

Reviewing the Past to Inform the Future: A Literature Review of Social Media in Tourism

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Abstract

Acknowledging the significant advancement of social media, the role and impact of social media has been widely discussed in tourism research. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain an overview of the knowledge produced in relation to the topic. Review studies provide such overviews to guide future research efforts. This study reviews and analyses 152 tourism-related social media publications since 2008. Based on a qualitative systematic analysis of publications that address the topic from a consumer perspective, the paper identifies publication trends and highlights patterns in the topics, aims, and research designs of existing publications. Specifically, it captures a broader array of consumer-centric topics than previous reviews and highlights methodological gaps. Moreover, the research argues that there is still ample room for more research on social media in tourism, particularly as the existing literature neglects social media beyond review platforms while demonstrating that user-generated content greatly influences tourist behaviours and experiences.

Keywords

social media, systematic analysis, consumer perspective, tourism, literature review

JEL classification: Z32

Introduction

Social media has been defined as “internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content” (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 180). Gretzel, Kang, and Lee (2008, p. 100) defined consumer-generated content as “media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience and achieved or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers”. This content appears across a number of different platforms with varying functions such as blogs, microblogs, and social networking sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media’s evolution along with search engines (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and mobile technologies (Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013) has led to profound impacts on travel information search, travel decision-making, and the representation/communication and recollection of travel experiences. Social media impacts travel decision-making by supporting an active and informed consumer (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015). Social media’s influence in tourism spans across all aspects of a trip (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). For many travellers, social media has become indispensable (Lu, Chen, & Law, 2018; Bilgihan, Barreda, Okumus, & Nusair, 2016; Law et al., 2014).

The emergence of social media has not only changed consumer behaviour and the tourism industry but also tourism as a research field. Acknowledging the important role of social media in travellers’ decision-making and trip planning, during the last two decades, scholars have demonstrated a growing interest in understanding the role and impacts of social media in the tourism field (Law, Buhalis, & Cobanoglu, 2014). Trying to keep pace with the increasing number of research studies in this area, scholars have reviewed publications to determine how far research has progressed in this field. This has resulted in a number of social media in tourism-related review studies. Scholars have usually reviewed publications from both consumer and provider perspectives (e.g., Lu et al., 2018; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014) with few adopting a consumer-centric view (e.g., Uk-pabi & Karjaluo, 2018). A consumer-centric view emphasizes social media as cardinal platforms for the tourists to search for information, engage in trip planning, or share contents and differs significantly from the provider perspective, which deals with exploiting social media for market intelligence and marketing communications purposes. Mixing the two together risks overlooking concepts that are important in one area but not the other. Furthermore, the continued growth of social media in tourism literature means that even recent reviews have already missed significant advances in the literature. Therefore, it is the aim of this paper to present a review of consumer-focused research in the area of social media and tourism in order to extend the existing reviews in this area and to provide an overview, identify trends, and discern patterns that can inform future research.

Literature review

Systematic literature reviews are important for the progress of a field (Zarezadeh, Benckendorff, & Gretzel, 2018) and are especially relevant for a dispersed field of inquiry or ‘indiscipline’ like tourism (Tribe, 1997). Reviewing the literature is about gathering, classifying, and synthesizing the publications containing primary information (Cooper & Hedges, 2009). Systematic literature reviews are therefore a form of meta-analysis that uses previous research studies as data. However, based on the goal of this study, selection of previous research may vary. Therefore, central interests of the authors will define both inclusion and exclusion criteria. Despite such variations in the selection process, in discussing the advantages of meta-analysis, Hoffman (2015) argues that the process offers the opportunity to gather information from many small studies to provide broader insights. Particularly, the qualitative meta-analysis characterised as “a new and integrative interpretation of findings that is more substantive than those resulting from individual investigations” (Finfgeld, 2003, p. 894) provides avenues for additional insights and important guidance for future research. As such, systematic analysis not only assists in positioning of the existing literature, but also provides the opportunity to accelerate knowledge development in the field (Zarezadeh et al. 2018). Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel (2012) identified the meta-analysis, and specifically, the qualitative meta-analysis, as an important research approach in the tourism field.

