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A bibliometric analysis of studies on social media marketing and tourism published in Web of Science Database

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ABSTRACT

With the widespread use of social media, the application areas of social media marketing are expanding. Tourism is one of these areas. Especially the fact that consumers include tourist activities in their social media posts has made the necessity of social media marketing inevitable for tourist businesses. This situation enables word-of-mouth marketing, one of the main objectives of marketing, to be realized in the digital dimension. This relationship between social media marketing and tourism has led academics to conduct studies in the related field. This study aims to reveal the importance of studies published on social media marketing and tourism and take a snapshot of the development of studies on this subject. In this context, 234 academic publications on social media marketing and tourism were accessed from the Web of Science (WoS) database covering the period between 2009 and 2024. The publications obtained from WoS were analyzed in terms of number of publications, number of citations, countries of publication, study type, citation topics, WoS index, Web of Science categories, and most chosen keywords, and bibliometric analysis of these publications was performed with VOSviewer software. According to the study findings, there has been a steady increase in the number of publications every year. In addition, the most preferred type of publication is the article. The country with the most publications is the USA, followed by China. Looking at the WoS index, it is seen that most studies are published in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). When the most used keywords are analyzed, the keyword social media marketing is followed by social media. The study results are expected to be instructive for both businesses and academics.

KEYWORDS

Social media marketing, tourism, bibliometric analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing can be considered as all marketing activities carried out on electronic platforms with any technological device (Kotler et al., 2017). Social media marketing, considered within the scope of digital marketing, can be expressed as the realization of marketing activities on social media platforms. With the contribution of social media to businesses, social media marketing is among the popular concepts of today's marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Businesses have detailed information about customers thanks to the databases provided by social media (Minazza, 2015). According to the WeAreSocial 2024 report, the most common purposes for people to use social media are to stay in touch with friends and relatives and to follow brands. Social media marketing contributes to increased interaction with customers and individualization of communication. Customers feel more special with individual marketing than with mass marketing; in this case, they establish a closer bond with the business (Wirtz et al., 2013). In addition, the business can better follow the current trends in the market and accordingly become aware of changes in consumer behavior and adapt to them quickly.

Tourism is a significant sector contributing to countries' development and economic growth. Tourism, one of the most up-to-date sectors in which marketing is applied, actively uses social media marketing to convert potential global customers into actual customers (Sigala, 2011). In the tourism sector, social media marketing has become attractive in bridging consumer expectations, perceived quality and satisfaction, and destination image that encourages consumers to purchase (Leung et al., 2013).

Within the scope of the research, a bibliometric analysis was explicitly conducted on social media marketing in tourism. As will be explained in more detail in the literature section, bibliographic analysis has been conducted many times in the field of tourism, as it is frequently done in social media, social media marketing, and digital marketing. For example, Bastidas et al. (2020), according to their bibliometric analysis, revealed which research areas stand out for technological tourism solutions. Evren and Kozak (2014) analyzed tourism articles published in academic journals in Turkey between 2000 and 2010 and tried to express academic trends on this subject. Ülker et al. (2022) examined 136 bibliometric studies and analyzed collaboration networks. In studies on food and gastronomy research in tourism, it was emphasized that the majority of the studies covered in the scope of the study need advanced methodologies (Bendegul et al., 2018; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Ellis et al., 2018; Sims, 2009; Everett & Aitchison, 2008). In the studies conducted within the scope of sports tourism, important issues in sustainable sports tourism research have been emphasized (Jimenez-Garcia et al., 2020; Weed, 2008; Higham & Hinch, 2018; Gibson, 1998; Chalip, 2006). In studies on artificial intelligence applications in tourism, future research areas of artificial intelligence applications were tried to be expressed (Knani et al., 2022; Tussyadiah, 2020; Ivanov & Webster, 2019; Li, 2021; Neuhofer et al., 2015). In tourism research on sustainability within the scope of tourism, the main trends of the field have been addressed (Garrigos-Simon et al., 2018; Bramwell & Lane, 2005; Sharpley, 2009; Hall, Gössling & Scott, 2015; Saarinen, 2006). However, since there are few studies on tourism and social media marketing, this field needs to be analyzed. This research aims to reveal the trends in this topic to contribute to future studies on social media marketing and tourism. It also aims to highlight the importance of social media marketing practices in the tourism sector and provide recommendations to tourism businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media's worldwide resonance has mobilized marketers. The strength of social media marketing is that it offers consumers direct and live communication independent of time and space (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The communication here is reciprocal, and it is possible to establish a strong bond between the business and the consumer thanks to the interaction created through methods such as likes, comments, and messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The tourism sector also benefits from this connection and makes its brands heard from the other side of the world (Sigala, 2011). The recognition of both national and international tourist places has increased with social media. These and similar posts have become increasingly widespread as consumers share the places they visit, eat, and drink on social media (Leung et al., 2013). With

