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The 60-year journey of communication in tourism: A bibliometric analysis

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Background: The convergence of tourism and communication has evolved substantially over the past 60 years, driven by the pervasive influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). As these domains have increasingly intersected, tourism communication has emerged as a vital field of academic inquiry.

Aim: This study advances the field of tourism communication by identifying key convergence points between tourism and communication scholarship and by outlining a structured research agenda for the future.

Setting: The analysis focused on peer-reviewed journal articles in the social sciences indexed in the Scopus database, with specific emphasis on English-language publications addressing tourism and communication.

Method: It employed bibliometrics to analyze 3597 publications using performance analysis and science mapping. VOSviewer and Biblioshiny were used to visualise institutional and thematic networks within the field.

Results: It revealed prominent publication trends, influential authors and institutions, and emerging thematic clusters, which encompass the role of ICT and social media in tourism management, social context mobile (SoCoMo) marketing strategies, user-generated content in tourism communication, smart tourism and destination marketing.

Conclusion: It demonstrates that tourism communication has matured into a distinct and dynamic research area. The identification of key themes provides valuable direction for future studies. The practical implications include the integration of social media and ICT use into the tourism business, the adoption of resilient crisis management strategies, and the sustainable practices in the tourism sector.

Contribution: This study offers a comprehensive overview of six decades of research in tourism communication and by establishing a robust foundation for future scholarly exploration in this interdisciplinary field.

Keywords: tourism; tourism communication; information and communication technologies; social media; bibliometric analysis.

Introduction

In the social sciences, intersections in interdisciplinary fields have emerged when researchers from different disciplinary perspectives realise that they share a common area of interest (Martin, Nightingale & Yegros-Yegros 2012). The complex nature of tourism phenomena and the interrelation of its concepts have led researchers to adopt various disciplines in tourism studies (Sigala et al. 2021). Communication is one such discipline, and there are numerous articles that examine both fields through an interdisciplinary approach. Subsequently researchers argued that the accelerating and synergistic interaction between Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and tourism has led to fundamental shifts in perceptions of the nature of the hospitality and tourism industry (Buhalis & Law 2008), and that because of the novel nature of this technology, its significance for the tourism sector remains relatively ambiguous (Egger 2013), various literature reviews have been conducted to assess the progress of research on ICTs (Law, Leung & Chan 2020).

The development of ICTs has fundamentally transformed the concept of communication (Liu-Lastres 2022) while simultaneously reshaping tourism on a global scale (Buhalis & Law 2008). This transformation has facilitated the development of a wide array of new tools and services, enabling global interaction among players worldwide (Buhalis & Law 2008). Particularly in the

Note: Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article as Online Appendix 1.

last decade, ICTs have led to profound changes in the hospitality and tourism sectors, playing an increasingly significant role in the industry (Foris et al. 2020; Lee 2022; Lu et al. 2015; Song, Hwang & Park 2024), offering unique opportunities for tourism and hospitality businesses (Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu 2014).

Practitioners in the accommodation sector have widely adopted and implemented ICTs within their businesses to enhance operational efficiency, improve service quality and reduce costs (Ip, Leung & Law 2011). For instance, the use of ICTs has resulted in increased operational efficiency, reduced costs and improved services and customer experience (Foris et al. 2020), with many hospitality businesses reporting improvements in the performance of front-office staff (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal 2017). Some ICT applications have even directly contributed to reducing energy demand in the hospitality sector (Molina-Collado et al. 2022).

The impact and integration of ICTs on the tourism industry have significantly heightened the interest of tourism researchers in this domain, leading to studies that have systematically analysed this field and identified research trends (Buhalis & Law 2008; Ip et al. 2011; Law et al. 2014, 2020; Molina-Collado et al. 2022; Pahrudin, Hsieh & Liu 2023). Moreover, tourism and communication intersect on a wide range of issues. Topics such as tourism communication (Cuic Tankovic, Kapeš & Benazić 2023; Koo et al. 2016; Minazzi 2022; Molina et al. 2020; Salgado Moreno et al. 2024; Zhou et al. 2021), mobility (Hannam, Butler & Paris 2014; Lu et al. 2015), communication technologies (Hailey Shin, Jeong & Cho 2021; Kozłowska-Adamczak, Essing-Jelonkiewicz & Jezierska-Thöle 2024; Pesonen & Horster 2012), crisis communication (Liu, Kim & Pennington-Gray 2015; Liu-Lastres 2022; Pachucki, Grohs & Scholl-Grissemann 2022; Park, Kim & Choi 2019), marketing (Buhalis & Sinarta 2019; Labanauskaitė, Fiore & Stašys 2020; Pachucki et al. 2022; Semerádová & Vávrová 2016; Viglia, Minazzi & Buhalis 2016), social media (Kitsios et al. 2022; Liu et al. 2015; Minazzi 2022; Molina et al. 2020; Pachucki et al. 2022; Park et al. 2019), loyalty (Abbasi et al. 2024; Ng et al. 2023), trust (Li, Teng & Chen 2020; Palácios, De Almeida & Sousa 2021; Williams & Baláž 2021), satisfaction (Abbasi et al. 2024; Ng et al. 2023) and ecotourism (Chai-Arayalert 2020; Chi 2021; Go, Kang & Nam 2020; Kozłowska-Adamczak et al. 2024) are directly linked to the hospitality and tourism industry. It is important to note, however, that ICTs provide a solid foundation for these topics as well. Therefore, ICTs should not be considered separately from other communication-related aspects in tourism.