Considering the increasing interest in social media in tourism, several scholars have attempted to review the literature in order to map the progress of the field. A collection of the existing review studies in the context of social media in tourism are presented in Table 1. Lu et al. (2018) indicate that the two major research streams in the field are “the use of social media by tourists at different stages of their travel planning process” and “the use of social media by service providers”. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that the existing review studies either focus on reviewing consumer-based (e.g., Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2017; 2018) or both consumer and provider-based studies (e.g., Leung et al., 2013; Lu et al., 2018).

Table 1 Review studies

Title/Author/Year	Perspective	Period	Database	Sample
What drives travelers' adoption of user-generated content? A literature review (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018)	Consumer	2005 to 2016	Google Scholar and specific databases, including Science Direct, SAGE, Wiley, Springer, Emerald, JSTOR, IEEE, Taylor & Francis, and Inderscience.	54 (51 articles from 28 journals, 1 conference paper, and 2 PhD dissertations)
Mapping the progress of social media research in hospitality and tourism management from 2004 to 2014 (Lu et al., 2018)	Consumer and provider	2004 to 2014	Science Direct, EBSCOHost, and Google Scholar. Social media articles published in the seven of the most influential hospitality and tourism journals were also collected.	105 journal articles
Sharing tourism experiences in social media; A literature review and a set of suggested business strategies (Sotiriadis, 2017)	Consumer and provider	2009 to 2016	Google Scholar and ScienceDirect	146 journal articles
Consumers' acceptance of information and communications technology in tourism: A review (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2017)	Consumer	2005 to 2016	Google Scholar and Web of Science were used first. Further search included ScienceDirect, SAGE, Wiley, Springer, Emerald, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR and Inderscience.	71 journal articles
A Review of Research on Electronic Word-of-Mouth in Hospitality and Tourism Management (Chen & Law, 2016)	Consumer and provider	2008 to 2013	Science Direct and EBSCOHost	43 journal articles
User-Generated Content as a Research Mode in Tourism and Hospitality Applications: Topics, Methods, and Software (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2014)	Consumer and provider	First publication to 2013	Google Scholar, Web of Science, and online archives of the top five tourism and top five hospitality journals.	122 (75 tourism and hospitality journals, 10 non-tourism and hospitality journals, and 37 conference proceedings)
What do we know about social media in tourism? A review (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014)	Consumer and provider	First publication to 2013	Web of Knowledge, EBSCOHost, and Google Scholar	279 (165 journal articles, 82 conference proceedings, 23 research degree theses, 4 electronic articles, 3 books, and 2 reports.

Title/Author/Year	Perspective	Period	Database	Sample
Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality: A Literature Review (Leung et al., 2013)	Consumer and provider	2007 to 2011	Science Direct, EBSCOHost and Google Scholar	44 journal articles

Source: own processing

The scope of these review publications varies from as few as 43 publications (Chen & Law, 2016) to 279 publications (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014) and there are small differences in terms of the approach adopted to identify publications to be included in the review. Even the most recent reviews stopped data collection at the year of 2016. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) underline the importance of comprehensiveness of review studies to be able to chart a path for future research. Along the same lines, Sotiriadis (2017) and Lu et al. (2018) call for the inclusion of more types of publications than just journal articles and also for the use of either multiple databases or more inclusive ones to ensure broad coverage of the field.

Systematic literature reviews provide important insights into the state-of-the-art of knowledge in a particular domain. The existing review studies identified a heavy focus on adoption-related studies (e.g., Ukpabi & Karjaluo, 2017), which is not surprising given the rather recent emergence of social media, as well as an emphasis on the pre- and post-travel behaviours of social media users (Lu et al., 2018). Sotiriadis (2017) identified antecedents of review use, the influence of online reviews on consumer behaviour, and the impact of these reviews on tourism businesses as the major themes. Ukpabi & Karjaluo (2018) also found out that a majority of research studies focused on Facebook and TripAdvisor rather than other platforms such as YouTube. The uniformity of the research is further underlined by most publications relying on theories derived from the fields of information systems, social psychology, and management (Ukpabi & Karjaluo, 2018). The research presented in this paper builds on these existing review studies and further extends them by exploring additional structural and content-related properties of relevant publications in the field of tourism-related social media research.