social media marketing, businesses mobilize potential consumers by implementing various campaigns to ensure that potential consumers share posts like others (Hajli, 2014). With the digital word-of-mouth marketing provided, tourist attractions tend to become more popular (Litvin et al., 2008). In addition, tourism and social media have led third parties to open more social media accounts with a variety of tourism information, and these pages have attracted much attention from consumers and have many followers (Gretzel et al., 2006).

When social media marketing is associated with tourism, it is seen that there are studies that can contribute to both the literature and the sector (Katsikari et al., 2020; Hays et al., 2012; Cheng & Edwards, 2015; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Katsikari et al. focused on push and pull travel motivation in segmenting the Greek market for social media marketing in tourism. The result of the study suggests a roadmap for a successful social media marketing strategy based on the wants and needs of specific target audiences (Katsikari et al., 2020, p. 14). Another study on social media as a destination marketing tool focused on the social media marketing practices of national tourism organizations and found that the use of social media by destination marketing organizations is mostly trial and error and that their social media marketing strategies are very different from each other (Hays et al., 2012). Cheng and Edwards evaluated social media in tourism with a visual analytic approach. Accordingly, three insights on the impact of a social analytical approach on the travel news that Chinese consumers follow were revealed: potential tourist-generating regions, tourists' travel policy, and the lifespan of travel news (Cheng & Edwards, 2015). Leung et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of social media marketing in tourism competition in a literature review on tourism and hospitality. In addition, Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) encouraged a comprehensive study of the impact of social media on the tourism industry. After discussing the literature on social media marketing and tourism, it would be appropriate to mention the bibliometric analysis studies on social media marketing within the scope of the analysis method of this study. First of all, when the studies in the literature on this subject are examined, it is observed that the studies reveal various implications for marketing practices specific to social media marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Some studies have tried to capture the main trends and gaps in social media marketing studies (Gretzel, 2011; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Sigala, 2018; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Constantinides, 2014). Different bibliometric studies have also been conducted on social media marketing, providing suggestions for future research (Leung et al., 2013; Tuten & Solomon, 2017; Felix et al., 2017; Michaelidou et al., 2011). Finally, according to the literature review, some studies express the development and future of social media marketing (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Hudson et al., 2015; Trainor et al., 2014; Kim & Ko, 2012).

Within the scope of the research, many studies focused on social media, social media marketing, digital marketing, and tourism were analyzed. Many of these studies emphasize that the relationship between social media marketing and tourism should be addressed regularly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Therefore, this research aims to assess the intensity and contribution of academic studies on the relationship between social media marketing, which has attracted more attention, especially in the last decade, and tourism.