This study reviews articles that have explored the intersections between tourism and communication on a large scale since 1964, seeking to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the publication trends in the field of tourism and communication?

RQ2: What are the main research clusters?

RQ3: What are the future research directions for tourism communication?

This study undertakes a comprehensive literature review, summarising the relevant theoretical frameworks within the fields of Tourism and Communication. While the existing literature includes numerous works addressing the intersections of these two disciplines, much of the research remains limited in scope and insufficient in providing a thorough analysis of these fields' intellectual development. In particular, significant gaps exist in the literature regarding systematic examinations of interdisciplinary intersections and their evolution over time. Although a recent systematic and bibliometric study on tourism communication (Salgado Moreno et al. 2024), attempts to uncover the underlying concepts and main trends in the field of tourism and communication, it is restricted to a specific field of research in the field of communication, namely visual communication and narrative studies, and thus fails to provide a comprehensive and holistic examination of the 'tourism communication'. Therefore, this study aims to address these deficiencies by presenting a detailed synthesis of the current body of knowledge in these intersecting disciplines and providing a justification for the chosen methodology.

By mapping the intellectual trajectory of these fields over the past 60 years, the study seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of their evolution. Drawing on the Scopus database, in conjunction with Web of Science (WoS), which archives scientific studies, documents and citation records (Cobo et al. 2011), the research reviews articles published since 1964. This comprehensive analysis not only traces the evolution of key themes but also identifies major research clusters (see Online Appendix 1 for cluster items) and emerging trends within the field. Through this approach, the study aspires to make significant and original contributions to the intellectual structure and future directions of Tourism and Communication research.

Methods

Researchers have sought to shed light on how disciplines evolve by examining their epistemologies, domains of knowledge and/or intellectual structures (Köseoglu, Sehitoglu & Parnell 2015). Metrical analysis methods have been employed to identify the intellectual structure of scientific disciplines, with bibliometric analysis being one of these methods (Köseoglu et al. 2015). Bibliometric methods are used to map research specialisations (Zupic & Čater 2015). Science mapping, or bibliometric mapping, aims to create bibliometric maps that describe how specific disciplines, scientific fields or research areas are conceptually, intellectually and socially structured (Cobo et al. 2011). Science mapping utilises bibliometric methods to examine how disciplines, fields, specialisations and individual articles are related to one another (Zupic & Čater 2015) and, at its core, is a combination of classification and visualisation (Boyack & Klavans 2014).

This descriptive article aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the key characteristics of tourism communication

literature through a bibliometric analysis. This study presents a clear summary of the research advancements in tourism communication, helping both researchers and practitioners identify significant impacts from authors, affiliations and institutions, countries, research topics and references (Heersmink et al. 2011).

The data for this bibliometric study were extracted from Scopus on 01 August 2024. Scopus was selected as the primary database because of its widespread acceptance and extensive coverage of the academic studies, making it the preferred choice for analysing the scientific publications in the social sciences context (Vieira & Gomes 2009). The search utilised the terms 'tourism communication' and 'tourism AND communication', ensuring that these terms appeared in the title, abstract or keywords of the publications stored in Scopus. The inclusion of quotation marks in the search terms helped to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the results (Liu et al. 2013). The search was focused on literature within the social sciences to provide insight into the current state of tourism and communication research within this context. The study was further narrowed to include only English-language research articles published in academic journals, as the primary goal was to identify trends in peer-reviewed studies employing research methods. Additionally, English-only article were selected because of the authors' linguistic proficiency. The complete search query is presented next:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ('tourism communication') OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ('tourism' AND 'communication') AND LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'SOCI') OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'BUSI') OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'ARTS') OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'PSYC') OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'ECON') AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, 'ar')) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, 'j')) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, 'English')).