Methodology

In April 2018, Google Scholar was used to identify the studies on social media published in the last 10 years (2008–2018). Google Scholar was used for almost all the previous review studies (Table 1) and was therefore adopted to identify relevant publications. The timeframe was selected to cover a substantial part of the literature. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) argue that the history of social media publications in tourism and hospitality is not very long. They found out that the first social media related research in tourism and hospitality had been published in 2007. Leung et al., (2013) also discovered that there had been only ten full-length articles published from 2007 to 2009 (two, three, and five, respectively). The recent literature review on travellers' adoption of user-generated

content between 2005 and 2016 found no publications in the years of 2008 and 2009 (Ukpabi & Karjaluo, 2018). On the contrary, Chen & Law (2016), in providing an overview of eWOM in hospitality and tourism, found seven journal papers published between 2008 and 2010 (one, two, and four, respectively). As such, 2008 was deemed an appropriate starting point.

To provide a comprehensive review of all social media related publications, this paper expanded the search to include studies published in both tourism and non-tourism journals. In order to identify the studies, the keywords 'social media' or 'USG' or 'web 2.0' or 'travel review' coupled with 'tourism' or 'travel' or 'tourist' were searched. Terms referring to popular social media platforms were added to the keywords to identify additional studies; these terms included 'Facebook', 'Twitter', 'TripAdvisor', 'Weibo', 'Instagram'. In total, 27 keyword combinations were used. Up to 15 pages of Google Scholar results for each combination were reviewed, which resulted in identifying a total of 320 publications.

After retrieving the studies via Google Scholar searches, information about the relevant studies was imported into an initial spreadsheet. Then, two of the researchers first read the title, abstract, and in some instances, the full text of the article before deciding on classifying each as 'yes', 'no', or 'maybe' in terms of inclusion. As there is extensive research on social media, both inclusion and exclusion criteria were set. The inclusion criteria stipulated that the study must be tourism-related, must have a consumer focus, and must be published as an article, conference proceedings, or book chapter. In exploring the characteristics of eWOM, Chen and Law (2016) found out that the social media research between 2008 and 2013 had mainly focused on the consumer perspective. Ukpabi and Karjaluo (2017) also highlight the significant impact of social media on consumer acceptance of services and their behaviour in tourism. A focus on consumers is therefore justified. Furthermore, as social media is a fast-growing phenomenon and as suggested by Ukpabi and Karjaluo (2018), the inclusion criteria for the type of publication were expanded to include conference proceedings. Correspondingly, the exclusion criteria eliminated degree research theses and business reports, as well as provider-focused research. This procedure resulted in identifying a total of 152 publications published from 2008 to 2018, which represents a much bigger sample size compared to the other two consumer-based review studies that included 54 publications (Ukpabi & Karjaluo, 2018) and 71 publications (Ukpabi & Karjaluo, 2017), respectively.

For stage two, for each publication, important attributes such as author/s, title, publication year, abstract, keywords, and source title are recorded. Moreover, research focus (aim), theory used, data characteristics (which included data sources and sample size), and methodology (data collection and data analysis) for each publication, if applicable, were coded by two of the researchers and checked for validity by the third. These characteristics were then analysed using descriptive analyses to identify patterns/trends and reveal gaps.

Findings and discussion

In order to identify trends and research gaps, the 152 selected publications were analysed regarding their year of publication, source journal, frequency of keywords, research methodology and design, and aim of study.

Year of Publication

The number and types of publications published each year are presented in Table 2. The greatest proportion of publications were journal articles (93) followed by conference proceedings (45) and book chapters (13). In 2008, there were only 4 consumer-based publications (1 journal article and 3 conference proceedings) published on social media and tourism. The journal article is a conceptual study on UGC and empowerment of online travellers (Mendes-Filho & Tan, 2008). The number of publications grew over the next few years and reached a total of 18 publications in 2012 before dropping to 11 publications in 2013. This finding is in line with the findings of the study on mapping progress in social media research between 2004 and 2014 by Lu, Chen, and Law (2016), showing a rise in the number of journal articles in 2010. The drop in 2013 also corresponds to the drop in 2014 identified by Lu et al. (2018). A similar drop from 81 publications in 2012 to 58 in 2013 is reported by Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) although their data does not include publications for the last month of 2013.

