Algeria)
hm.mehor@cu-elbayadh.dz
ORCID iD: 0009-0001-5656-2665

Maria Nascimento Cunha[3]
Instituto Superior Miguel Torga (Portugal)
mariazncunha@ismt.pt
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-1291-231X

Received: 12/04/2026 **Accepted: 29/05/2026** **Published: 10/06/2026**

Abstract :

This study aims to analyze the chronological and conceptual evolution of the impact of digital social influence on travel decisions between 2008 and 2025. Using the PRISMA systematic review methodology and bibliometric analysis of 100 studies, the results revealed a radical shift from reliance on rational textual reviews to emotional influence from visual content and influencers. Trust, image, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) emerged as crucial mediating variables. The study concludes by identifying a research gap in the dark side of digital influence and in developing geographic contexts, while offering recommendations to destination managers to enhance digital credibility to address the challenges of artificial intelligence and the manipulation of reality.

Keywords :online social influence, travel decision, systematic review

JEL Classification Codes: L83, M31, D91

Introduction:

The study of tourist consumer behavior and the travel decision-making process is of great importance in academic literature, given the complex nature of the tourist decision associated with choosing an "intangible service" that is difficult to evaluate until after actual consumption. In this context of uncertainty, social influence emerges as a crucial factor, providing collective support and confidence to travelers. With the digital boom and the development of information technology, this influence has moved from its traditional, limited context to wider spaces through social media platforms, user-generated content (UGC), and electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM), leading to the emergence of new leadership

roles for "influencers" and digital opinion leaders, who have radically transformed how the mental image of tourist destinations is shaped and purchasing decisions are made.

Despite the accumulation of research that has addressed digital social control and tourist behavior, the current literature still suffers from scattered results and conflicting visions, creating an urgent need for a comprehensive systematic review aimed at unifying this knowledge dispersion and understanding the complex relationships between variables. This study aims to trace the chronological evolution of concepts and analyze mediating and modifying factors such as age, destination type, trust, and brand image with a focus on the most influential platforms in tourism planning.

This review is based on an analysis of 100 peer-reviewed research papers published between 2009 and 2025, all of which focused on the mechanisms of digital influence (from mainstream content to celebrity influence). The paper aims to provide a unified theoretical framework for researchers and equip decision-makers in the tourism sector with modern marketing strategies that keep pace with the evolving digital consumer. The paper begins by outlining the methodology used, followed by a discussion of the major thematic themes, culminating in an identification of research gaps and suggestions for future studies.

In order to investigate the state of the art in the literature regarding of social influence via internet and Travel Decision, a systematic literature review was performed. This method allows to identify trends and future potentialities in research and aims to study the relevant publications in the field, the most influential authors, journals, and other bibliometric data. The reviews of the literature include the following phases definition of research questions; redaction of research protocol, construction of the sample to analyze; analysis and synthesis; and identification of future research trends. The reviews started with the definition of the research question that, for this study, are defined as follows:

"How has the conceptual and methodological path of academic literature evolved in interpreting the mechanisms of digital social influence on the tourism decision-making process, and what are the theoretical frameworks and research gaps that shape this evolution between 2008 and 2025?"

I. Methodology:

This study adopts a structured literature review approach to analyze the impact of online social influence on travel decision-making. The review follows a multi-phase process including the definition of research questions, the development of a research protocol, sample construction, data analysis and synthesis, and the identification of future research trends.

1. Research Protocol:

Although the primary focus was on peer-reviewed articles indexed in major databases, a limited number of studies published in non-indexed or regional and local journals were also included. This decision was motivated by the need to capture context-specific insights, particularly from underrepresented regions, which are often overlooked in highly indexed journals. A combination of keywords was used, including "social influence", "user-generated

content (UGC)", "electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)", "social media influencers", and "travel decision".

The inclusion criteria were:

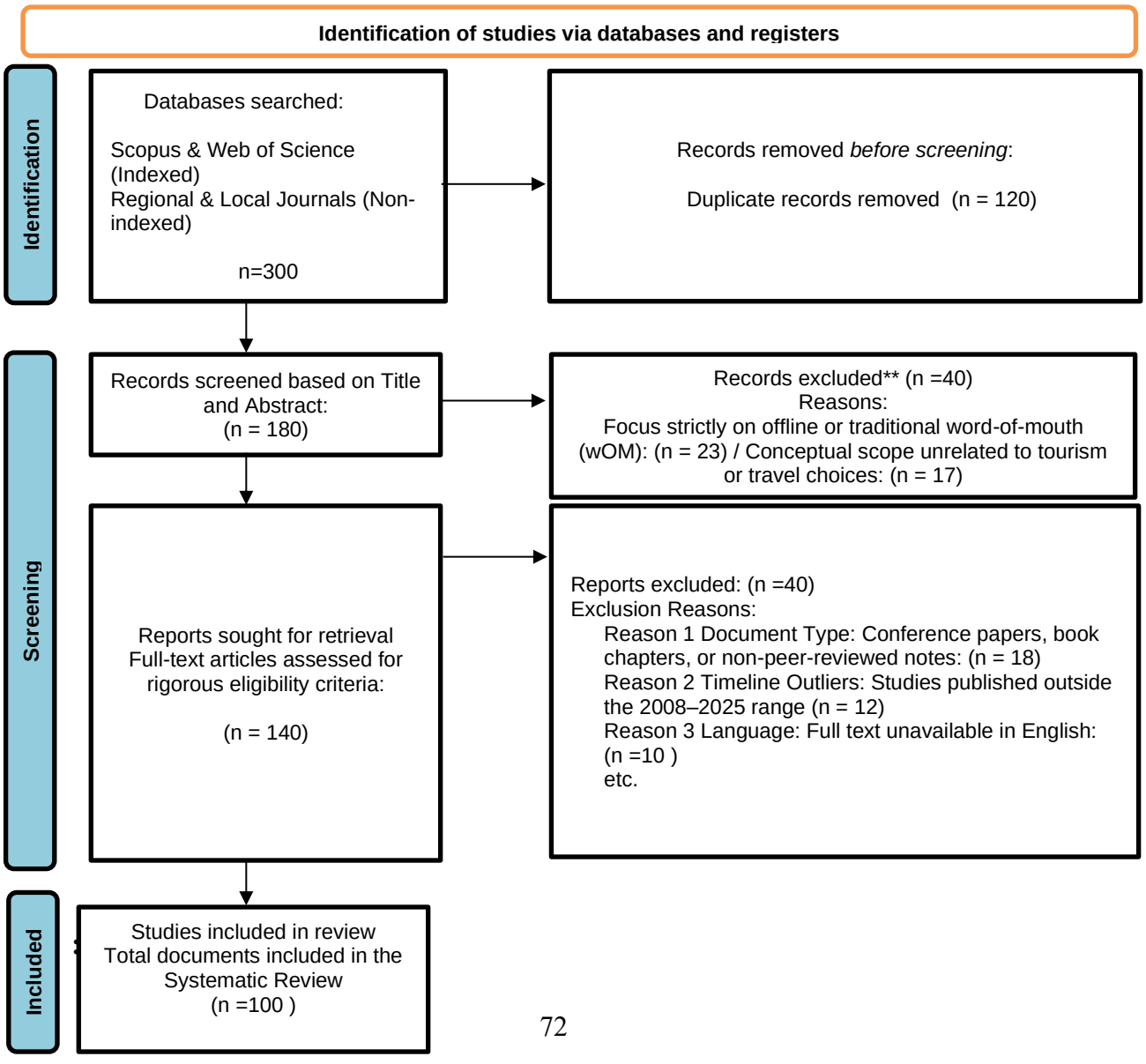
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Published between 2008 and 2025
- Articles written in English
- Studies directly addressing the impact of online social influence on travel decisions

The exclusion criteria included:

- Studies focusing solely on offline influence
- Articles not related to tourism decision-making
- Conference papers and non-academic publications

The study selection process followed a PRISMA-like approach. An initial search yielded 300 articles. After removing duplicates, 180 articles remained. Following title and abstract screening, 140 articles were retained for full-text assessment. Finally, 100 articles were included in the systematic review.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram



2. Data Analysis and Synthesis:

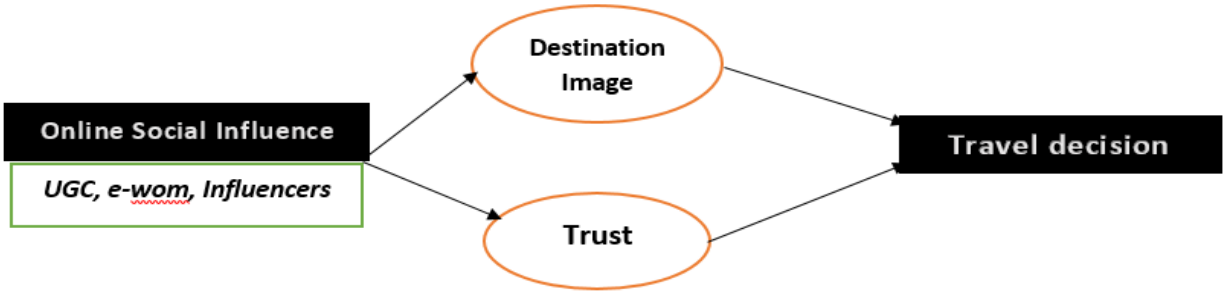
The selected studies were analyzed using a combination of bibliometric and thematic analysis techniques. The analysis focused on identifying dominant research themes, methodological approaches, geographical distribution, and key variables influencing travel decision-making. The synthesis process allowed the classification of studies according to: Research methodology, Tourism type, Geographic context, Theoretical frameworks.

3. Conceptual Framework:

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework integrating multiple forms of online social influence, including user-generated content (UGC), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and social media influencers. These factors are hypothesized to influence travel decision-making indirectly through key mediating variables such as trust, destination image, and emotional engagement. Additionally, moderating variables such as age and tourism type are introduced to capture the variability of these relationships across different consumer segments. This framework extends previous studies by integrating cognitive (trust, image) and emotional (engagement) mechanisms.

Online social influence manifests through multiple forms, including user-generated content (UGC), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and social media influencers, each playing a distinct yet complementary role in shaping travel decisions.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model



Source: Elaborated by the authors

3.1 Literature Background

User-generated content (UGC) is a cornerstone of online social influence in the tourism sector, becoming a crucial factor in shaping travel decisions at all stages (before, during, and after the trip). This is due to its high degree of credibility and authenticity compared to official advertisements, as it stems from the real experiences of ordinary people. A study by (Hidalgo Alcázar et al., 2014) demonstrated that UGC positively impacts the cognitive and emotional dimensions of a destination's mental image, thereby enhancing travel intentions and reducing perceived risks. Furthermore, findings by (Aboalganam et al., 2025) showed that 62% of consumers trust UGC when researching new destinations, while (Joseph et al., 2024) confirmed its role in boosting travel intentions.