In total, 3657 publications related to tourism communication were identified and exported to a .csv file. After a close screening of the dataset, which required the authors to read the titles and abstracts of each publication and the main text where necessary to identify the non-duplicate publications addressing the topic of 'tourism communication', the authors omitted 24 recurrent and 36 irrelevant documents from the dataset before proceeding to the bibliometric analysis process. The articles were excluded from the final dataset if they addressed only the communication or tourism field, if they were not written in English or if they were not published as a research article in journals, which focused on the subject areas of social sciences, business, arts, psychology and economics. Eventually, 3597 publications were analysed in terms of performance analysis and science mapping through the freely available software programs VOSviewer and Biblioshiny. While Biblioshiny was used for performance analyses to reveal the most prominent authors, institutions, countries and keywords, VOSviewer was utilised for science mapping techniques such as bibliographic coupling and co-citation analysis (Donthu et al. 2021). Considering the research questions that require the authors to determine the main bibliographic status of the field of research, as well as

the scientific map of themes, which lead the scholarly knowledge of 'tourism communication', these programmes were deemed to be suitable because they help researchers find out the main scientific knowledge and bibliographic information regarding the relevant literature.

The detailed explanation of the visualisations is provided in the results section. Generally, the interpretation is as follows: the size of the circles and the font size of the labels indicate the frequency of occurrences, the colours denote different clusters and the proximity between the two circles illustrates their relatedness and similarity (Khalil & Gotway Crawford 2015; Rizzi, Van Eck & Frey 2014). The x-axis and y-axis hold no specific significance, allowing the maps to be rotated or flipped (Khalil & Gotway Crawford 2015).

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

This section provides the results of a bibliometric analysis of the tourism communication literature. The results are presented under two subheadings: performance analysis results and science mapping results.

Performance analysis results

This study analyses 3597 documents published between 1964 and 2025 by 1029 sources. The document average age is 7.26, and the annual growth rate is 24.88%. As seen in Figure 1, over the last few decades, the number of scientific articles has dramatically increased and appears to have plateaued around 2021–2022. This decrease may be in part a result of incomplete data for the 2023–2024 publishing years, or it might reflect fewer publications overall. Regarding the citations over the years, the yearly citation averages fluctuated more. The sharp spike in 1988 may have been the result of a pivotal article or event within the scientific community. Following that, the mean citations per article tended to increase with time as well – the research appearing in journals of any given suit became more visible. The recent decline could also align with those same production graph reasons.

The dataset includes publications written by 7855 authors. The number of the authors of single-authored documents is 737, which is the one-tenth of the total author number. This means that most of the publications belong to more than two authors. The top five most prolific authors are Dimitrios Buhalis (total publication [TP] = 22; total citations [TC] = 3336; publication year start [PY_start] = 2000), Rob Law (TP = 22; TC = 986; PY_start = 2007), Ying Wang (TP = 19; TC = 980; PY_start = 2002), Lori Pennington-Gray (TP = 16; TC = 780; PY_start = 2011), Daniel R. Fesenmaier (TP = 15; TC = 2934; PY_start = 1993) and Lorenzo Cantoni (TP = 14; TC = 206; PY_start = 2012). To reveal the productivity of the authors publishing in this field,

the Lotka's Law was applied to the dataset, and according to the author productivity figure (see Figure 2), it can be asserted that the scientific productivity (c = 86.60%) is substantially skewed, and much of the published work comes from a few authors. This is also evidence of Lotka's Law, which proposes that authors contribute most of the documents, and many more have written very little. The 3-fold drop-off from one document to multiple documents indicates that the potential or willingness of authors diminishes substantially when their work increases (Su et al. 2019).

This study finds that the top 10 most prolific institutions are located in four different continents, including Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania. The most prolific institution is the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Hong Kong, TP = 109), followed by Griffith University (Australia, TP = 66), Sun Yat-Sen University (China, TP = 52), The University of Queensland (Australia, TP = 52), Kyung Hee University (South Korea, TP = 51), University of Surrey (United Kingdom [UK], TP = 50), University of Florida (United States of America [USA], TP = 47), James Cook University (Australia, TP = 43), Huaqiao University (China, TP = 42) and University of Valencia (Spain, TP = 42). In a similar vein, this study investigates the country collaborations in the field of tourism communication (see Figure 3), and ascertains that the top 10 most-collaborating countries include USA-China (TP = 40), China-Australia (TP = 26), China-Hong Kong (TP = 26), China-UK (TP = 23), USA-Korea (TP = 23), USA-UK (TP = 21), Spain-Portugal (TP = 19), Spain-UK (TP = 17), USA-Hong Kong (TP = 15), UK-Italy (TP = 14), USA-Australia (TP = 14), UK-Australia (TP = 13) and UK-Hong Kong (TP = 10). The diversity of the countries in the collaboration is also clear from the international co-authorship rate. The international co-authorship rate has been determined to be 22.52%, meaning that a quarter of the documents available in the analysed dataset belong to authors from different countries.