Table 2 Frequency of publications from 2008 to 2018

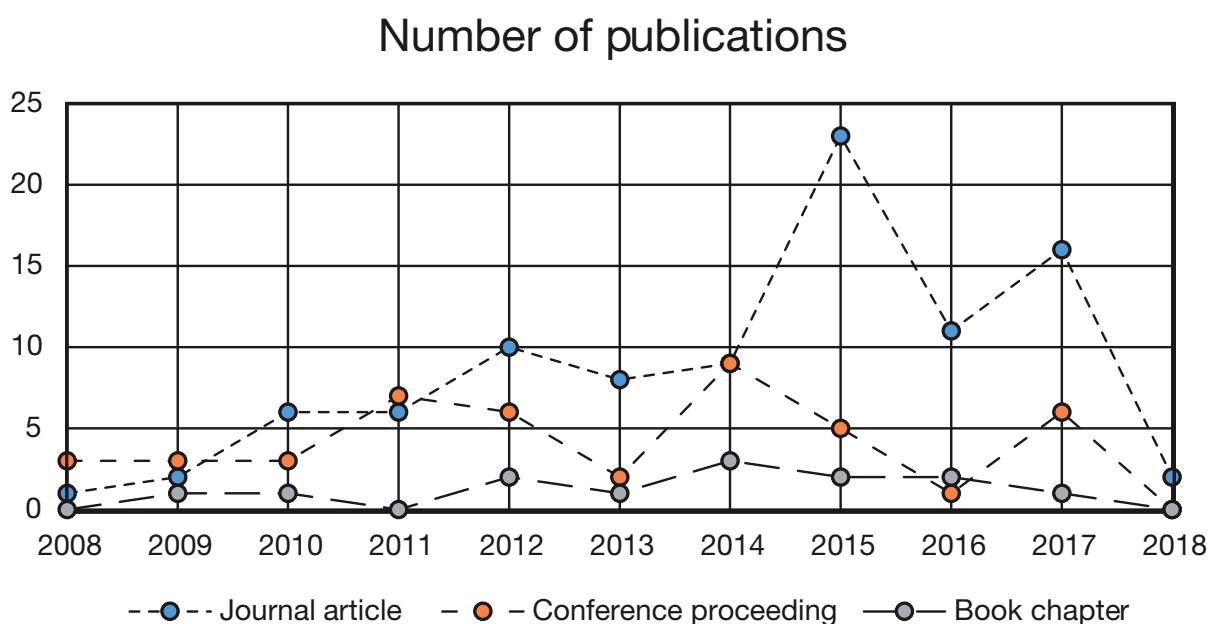
Year	Journal Article	Conference Proceeding	Book Chapters	Total number of publications
2008	1	3	0	4
2009	2	3	1	6
2010	6	3	1	10
2011	6	7	0	13
2012	10	6	2	18
2013	8	2	1	11
2014	9	9	3	21
2015	23	5	2	30
2016	10	1	2	13
2017	17	6	1	24
2018	2	0	0	2
Total	94	45	13	152

Source: own processing

As it can be seen in Table 2, the number of publications grew dramatically again in 2014 and 2015 (21 and 30, respectively). The year of 2015 is also the year in which the highest number of journal articles was published (23 in total). However, the number of publications drops again in 2016. While it rises to 24 publications (17 journal articles) in 2017, the overall pattern indicates that 2015 was indeed the peak year for consumer-based social media publications related to travel and tourism.