This content takes many forms, such as reviews, photos, videos, and blogs, and has become a primary source of information, especially during the inspiration and planning stages. This

was confirmed by a study by (Cox et al., 2009) on a large sample of internet users, as well as by the findings of (John N. Fotis et al., 2012) and (Varga & Gabor, 2021), which highlighted its superior reliability compared to official sources and its stronger impact compared to advertising. More recent studies, such as those by (Wang & Yan, 2022), have shown that the quality of UGC content enhances trust and, consequently, travel intention. (Jog & Alcasoas, 2023) and (Susanto, 2024) indicated its powerful influence on travel decisions, reaching up to 93%.

The impact of UGC is not limited to the pre-travel stage. (Sanjoy Kumar Acharjee & Tanvir Ahmed, 2023) study demonstrated its role in boosting bookings, and (Amaro et al., 2016) categorized users based on their interaction with it. During the journey, UGC provides immediate guidance to travelers, especially in new destinations, as demonstrated by studies by (Liu J et al., 2019) and (Tham et al., 2020). After the journey, it plays a significant role in sharing experiences and reshaping others' decisions, as confirmed by studies by (John N. Fotis et al., 2012).

Electronic word-of-mouth marketing is defined as a form of online social communication based on the exchange of consumer opinions and experiences about products, services, and companies. This content is generated through recommendations from experienced customers or their direct experiences. This type of marketing differs from other digital phenomena related to consumer behavior and is influenced by factors related to users and available technologies (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). Electronic word-of-mouth marketing is also considered any form of informal or semi-formal communication that takes place via digital platforms and relates to the use of products, services, or their features (Litvin, S. W et al., 2008). Unlike traditional word-of-mouth marketing, which occurs directly between individuals who know each other, Electronic word-of-mouth marketing spreads through digital media to reach a broad audience of both known and unknown users (Fakir, M. K. J & Miah, M. R, 2021). Electronic word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most influential forms of informal communication between consumers, businesses, and the community. It is a modern extension of traditional word-of-mouth marketing, a result of the internet's development. Thanks to the digital environment, messages and reviews spread much faster than in traditional marketing. Online reviews have become a crucial element in e-commerce, directly influencing consumer purchasing decisions and spending levels (Wu et al., 2020). In the tourism sector, this type of content allows travelers to access up-to-date and reliable information through social media platforms. Other people's reviews significantly influence the choice of tourist destinations (Nowacki & Niezgoda, 2020). Positive reviews boost trust and create a positive impression of tourism services or establishments, often leading to increased sales and revenue (Cheng, Y et al., 2020). They also make hotels and tourist facilities more attractive to potential travelers (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009).

According to expansion and construction theory, positive emotions broaden individuals' perception and increase their willingness to consider multiple options, which explains the impact of positive reviews on boosting trust and purchasing intention (Fredrickson, 2004). Therefore, positive online reviews can lead to a significant increase in hotel bookings, as users

associate these positive reviews with feelings of satisfaction and trust. Furthermore, sharing positive experiences about tourist attractions through digital media can enhance the image of tourist destinations and increase individual interest and booking intentions (Riyadi, B et al., 2021); (Leong et al., 2019). These reviews are an important strategic tool for tourism sector managers to strengthen customer relationships and build an attractive destination image.

On the other hand, studies indicate that positive reviews with strong emotional content have a greater impact on boosting trust compared to less emotionally charged reviews, especially when disseminated through digital media (Xu et al., 2023). Social media influencers also contribute to enhancing the image of tourist destinations and services by providing positive recommendations and experiences, which improves travelers' perception and strengthens the tourism brand image (Ragab, 2022).

The widespread use of social media platforms has led to the emergence of influencers as a major source of inspiration in tourism. They enjoy high credibility and trust among their followers, giving their recommendations significant influence on travel decisions. Studies (Saini et al., 2023); (Pop et al., 2022) have shown that trust in an influencer is the decisive factor in their impact, fostering a lasting relationship with followers and increasing the likelihood of adopting their recommendations. Characteristics such as content quality (images, videos, stories), follower count, and engagement level also play a crucial role in enhancing an influencer's credibility and stimulating travel intention.

In the pre-travel phase, influencers contribute to shaping the mental image of a destination, as confirmed by studies (Susanto, 2024);(John N. Fotis et al., 2012).. However, excessive promotion of destinations can sometimes lead to disappointment among tourists (Jani et al., 2024). During the trip, their influence continues by guiding travelers' decisions regarding activities and restaurants, as travelers rely directly on their content (Pop et al., 2022), and they also contribute to enhancing tourist satisfaction (Susanto, 2024). In contrast, their influence remains relatively limited in the post-trip phase, with the exception of long-term content such as blogs and videos that transform into e-WOM (e-word-of-mouth marketing).

Generally, influencers are part of the social influence ecosystem alongside UGC (User-Generated Content) and traditional advertising. They act as a bridge between travelers and tourism brands, contributing to increased destination awareness and stimulating travel intentions. However, their role can involve risks such as over-promotion and the creation of unrealistic expectations, which can negatively impact consumer confidence. Therefore, we can propose the following general hypothesis :

Hypothesis: Online social influence tools, including user-generated content (UGC), e-word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and influencers, positively impact travel decisions by enhancing the destination's image and building a higher level of trust among travelers.