METHODOLOGY

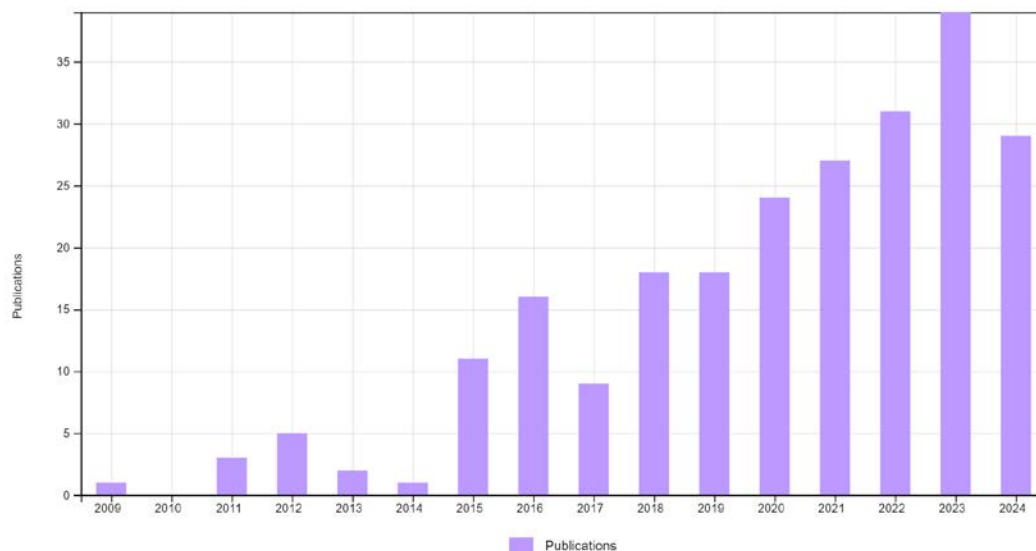
Today, social media marketing is successfully applied in many areas. Touristic locations are the most common locations where consumers take photos and/or videos and post them on social media (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Social media is overflowing with vacation, food, and travel posts, highlighting the popularity of visual content and user engagement in the tourism sector (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). This fact reveals the prevalence of social media marketing in tourism. In this context, the existence and continuity of academic studies related to social media marketing and tourism are important (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). This research aims to take a snapshot of the academic studies on social media marketing and tourism through bibliometric analysis and to reveal trends in the field through various statistics about these studies. The purpose of bibliometric analysis is to share comments and findings that will

contribute to scientific development within the scope of various documents such as documents, articles, and books and to reveal remarkable indicators regarding both publications and authors (Donthu et al., 2021; Metin, 2013; Al, 2008).

Web of Science (WoS) is one of the databases widely used by academics and frequently preferred in bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al., 2021). The search conducted on October 18, 2024, consisted of studies between 2009 and 2024, and a total of 234 studies were accessed. Since the studies on social media marketing and tourism were first included in the Web of Science database in 2009, the studies conducted as of 2009 were considered within the scope of the research. The 234 studies were analyzed in terms of the number of publications, number of citations, countries of publication, study type, citation topics, WOS index, Web of Science (Webos) categories, and most chosen keywords, and each parameter was grouped according to years. In light of the data obtained from the WoS database, as a result of the analyses made in VOSviewer, tables, graphs, and figures were created, and relevant findings on the subject were reached. VOSviewer is a software that analyzes the data obtained from databases with visual support (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Since the use of the WoS database for the realization of the research means that the academic studies subject to the research are limited to the resources in this database, this situation expresses the research limitation (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

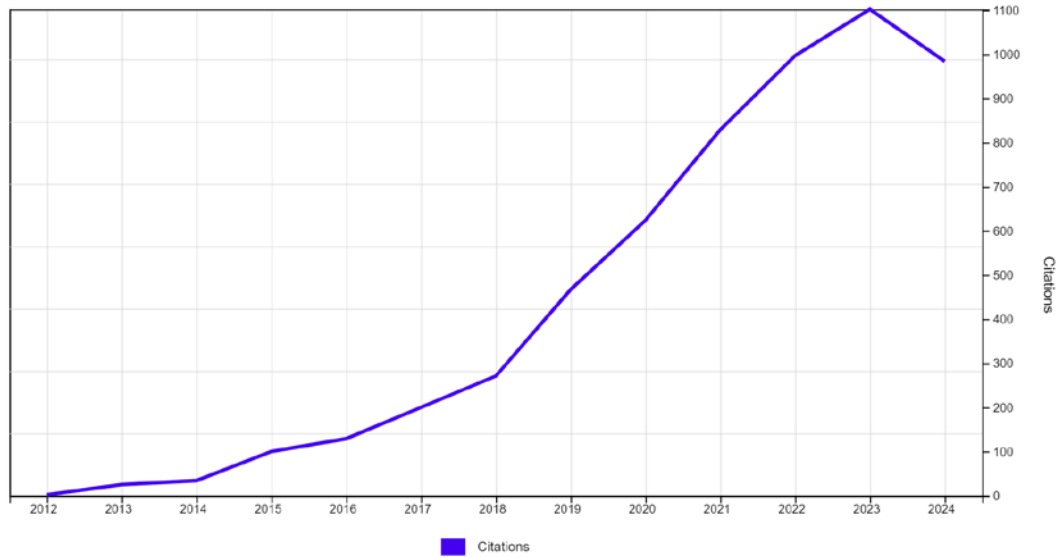
Within the scope of the research, data obtained from the WoS database were used. The data collected for studies on social media marketing in tourism were analyzed according to the parameters of number of publications, number of citations, countries of publication, study type, citation topics, Wos index, Web of Science (Webos), and most chosen keywords categories. In this section, research findings are expressed in various graphs and tables.