The greatest proportion of the identified publications were journal articles (94; 61.8%), followed by conference proceedings (45; 29.6%), and book chapters (13; 9.6%). Figure 1 shows that there were more conference papers than journal articles in the first two years (2008 and 2009). The number of journal articles increased drastically in 2010, and from 2011 on, the number of journal articles consistently remains higher than the number of conference publications with one exception in 2014 when there is an equal number of journal articles and conference proceeding. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) argue that the reason for the dramatic growth in the number of journal articles is that after 2010 more leading journals such as *Tourism Management* and the *Journal of Travel Research* started acknowledging the emerging topic of social media in tourism. As such, 2010 can be identified as the year when the consumer-based research on social media became mainstream in tourism.

Figure 1 Type of Publication by Year of Publication



Source: own processing

A total of 94 journal articles identified in this study were published in 60 different journals (24 tourism and 36 non-tourism journals), suggesting that literature reviews for future research studies need to reach beyond the top tourism journals. The number of articles published in each journal varied from 1 to 8 articles (Table 3). The first journal paper identified in this study is “An overview on user-generated content and the em-

powerment of online travellers” published in *Revista da Farn Natal* (Mendes-Filho & Tan, 2008) and the latest journal paper is “‘Troll Alert!’ Provocation and harassment in tourism and hospitality social media” published in *Current Issues in Tourism* (Mkono, 2018). The journals which published most articles are *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management* (8 papers), *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology* (6 papers), *Annals of Tourism Research* (4 papers), *Current Issues in Tourism* (4 papers), and *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (4 papers). Out of 26 articles published in the four leading journals, only one was published in 2009 and the other 25 articles were published from 2010 to 2018.

Table 3 List of source journals

Journal	Number	Percentage
Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	8	8.6%
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	6	6.4%
Annals of Tourism Research	4	4.3%
Current Issues in Tourism	4	4.3%
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	4	4.3%
Information Technology & Tourism	3	3.2%
Journal of Travel Research	2	3.2%
Behaviour & Information Technology	2	2.1%
Electronic Commerce Research	2	2.1%
Information & Management	2	2.1%
Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	2	2.1%
Journal of Pragmatics	2	2.1%
Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism	2	2.1%
Journal of Tourism	2	2.1%
Journal of Vacation Marketing	2	2.1%
Narrative Inquiry	2	2.1%
Tourism Management	2	2.1%
Transportation Research Part C: Emerging Technologies	2	2.1%
Other journals	41	43.6%

Source: own processing

Keywords

In order to identify the main topics of the studies in our sample, the keywords were subjected to stemming (e.g., ‘reviews’ was changed to ‘review’) and then analysed. The most frequent keywords overall were ‘Social media’ (45 counts), ‘UGC’ (38), ‘Review’ (23),

‘Tourist’ (19) and ‘E-WOM’ (18). In order to capture progress in the field, we compared the frequency of keywords among publications in the early stage (2008-2012) and the recent years (2013-2018). After eliminating the words ‘social media’ and ‘UGC’, which were the most frequent keywords in both periods, interesting patterns emerged (Table 4). First, reviews (especially those on TripAdvisor) continue to be the social media type that is researched the most. Second, while the early publications were more concerned with social media adoption for travel planning, the publications in the second phase focus more on situating the research within the broader contexts of e-WOM and overall consumer behaviour.

Table 4 Comparing word frequency used in keywords

Word Frequency	2008–2012	Word Frequency	2013–2018
Travel	7	Tourist	16
Review	6	Review	15
Travel planning	4	E-WOM	13
TripAdvisor	4	TripAdvisor	11
Internet	4	Consumer behaviour	6

Source: own processing

Research methodology and design

There are multiple research designs associated with tourism-related social media studies. Table 5 outlines the research designs identified in the studies. Quantitative designs (54%) are used more often than other research designs. This approach was mainly applied to studies focused on topics such as use of social media in trip planning (pre, during, and post) (Guy, Mejer, Nus, & Raiber, 2017; Kim, Lee, Shin, & Yang, 2017), consumer adoption of social media (Chung, Han, & Koo, 2015), user-generated content and tourist behaviour (Yu, Carlsson, & Zou, 2014), and influence of factors such as trust and motivation to use social media (Huang et al., 2010; Yoo & Gretzel, 2010). Fewer studies applied qualitative research designs (17%), mostly those focused on topics such as social media content and its characteristics (Ferguson, Piché, & Walby, 2015; Jeacle & Carter, 2011) and understanding of travellers’ use of social media (Mendes-Filho, Tan, & Milne, 2010). The majority of the conceptual papers (22.4%) focused on subjects such as exploring and explaining social media platforms and conceptualizing the influence of social media on travel decision-making (Chou, 2017; Minazzi, 2015), or proposing models for different aspects of social media such as validation of user-generated content (Kim et al., 2016).