Mapping the Research Landscape of Digital Social Influence and Tourist Behavior:

An Analytical Insight:

1. **Descriptive and Bibliometric Analysis:**

1.1 Classification of Studies by Database and Major Publishers :

Table 01: Number of studies according to Database and Publisher

Database / Indexing Platform	Number of Studies	Key Journals
ScienceDirect (Web of Science / Scopus)	***32***	Tourism Management, Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management
Emerald Insight (Web of Science / Scopus)	***15***	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Journal of Tourism Futures, Tourism Review
Taylor & Francis Online (Web of Science / Scopus)	***15***	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Tourism Geographies, Current Issues in Tourism, Cogent Social Sciences
SpringerLink (Web of Science / Scopus)	***10***	Information Technology & Tourism, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology, Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics
MDPI (Web of Science / Scopus)	***8***	Sustainability, Tourism and Hospitality
SAGE Journals (Web of Science / Scopus)	***5***	Journal of Vacation Marketing, Tourism and Hospitality Research
Wiley Online Library (Web of Science / Scopus)	***4***	International Journal of Tourism Research, Psychology & Marketing
Local & Regional Journals (Non Indexed)	***10***	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism And Entrepreneurship, Proceedings of The ICECRS.

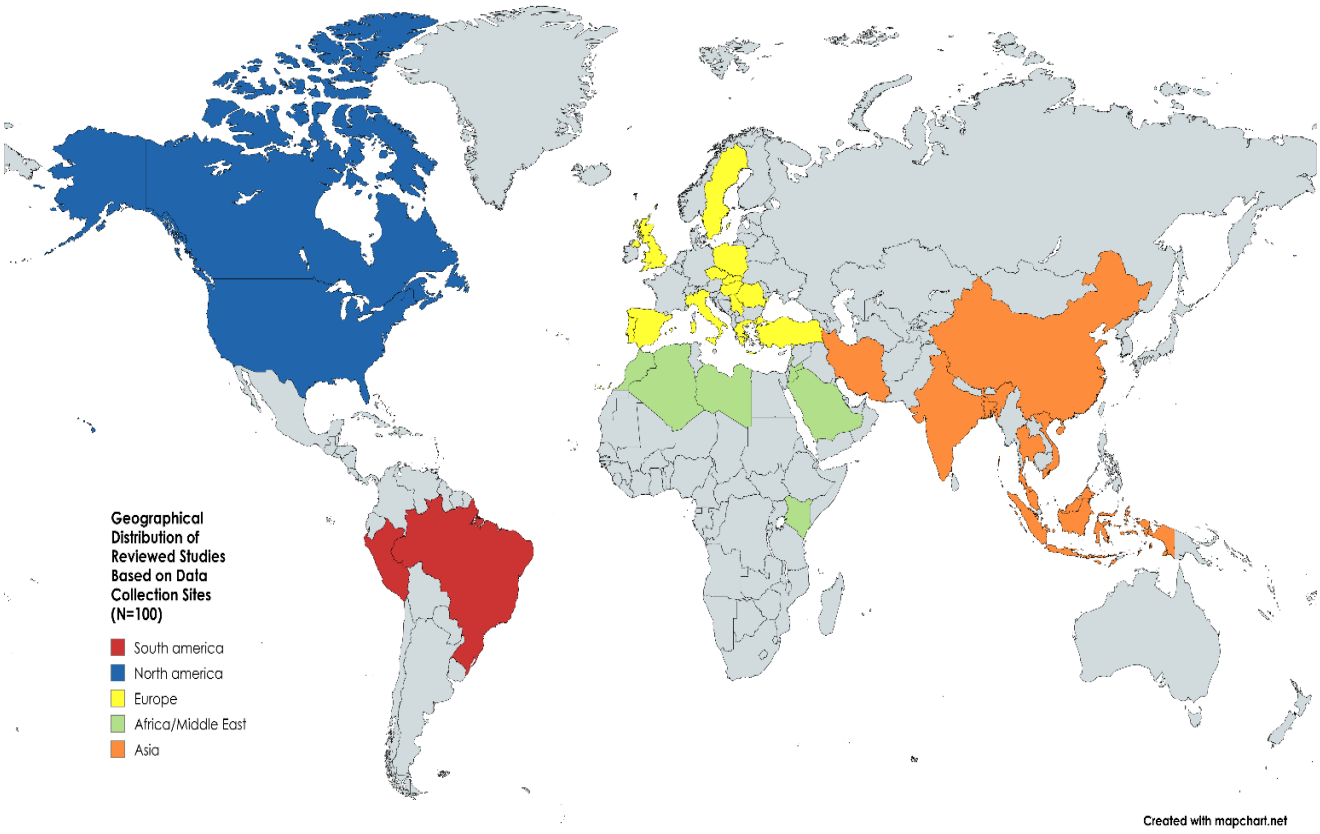
Source: Elaborated by the authors

There is a clear dominance of major publishers such as Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, and Emerald in the field of research on the influence of online social media on travel decisions. The proliferation of journals like 'Tourism Management', 'Annals of Tourism Research', and'Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing' confirms that this topic lies at the heart of the field of "experiential tourism management and marketing." The large number of studies published by MDPI, particularly in the journal *Sustainability*, reflects the modern research

trend toward examining the impact of social media on sustainable tourism and its ethical and social aspects. Studies published in regional journals provide data and findings from diverse contexts that may not be adequately covered by major international journals, thus facilitating the identification and filling of new research gaps. The reliance on this combination of prestigious publishers and specialized regional journals was intended to conduct a large and comprehensive literature review on the topic, combining high-impact sources with specific contextual sources.