Graph 1. Number of Publications

Considering the number of publications on social media marketing in tourism, a total of 234 studies were accessed. Looking at Graph 1, while there was a maximum of 5 publications between 2009-2014, there has been a steady increase in the number of publications on this topic, especially as of 2017; only in 2024, there was a decrease compared to the previous year. It would be appropriate to wait until the end of 2024 to make the most transparent assessment. However, it is possible to say that an increase in the number of studies in this field is usually parallel with the increase in the prevalence of social media and social media marketing practices in the tourism sector. Another study investigating the impact of social media in hospitality similarly found that the number of publications on this topic has steadily increased since 2014 (Jimenez et al., 2024, p. 3). In addition, the number of publications in a bibliometric study on user-generated content in social media for hospitality has started to increase as of 2019 (Kitsios et al., 2022, p. 6). It can be

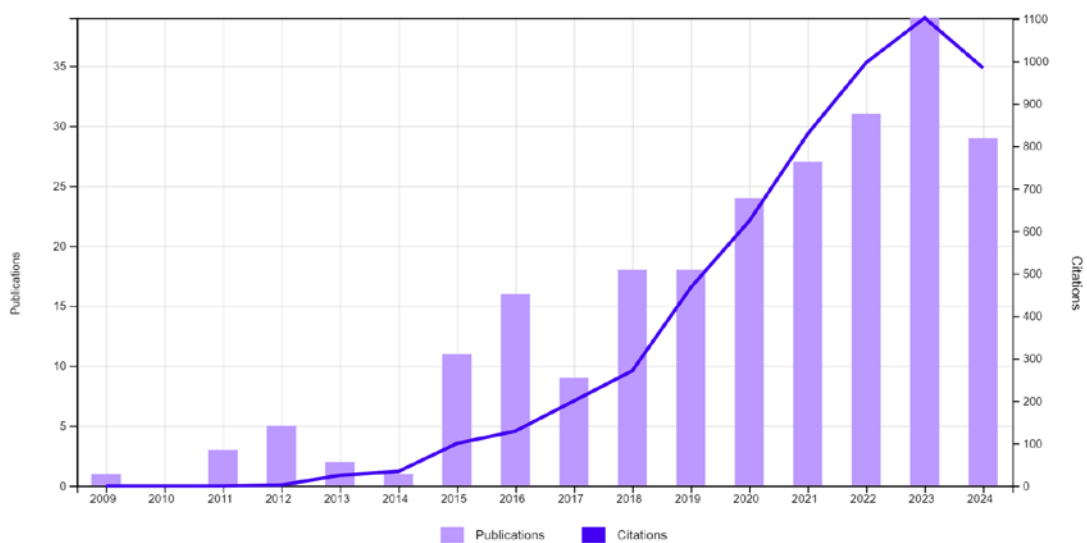
stated that social media has impacted academic publications on different topics over different years. This graph shows that the topic of social media marketing in tourism is trending among researchers.



Graph 2. Number of Cites

Graph 2 shows the number of citations received by the studies according to years. It is possible to say that the number of citations is in parallel with the number of publications. Compared to the number of publications, it can be said that there has been no decline over the years, and it draws a continuously increasing line. It can be thought that the decline only occurred in 2024, maybe because the data for 2024 was collected before the end of the year. In a study investigating the relationship between social media and tourist experience, the increase in the number of articles and citations was not as consistent as in this study (Idbenssi et al., 2023, p. 6). The reason for this situation, which presents a contrary view, may be that social media marketing was not the focus of the other study.

Graph 3. Number of Cites and Publications



Graph 3 shows that the increase in the number of publications and citations is directly proportional. In this case, it is possible to say that the increasing number of citations and publications on a particular topic support each other.