Table 5 Research designs

	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	Count	%
Qualitative	1		1	2	3	1	4	6	3	4	1	26	17 %
Quantitative	1	5	7	8	7	7	13	15	6	12	1	82	54%
Conceptual	1	1	2	2	6	2	1	7	4	8		34	22.4%
Descriptive	1			1	2	1	2	1				8	5.3%
Mixed method							1	1				2	1.3%
Total												152	100%

Source: own processing

Table 6 summarizes the data collection methods employed in the studies. Researchers adopted seven different research methods to collect their data; interviews, content extraction, case study, online survey, survey, experiment, and focus group research. The content extraction was applied by 36.3% of researchers in the field and therefore constituted the most dominant approach. The studies using the content extraction methods focused mostly on collecting reviews from different platforms (Vásquez, 2012) and mainly analysed the data to understand topics related to the satisfaction of travellers (Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu, & Okumus, 2016). The studies that extracted other types of contents such as photographs were rare. Scholars applied both online surveys (20.1%) and traditional surveys (27.1%) to collect data. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) also identified surveys as a method prominently used by studies focusing on social media users or travellers. Less than 20 percent of publications applied other data collection methods such as interviews (4.4%), case studies (9.4%), experiments (0.86%), or focus groups (1.8%). While our finding is in line with the finding by Lu et al. (2018) that various research methods were applied to the study of tourism-related social media phenomena, Table 6 shows an alarming lack of both experimental as well as in-depth qualitative research in the field.

Table 6 Data collection method

	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	Total	%
Content extraction	1	1	5	4	6	3	3	11	4	5		43	36.3%
Survey		1	1	1	2	3	8	7	2	6	1	32	27.1%
Online Survey			2	1	4	3	3	5	4		2	24	20.1%
Case study	1			1	1		3		2	2	1	11	9.4%
Interview	1						1	2		1		5	4.4%
Focus Group				1	1							2	1.8%
Experiment		1										1	0.86%
Total												118	100%

Source: own processing

Study aims

The publications were classified into six categories based on their aim and objectives: 1) social media and their general use by travellers; 2) social media adoption and use; 3) social media-related consumer behaviours; 4) social media and trip planning; 5) social media and tourists' sociodemographic characteristics; and, 6) evaluation of reviews (Table 7). The social media and their implications category consists of publications that aimed to understand and examine the key characteristics of social media (e.g., Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2015) and how travellers can use social media (e.g., Eftekhari, Barzegar, & Isaai, 2010). The social media adoption-related publications investigate the factors that influence the adoption of social media by travellers (e.g., Chung et al., 2015; Filieri & McLeay, 2014) and social media use and creation by travellers (e.g., Yoo & Gretzel, 2016). The publications further aim to examine social media perceptions such as trust or credibility and reliability (e.g., Del Chiappa, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2010), perceived usefulness (e.g., Hwang & Park, 2015), and general attitudes of travellers towards social media (e.g., Mendes-Filho, Tan, & Mills, 2012). Motivations is another sub-category which contains the publications that aim to explore what drives social media use (e.g., Huang, Basu, & Hsu, 2010).