1.2 Classification of Studies by Country/Region (Data Collection Site):

Figure 3: Geographical Distribution of Reviewed Studies Based on Data Collection Sites (N=100)



Source: Elaborated by the authors

The geographical distribution of the reviewed studies (Figure 2) reveals a clear dominance of Asia (35%), with China and India emerging as the most attractive countries for research on digital tourism consumer behavior. This reflects the massive surge in the use of digital technology and social media platforms in these emerging markets. Europe follows with 28%, with a notable concentration in Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Spain, given their global tourism prominence. Conversely, the distribution reveals a research gap in South America, Africa, and some Middle Eastern countries, where research remains limited compared to the research momentum in Asia and Europe. This spatial disparity highlights a pressing need for further studies in underrepresented cultural contexts and tourism

environments to understand the generalizability of the findings of digital social impact across different geographical segments.

1.4 Classification by Theoretical Framework :

Table 02: Number of studies according to theoretical frameworks

Theoretical Framework	Number of Studies
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	15
Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	10
Travel Decision-Making Process Models	8
Social Comparison Theory	7
Social Capital Theory	6
Media Dependency Theory	6
Social Identity Theory	4
Symbolic Interactionism	3
Miscellaneous Other Theories	12
Not Explicitly Stated / No Specific Framework	29

Source: Elaborated by the authors

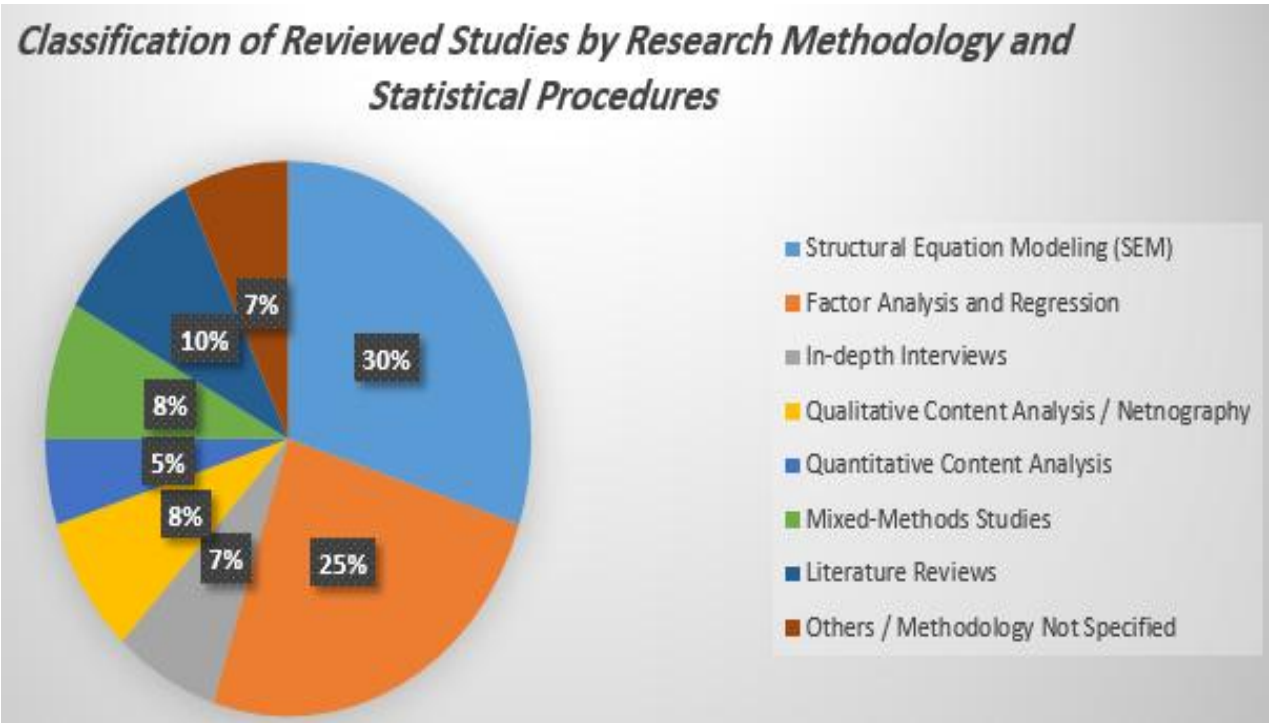
The table above reveals a clear dominance of technological behavioral theories (TPB and TAM), accounting for 25% of the total studies. This reflects researchers' interest in measuring 'technology acceptance' as a motivating factor for travel decisions. However, the emergence of theories such as 'social comparison' and 'social capital' underscores that digital social influence extends beyond mere information transfer to shaping the social identity of the traveler. Most interestingly, 30% of the studies lack a defined theoretical framework, indicating a gap in the philosophical grounding of current research. This study aims to address this gap by constructing a conceptual framework that connects digital influence with decision-making behavior.