Table 1.
Publications by the Countries

Countries	Frequency	%
USA	51	21.795
PEOPLES R CHINA	43	18.376
INDIA	21	8.974
AUSTRALIA	14	5.983
MALAYSIA	14	5.983
ENGLAND	12	5.128
ITALY	11	4.701
INDONESIA	10	4.274
SPAIN	10	4.274
TURKEY	10	4.274

Table 1 shows the top ten countries with the highest number of publications. Accordingly, the USA has the highest number of publications, with 51, followed by China, with 43. India ranks third with 21 publications. In tenth place, Turkey has 10 publications. According to the data obtained from WoS, a total of 234 publications were published by 60 different countries. This situation reveals that although there has been an increase in the number of publications on the subject over the years, academic studies on this subject are insufficient in terms of global dissemination.

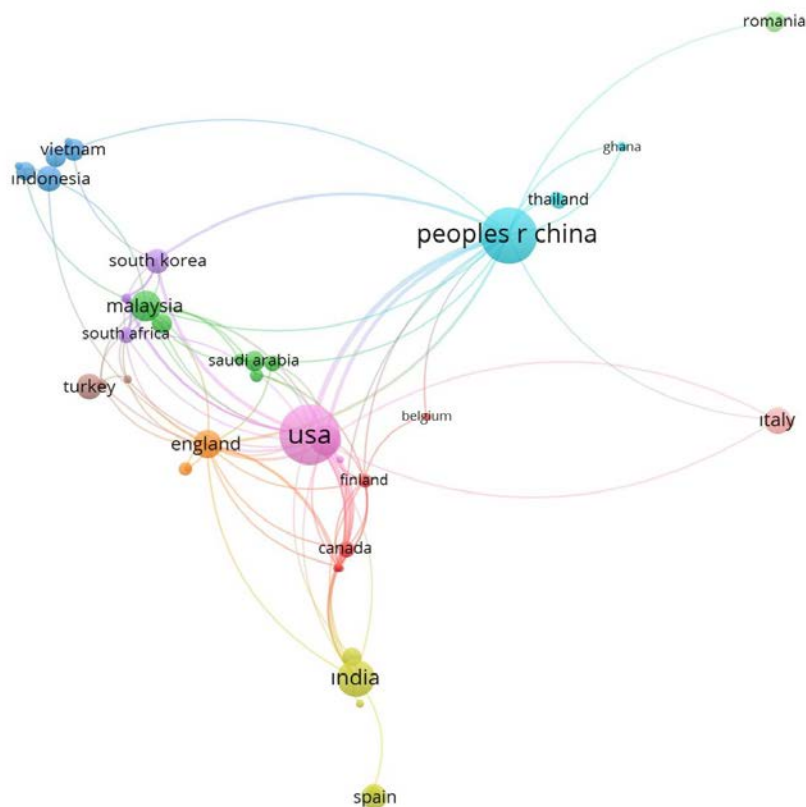
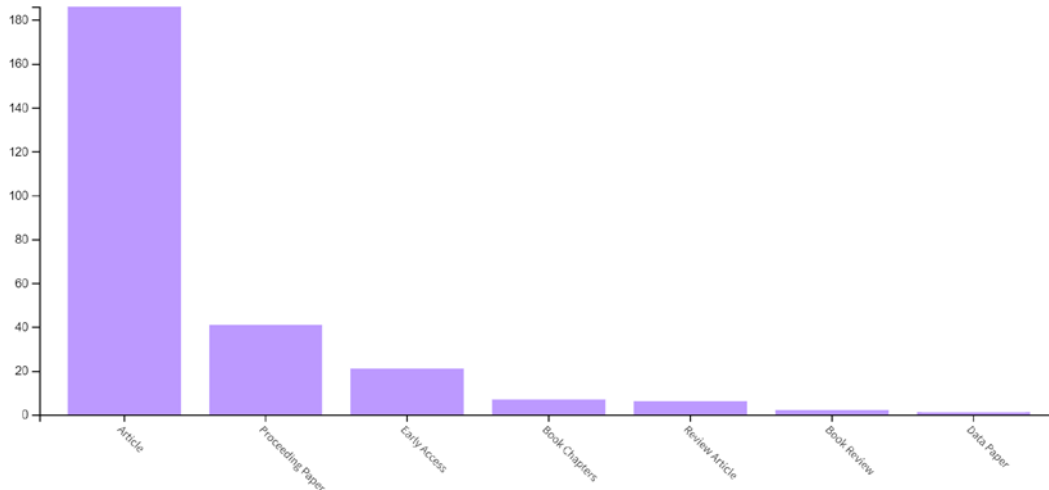