Table 7 The aims and objectives of studies

Study aim categories	Study aim sub-categories
Social media and their general use by travellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key characteristics of social media • Travellers use of social media
Social media adoption and use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors influencing social media adoption • Social media use and creation • Social media perception • Social media perceived usefulness • General attitudes toward social media • Motivation to use social media
Social media-related consumer behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist satisfaction • Impact of satisfaction on review behaviours • Tourist behaviour due to social media adoption
Social media and trip planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of social media in trip planning • Social media use in information search • Decision making in the context of trip planning • Role of social media in different stages of trip
Social media and tourists' sociodemographic characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of nationality and culture on social media use
Evaluation of reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of positive and negative reviews on travellers • Examine traveller experiences by analysing review contents

Source: own processing

The social media-related consumer behaviours category includes the publications attempting to understand topics such as how social media influences tourist satisfaction and how satisfaction influences review behaviours (e.g., Narangajavana Kaosiri et al., 2017). Tourism behaviour is another sub-category which examines changes in tourist behaviour due to social media adoption (e.g., Díaz-Meneses, 2017; Zhong, Yang, & Zhang, 2014). The social media and trip planning category describes the publications that examine the role of social media in trip planning (e.g., Sigala, 2010), social media used by travellers to search for information when planning (e.g., Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and decision making in the context of trip planning (e.g., Osei & Abenyin, 2016). Researchers also attempt to investigate the role of social media in different stages of trip planning such as pre, during, and after the trip (e.g., Scott & Frew, 2014).

The publications in the category of tourists' sociodemographic characteristics mostly examine nationality or culture and their effect on social media use (e.g., Chen, Guevara Plaza, & Alarcón Urbistondo, 2017; Magnini, Kara, Crotts, & Zehrer, 2012; Syed-Ahmad, Hashim, Zubairi, & Murphy, 2008; Wilson, Murphy, & Fierro, 2012). The evaluation of reviews contains the publications that focus on different types of reviews and their influence on travellers such as positive and negative reviews (e.g., Dickinger, Lalicic, & Mazanec, 2017) and examining traveller experiences by means of analysing review contents (e.g., Yu, Li, & Jai, 2017).

The previous review papers argued that consumer-related studies mainly focused on the use and impact of social media (Leung et al., 2013), the antecedents of social media use, as well as the use of behaviours and their impacts on tourist behaviour and trip planning (Sotiriadis, 2017). While these are indeed prominent themes in our sample as well, the identified themes indicate that a broader array of topics have been covered.

Conclusion

This study offers several useful insights into the progress of social media research in tourism. Particularly, it suggests that the focus on the consumer perspective (as previously pursued by Ukpabi & Karjaluto, 2017; 2018) should be indeed warranted and will grow in relevance with the noticeable increase in consumer-related publications in this area (Chen & Law, 2016). Navio-Marco, Ruiz-Gomez, and Sevilla-Sevilla (2018) also argue that consumer-centricity is central to understanding technology-related topics in tourism. Furthermore, while Lu et al. (2018) discuss a pattern of introduction, growth, maturity, and decline, our research identifies ups and downs and shifts in the publication types, but also the mainstreaming of the topic and significance beyond the core tourism publication outlets.

As far as the topics are concerned, this literature review identified a development away from the adoption for and impacts on trip planning to broader topics of e-WOM, consumer behaviour, and satisfaction, but it also illustrates the continuing focus on travel reviews. The platforms beyond TripAdvisor are largely ignored and recent developments in social media towards more visual contents (Gretzel, 2016) are not yet reflected in the

published research. Topics such as the processing of social media posts, their relationship to other tourism information, the role of social media in ongoing search rather than trip planning, their significance in travel identity construction, their contribution to new forms of sociality among travellers, their mediation of relationships with travel providers and destinations, and their non-adoption or disadoption remain largely untouched. At the same time, the study uncovered a lack of experimental research and qualitative research designs that could foster deeper understandings and theory building in this field. This indicates that there is ample room for additional publications that move away from the travel reviews and apply the innovative research designs. Accordingly, we find no indication of this field having reached maturity, with many avenues for exploration remaining open.

Social media has fundamentally changed the information and communication landscape in tourism (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and while individual platforms might become less relevant or even disappear, the notions of user-generated content creation, reviewing/rating, and sharing will continue to influence tourism-related marketplaces, tourist behaviours, and tourism experiences. Furthermore, while national, regional or cultural differences exist, social media is a global phenomenon. It is important for tourism research to explore social-media related developments from a variety of perspectives and with a multiplicity of methods to be able to capture the complexity and the manifold impacts.

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