1.1 Classification by Research methodology:

The analysis of research methodologies adopted in the reviewed literature (Figure 3) reveals a clear dominance of quantitative approaches (55%), indicating researchers' tendency to measure tourism phenomena digitally and test hypotheses with statistical rigor. Structural equation modeling (SEM) emerged as a leading analytical tool in 30 studies. This can be explained by the complexity of the tourist consumer behavior model, which includes mediating and adjusting variables (such as trust and destination image) requiring models capable of analyzing multiple relationships simultaneously. In a related context, analytical

studies based on content analysis and netnography constitute 13%, a trend consistent with the nature of the big data available in the digital space. Researchers seek to extrapolate traveler behavior from their real reviews and interactions on platforms. The limited percentage of purely qualitative (7%) and mixed (8%) studies reveals a methodological gap that calls for the adoption of more in-depth research approaches capable of exploring the deeper psychological motivations of travelers, which may not be revealed by data alone. The diversity of statistical procedures, ranging from factor analysis and regression to qualitative analyses, reflects the richness of this field of knowledge and its attempt to encompass all dimensions of the digital tourism experience. There is a pressing need for more mixed-methods studies to provide a more comprehensive and integrated understanding.

Figure 4: Classification of Reviewed Studies by Research Methodology



Source: Elaborated by the authors

1.6 Classification of Reviewed Studies be Tourism Type:

Analysis of the studied tourism types (Figure 4) reveals the dominance of 'general leisure tourism' (40%), reflecting the researchers' focus on studying consumer tourism behavior in its broadest sense, as digital consumers typically seek enjoyment and entertainment through social media platforms. 'Youth and student tourism' (12%) also stands out as a key pattern, which is logical given that young people (Gen Z and Millennials) are the most engaged with digital influencers and the most affected by the 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) phenomenon when making travel decisions. In terms of spatial patterns, we observe a balanced interest between cultural (10%) and urban (8%) tourism, indicating that the social and digital influence is no longer limited to simple leisure tourism but has extended to include exploring cultural identity and complex urban destinations. However, the table reveals a scarcity of

studies on specialized tourism patterns such as adventure tourism (3%) and niche tourism like religious and health tourism (2%), opening up important research avenues to explore how influencers impact these specific areas, which demand a high level of trust and credibility. The clear focus on international tourism (10%) versus domestic tourism (5%) in some studies reinforces the hypothesis that the digital space has broken down geographical boundaries, and user-generated content (UGC) and influencer content have become transcontinental, directly impacting the perception of global destinations and the decision to travel to them.

Figure 5: Reviewed Studies be Tourism Type



Source: Elaborated by the authors

1.7 Chronological Evolution of Research Themes and Features (2008–2025):

Table 03: Art Evolution

Period	***Research Features & Milestones***
2008–2010 (The Emergence)	Early emergence of eWOM and online reviews as alternative sources of tourism information. Primary focus on Facebook (in its infancy), TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and digital blogs. Studies relied heavily on content analysis and basic surveys using descriptive-exploratory approaches to validate and describe the phenomenon.

Period	*Research Features & Milestones*
2013–2016 (The Foundation)	Prominence of classical theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in digital tourism context. Growing interest in textual User-Generated Content (UGC) (comments + photos) and its direct impact on travel intentions.
2017–2019 (The Transition)	Emergence of Social Media Influencers and a shift from general UGC to influencer-driven content. Expansion of visual content with interest in YouTube Vlogs and the dominance of Instagram as the primary tourism platform. Increased focus on mediating variables (e.g., Trust, Destination Image). Rise of studies targeting Gen Y/Z. Methodologically, research shifted toward complexity through the widespread use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).
2020–2022 (The Surge)	Significant jump in research due to heavy reliance on social media during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Research focused on crisis management, rebuilding traveler confidence, and promoting domestic tourism. Specialization in specific tourism types (e.g., Sustainable & Medical Tourism). Notable increase in studies from Asia and the Middle East, alongside a rise in Mixed-Methods approaches.
2023–2025 (The New Era)	Expansion into TikTok and Xiaohongshu, with TikTok becoming the fastest-growing and most studied platform (Short-form content). Exploration of AI, Virtual Influencers, and Augmented Reality (AR). Emergence of comparative studies between platforms and influencer types. Introduction of cultural and demographic differences, as well as the "dark side" of digital influence (e.g., travel disappointment, Overtourism).

Source: Elaborated by the Authors

Systematic Literature Review Results:

Table 04: Studies's Key Funding

Outcome Orientation	Studies	Key Synthesis
Travel Intention & Inspiration	32	Rich visual content acts as a cognitive stimulant, increasing the desire to visit by enhancing the destination's image.
Trust Building & Risk Reduction	15	Electronic WOM reviews reduce perceived risk and enhance reliability.
Influencer Credibility & Affect	10	The perceived credibility of influencers builds para-social relationships that influence travel decisions.
Demographic Contingencies	8	Age, gender, and Gen Z are key moderating factors in tourist response.

Platform-Specific Dynamics	7	The impact varied between functional platforms (TripAdvisor) and visual platforms (Instagram/TikTok).
Post-Trip eWOM & Engagement	7	Altruistic motives and self-enhancement turn tourists into content producers.
Cross-Cultural Differences	5	The impact of national culture (individualism versus collectivism) on trust in digital information.
Negative & Critical Outcomes	2	There is a scarcity of studies on the impact of misinformation or discouraging experiences on travel decisions.

Source : Elaborated by the authors

Analysis of the outcomes trends (Table 04) reveals a strong research focus on the positive role of digital media in motivating travel intention and building trust, with 32% of studies identifying visual inspiration as the primary driver. However, the analysis highlights a significant gap; only 2% of studies addressed negative or mixed effects. This bias toward positive outcomes underscores the urgent need in future literature to explore the 'dark side' of digital influence, such as the false expectations created by influencers' embellishment of reality. This adds value to the current study by highlighting these gaps.