Figure 1. Countries and Links

Concerning the number of publications of the countries in Table 1, Figure 1 shows the international collaborations of the authors publishing in the relevant countries with other countries. According to Figure 1, prepared through VOSviewer, 37 of the publications in the USA, 32 of the publications in China, and 11 of the publications in India have emerged through international collaborations. Only 1 out of 10 publications in Turkey resulted from author collaboration; that country was Hungary.



Graph 4. Document Types

Graph 4 shows that most publications on social media marketing in tourism are articles. 79.4% of 234 publications, in other words, 186 of them are articles. Book chapters and review articles are arranged close to each other as 7 and 6, respectively. This data reveals the academic dominance of articles on this subject.

Table 2.
WoS Index

z	Frequency	%
Book Citation Index – Social Sciences & Humanities (BKCI-SSH)	7	2,99
Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)	85	36,33
Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH)	27	11,54
Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Science (CPCI-S)	16	6,84
Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED)	18	7,69
Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)	99	42,31

According to Table 2, the indexes in which the articles on social media marketing in tourism are most frequently indexed within the scope of WoS are SSCI with 99 articles, followed by ESCI with 85 articles. There are considerable differences in the number of articles between these two indexes, followed by other indexes. This finding supports Graph 4 and shows the prevalence of articles on the relevant study topic.

Table 3.
WoS Categories

z	Frequency	%
Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism	111	47,44
Business	61	26,07
Management	32	13,68
Environmental Studies	15	6,41
Economics	13	5,56
Environmental Sciences	11	4,7
Green Sustainable Science Technology	10	4,28

Web of Science categories classify completed academic studies under various categories. Table 3 shows the categories in which the studies on social media marketing in tourism are most frequently categorized within WoS and the number of studies in these categories. In addition, WoS categories with at least 10 studies are presented in Table 3. Accordingly, the “Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism” category leads the WoS categories with 111 studies and 47.44% of the studies. The second category is “Business,” with 61 studies and 26.17% of the studies, and the third category is “Management,” with 32 studies and a 13.68% share. With 10 studies and 4.28% of the studies, the “Green Sustainable Science Technology” category is at the bottom of the table. In another study that conducted a bibliometric analysis of bibliometric analysis studies in the field of tourism and hospitality, similarly, the category “Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism” was the most used. However, in the same study, the “business” category was expressed as the fifth category (Ülker et al., 2022, p. 805). The reason for this may be that the concept of marketing is not a keyword in the research.