Discussion:

The findings of this systematic review go beyond a mere statistical description of scholarly output, revealing profound shifts in the structure of social influence within the tourism industry. By extrapolating from 100 studies published between 2008 and 2025, several critical themes emerge that reshape the behavior of the digital tourist. It is striking that the vast majority of the literature (over 90%) has focused on the "enabling role" of social media in stimulating travel intention and building trust. However, the review reveals an "excessive research optimism" that overlooks critical aspects such as: influencer manipulation of reality, tourist disillusionment resulting from the expectations gap, and the phenomenon of "overtourism" driven by the desire to emulate Instagram images. The scarcity of studies addressing negative outcomes (only 2%) highlights the urgent need for a critical approach that examines the impact of misinformation on the sustainability of tourist destinations.

The discussion revealed a fundamental shift in the mechanisms of influence. While early studies (2008-2012) focused on textual reviews (TripAdvisor) as a rational tool for mitigating risk, more recent studies have moved toward "emotional influence" via TikTok and Instagram. Here, the traveler is no longer simply looking for "information," but rather for "belonging" to the influencer's community. This shift explains the emergence of social comparison and social identity theories in the preceding tables, where the decision to travel has become a tool for constructing a "digital self," not merely a recreational activity.

Asia's dominance (35%) in scientific output reflects a shift in the global economic and technological center of gravity. Critically, Asian studies have been more inclined to employ Technology Acceptance Modeling (TAM) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM),

indicating these societies' focus on "rapid digitalization." Conversely, the absence of the African and Arab context (except in a few studies) represents a gap in understanding how "collective cultural values" in these regions influence trust in digital advice from outsiders. This opens avenues for developing "local" theoretical models rather than relying solely on Western ones.

Most review studies focus on "travel intention" as the dependent variable, a methodological shortcoming known as the intention-behavior gap. Critical review reveals that while liking an influencer's content or experiencing FOMO may generate an intention, it doesn't guarantee a travel "action" due to physical or temporal barriers that most current models fail to account for. Therefore, there is a need to shift from measuring intentions to measuring actual behavior through longitudinal studies. In the final phase of the timeline (2023-2025), the features of "virtual influencers" and AI-generated content began to emerge. Critically, this puts "trust theory" in a difficult position; how will tourists react to travel advice from a non-human entity? The review's findings suggest that credibility will become the most complex variable in the coming years, as researchers will have to redefine "authenticity" in a space where reality and virtuality intertwine.

This systematic review not only confirms the impact of digital media but also sounds the alarm about "research paradigms." The path to a deeper understanding of the decision to travel lies in moving beyond rigid quantitative models and toward studies that explore the "human experience" in all its psychological, cultural, and technological complexity.

Future Research Directions:

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the reviewed literature, this study proposes several key research paths to bridge existing knowledge and methodological gaps:

1. Current literature lacks an understanding of how digital social influence evolves over time. Therefore, future researchers are advised to adopt the following approach as longitudinal studies and mixed-methods
2. There is a pressing need to break the barrier of "digital optimism" and study negative phenomena, such as: misinformation, digital fatigue.
3. With the advent of the new generation of technology, research should be directed towards: Virtual Influencers, Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) and Generative artificial intelligence.
4. The study calls for expanding the geographical scope to include: Arab and African context also directing research towards under-experienced patterns such as medical tourism, religious tourism, and adventure tourism.
5. The study proposes developing theoretical models that go beyond measuring "travel intent" to include situational and material factors that may prevent digital influence from turning into real action, in order to provide more realistic results for tourism marketing companies.

Managerial Implications:

Based on the results of the systematic review, a set of strategic recommendations can be made for destination managers and companies operating in the sector:

1. Tourist destinations need to focus on producing short, spontaneous videos (TikTok/Reels), as they are the most influential in stimulating "instant inspiration" and quick travel decisions.
2. Influencers are chosen based on "reliability" and closeness to the audience, not just the number of followers, to ensure building a sustainable relationship of trust with the tourist.
3. Encouraging tourists to share their real-life experiences and using them as a marketing tool to reduce "perceived risks" among new travelers.
4. The need for a continuous monitoring system for electronic reviews (eWOM) to respond quickly to complaints and turn negative experiences into opportunities to build loyalty.
5. Designing marketing campaigns based on "exclusivity" or "temporary events" to motivate tourists who are afraid of missing out on trending experiences.

Conclusion :

This study, through its systematic review of 100 research papers, concludes that digital social influence has fundamentally transformed the psychology of the modern tourist, shifting them from a mere source of rational information to a complex emotional and behavioral driver shaped by visual platforms and influencers. The timeline between 2008 and 2025 reveals a continuous maturation of methodological and theoretical approaches, with the emergence of advanced statistical tools and a growing research focus on next-generation technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual influencers. The results also demonstrate the pivotal role of mediating variables such as trust, brand image, and the FOMO phenomenon in bridging the gap between content exposure and actual decision-making. While the study identifies significant gaps related to bias towards positive outcomes and a lack of research in Arab and African contexts, it offers a roadmap for tourism decision-makers, emphasizing the need to invest in "digital reputation management" and authentic content to ensure the sustainability of destinations. The added value of this research lies in its unique combination of quantitative bibliometric analysis and qualitative theoretical critique, making it a fundamental building block for a deeper understanding of the future of tourist consumer behavior in a constantly changing digital space.