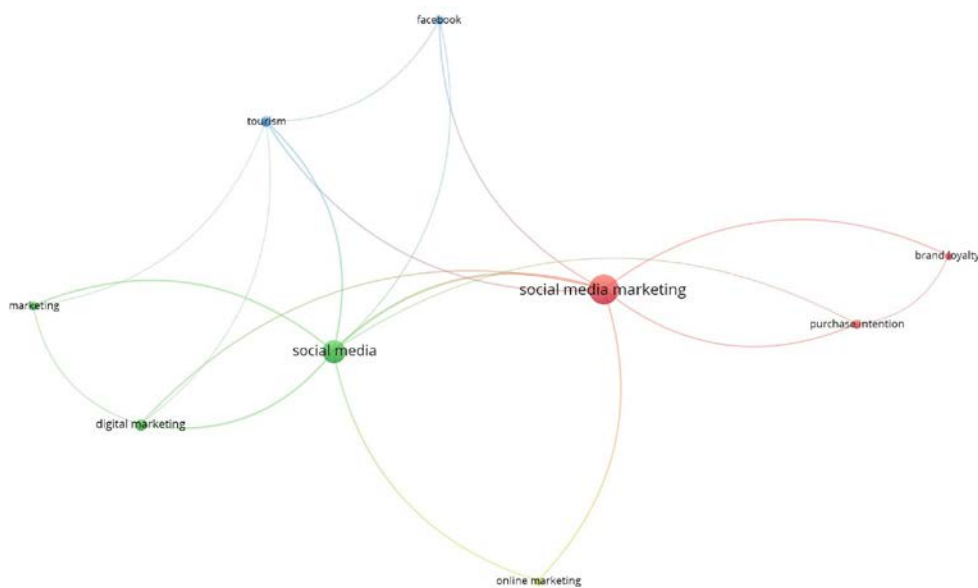


Figure 2. Most Chosen Keywords

A total of 794 keywords were used in tourism and social media marketing studies. Figure 2 shows the 9 most used keywords. Accordingly, social media marketing was used 100 times, social media 58 times, and tourism 14 times, sharing the top three places. In addition, in Figure 2, the link between keywords is drawn to show the other keywords where the 9 keywords are used together the most. Similarly, in Idbenssi et al.'s study (2023), “social media” was the most preferred keyword.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As social media continues to be widespread and consumers have smartphones in their hands at all times, social media marketing is a topic that remains attractive for businesses. In addition, the fact that many tourism-based posts are made on social media and that new pages are being created daily on social media solely on tourism reveals the relationship between tourism and social media. This situation emphasizes the importance of social media marketing in the tourism sector for both businesses and academic studies.

This research was conducted to reveal the trends and the big picture of research on social media marketing in tourism within the scope of the WoS database. Studies conducted from 2009 to the present day have been discussed within the scope of the research. As of 2009, the fact that the number of studies that started to emerge almost every year is an indication of how interesting this topic is. Parallel to this result, studies have emphasized that social media is a turning point in tourism and encourages information sharing (Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). It is recommended that researchers continue to produce new studies on this topic for different purposes. According to another conclusion, it would be appropriate for European countries, which are not in the top five when looking at the countries where the studies are published, to focus on more academic studies on this subject to take place in the first upper steps in the publication ranking.

As in almost every subject, the article is the most common type of study published on social media marketing and tourism. Similarly, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) stated that books and book chapters are not sufficiently emphasized in tourism. In order to increase the diversity of publications, it may be appropriate to create and disseminate an incentive system in terms of academic promotion criteria, academic work awards, etc., that will mobilize researchers to increase the number of book writing, book chapter writing, and proceeding papers. According to the WoS index, the publication rate in Book Citation Index - Social Sciences & Humanities (BKCI-SSH) is at the bottom with 2.99%. Various incentives and guidance would be appropriate to emphasize the importance of writing books and/or book chapters for researchers. It was revealed that the "Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism" category was the most used in the WoS categories, with a rate of 47%. However, when social media marketing and tourism issues are considered, it may be preferable to create a separate category called "Gastronomy" since gastronomy has become widespread worldwide and attracts attention in the tourism sector, and undergraduate education is given in universities under the name of Gastronomy. In support of this study, Garcia-Rosell and Makinen (2013) emphasized the importance of social media marketing in promoting gastronomy tourism. Although the study emphasizes the importance of social media marketing in the tourism sector, there is also a study that states that social media cannot always have a positive contribution and that negative comments that can spread quickly, especially in times of crisis, can damage the image of tourism destinations (Sigala, 2011).

It is important that future bibliometric studies on social media marketing and tourism are conducted regularly and at regular intervals to reveal the trends in this field. Likewise, with the emergence of new social media networks suitable for use within the scope of tourism, new research can be conducted on this subject, and even comparing the marketing methods among social media networks with the tourism dimension will contribute to this field. In addition, tourism businesses need to remain active in social media marketing. Especially with social media marketing, which provides individual rather than mass communication, it may be possible to provide e-wom by increasing consumer interaction. As a limitation of the research, it can be stated that only the data within the scope of WoS were analyzed. A bibliometric analysis using other databases will provide helpful information on the trend of research on social media marketing in tourism.

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In 2016, Reha completed his PhD and started his academic career at Anadolu University Eskişehir Vocational School marketing program in 2017. Reha has taught and continues to teach many courses, such as CRM, Digital Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Marketing Research, etc., at Anadolu University, both in EMYO and other faculties, mostly in marketing. Reha, who has published many papers, articles, books, and book chapters on marketing science, conducts most of his studies on the axis of digital marketing.