References:

Aboalganam, K. M., AlFraihat, S. F., & Tarabieh, S. (2025). The Impact of User-Generated Content on Tourist Visit Intentions : The Mediating Role of Destination Imagery. *Administrative Sciences*, *15*(4), 117. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15040117

Amaro, S., Duarte, P., & Henriques, C. (2016). Travelers' use of social media : A clustering approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *59*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.03.007

Babić Rosario, De Valck, K, & Sotgiu, F. (2020). Conceptualizing the electronic word-of-mouth process : What we know and need to know about eWOM creation, exposure, and evaluation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 422-448.

Cheng, Y, Wei, W, & Zhang, L. (2020). Seeing destinations through vlogs : Implications for leveraging customer engagement behavior to increase travel intention. International. *Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 3227-3248.

Cox, C., Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., & Buultjens, J. (2009). The Role of User-Generated Content in Tourists' Travel Planning Behavior. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, *18*(8), 743-764. https://doi.org/10.1080/19368620903235753

Fakir, M. K. J & Miah, M. R. (2021). Factors Influencing E-WOMs in Restaurant Business : Evidence from Bangladesh. Journal of Sustainable. *Tourism and Entrepreneurship*, 17-36.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). *The broaden–and–build theory of positive emotions. Philosophical transactions of the royal society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences*. 1367-1377.

Hidalgo Alcázar, M. d. C, Sicilia Piñero, M, & Ruiz de Maya, S. (2014). The effect of user-generated content on tourist behavior : The mediating role of destination image. *Tourism & Management Studies*, 158-164.

Jani, D. A., Ratnoday, N. R., & Bajpai, S. (2024). *SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON TRAVEL CHOICES*. *5*(7).

Jog, D. R., & Alcasoas, N. A. (2023). Travel decision making through blogs and vlogs : An empirical investigation on how user-generated content influences destination image. *Turyzm/Tourism*, *33*(2), 19-28. https://doi.org/10.18778/0867-5856.33.2.02

John N. Fotis, Dimitrios Buhalis, & Nicos Rossides. (2012). Social Media Use and Impact during the Holiday Travel Planning Process. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2012 ، Springer*.

Joseph, A., T P, V., & Thomas, T. (2024). How Social Media Influences Travel Decisions : The Effect of User-Generated Content, Visual Appeal, And Storytelling on Destination Intentions. *South India Journal of Social Sciences*, *22*(4), 349-359. https://doi.org/10.62656/SIJSS.v22i4.1413

Leong, L.-Y, Hew, T.-S, Ooi, K.-B, & Lin, B. (2019). Do electronic word-of-mouth and elaboration likelihood model influence hotel booking ? ,. *Journal of computer information systems*, 146-160.

Litvin, S. W, Goldsmith, R. E, & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism management*, 458-468.

Liu J, Zhang T, Wang C, & Fang S. (2019). Scale development for tourist trust toward a tourism destination. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 383-397.

Nowacki, M & Niezgoda, A. (2020). Identifying unique features of the image of selected cities based on reviews by TripAdvisor portal users. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 503-519.

Pop, R.-A., Săplăcan, Z., Dabija, D.-C., & Alt, M.-A. (2022). The impact of social media influencers on travel decisions : The role of trust in consumer decision journey. *Current Issues in Tourism*, *25*(5), 823-843. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1895729

Ragab, A. M. (2022). How do social media influencers affect digital natives 2.0 to travel inside Egypt ? Integrating the theory of planned behavior and elaboration likelihood model. International. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 75-105.

Riyadi, B, Yuliari, G, & Perdana, P. (2021). Travel Bubble and Virtual Tourism Strategies to Increase Tourist Visits. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship*, 115-126.

Saini, H., Kumar, P., & Oberoi, S. (2023). Welcome to the destination! Social media influencers as cogent determinant of travel decision : A systematic literature review and conceptual framework. *Cogent Social Sciences*, *9*(1), 2240055. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2240055

Sanjoy Kumar Acharjee & Tanvir Ahmed. (2023). The impact of social media on tourists' decision-making process : An empirical study based on Bangladesh. *Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies*, *3*(1), 56-71. https://doi.org/10.56556/jssms.v3i1.685

Susanto, E. (2024). Influencing Travel Decisions : Social Media's Role in Destination Perception and Visit Intentions. *Tourism and Leisure*, *13*.

Tham, A., Mair, J., & Croy, G. (2020). Social media influence on tourists' destination choice : Importance of context. *Tourism Recreation Research, 45*(2), 161-175. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2019.1700655

Varga, I. E., & Gabor, M. R. (2021). The Influence of Social Networks in Travel Decisions. *ECONOMICS, 9*(2), 35-48. https://doi.org/10.2478/eoik-2021-0015

Vermeulen, I. E & Seegers, D. (2009). Tried and tested : The impact of online hotel reviews on consumer consideration. *Tourism management*, 123-127.

Wang, H., & Yan, J. (2022). Effects of social media tourism information quality on destination travel intention : Mediation effect of self-congruity and trust. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 1049149. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1049149

Wu, Y, Ngai, E. W, Wu, P, & Wu, C. (2020). Fake online reviews : Literature review, synthesis, and directions for future research. *Decision support systems*, 113-280.

Xu, H., Cheung, L. T. O., Lovett, J., Duan, X., Pei, Q., & Liang, D. (2023). Understanding the influence of user-generated content on tourist loyalty behavior in a cultural World Heritage Site. *Tourism Recreation Research, 48*(2), 173-187. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.1913022