The authors from different countries on different continents publish their articles in 1029 different sources, namely journals. As can be seen in Table 1, the top h-index (62), g-index (117), and the highest TC of 14083 place 'Tourism Management' journal first among all journals in this table. This means it has a high influence and is highly

cited in its field. Moreover, the relatively young 'Sustainability (Switzerland)' with an m-index of 2.417 published quite a high number of papers (NP) (179 publications) making it rank first, but still on par, granting it a seemingly fast gain in importance across disciplines starting its voyage back in 2013. To sum up, although older journals such as 'Tourism Management' and 'Annals of Tourism Research' have built an influence over time, the table shows that newer journals such as 'Sustainability (Switzerland)' are catching up quickly.

Bradford's Law is a bibliometric principle that describes how articles are distributed across journals within a specific field of study. According to Bradford's Law, journals in a given field can be divided into three 'zones' based on the number of articles they publish (Su et al. 2019). As illustrated in Figure 4, Zone 1 (Core Zone) contains the fewest number of journals but the highest number of articles, turning them into the most influential journals in the field. In the middle zone is Zone 2, which covers more journals than Zone 1, but each journal in this Zone publishes fewer articles than those in Zone 1. Lastly, the 'peripheral zone' or Zone 3 is the zone where the largest number of journals can be found, each contributing the fewest number of articles (Su et al. 2019). In the context of this study, Zone 1 covers 21 journals, which are the most determining and impactful journals likely to publish a disproportionately large number of the most cited or most important papers in the field. Zone 2 contains 133 journals, which contribute significantly to the field but with a lesser concentration of key articles. They may be counted as the more specialised journals which serve as secondary sources of tourism communication research. Finally, Zone 3
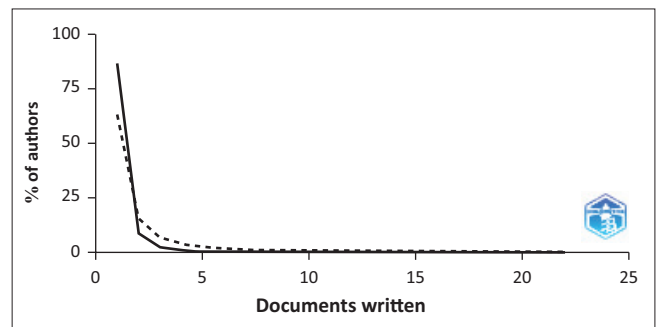

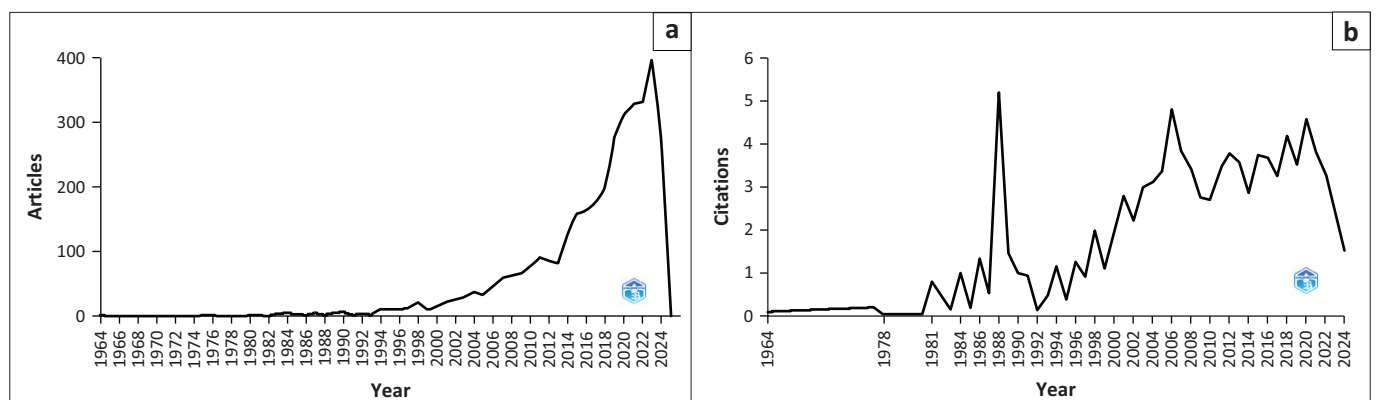**FIGURE 2:** Author productivity through Lotka's Law.

FIGURE 1: Combined production citation showing (a) the annual scientific production, and (b) the average citations per year.
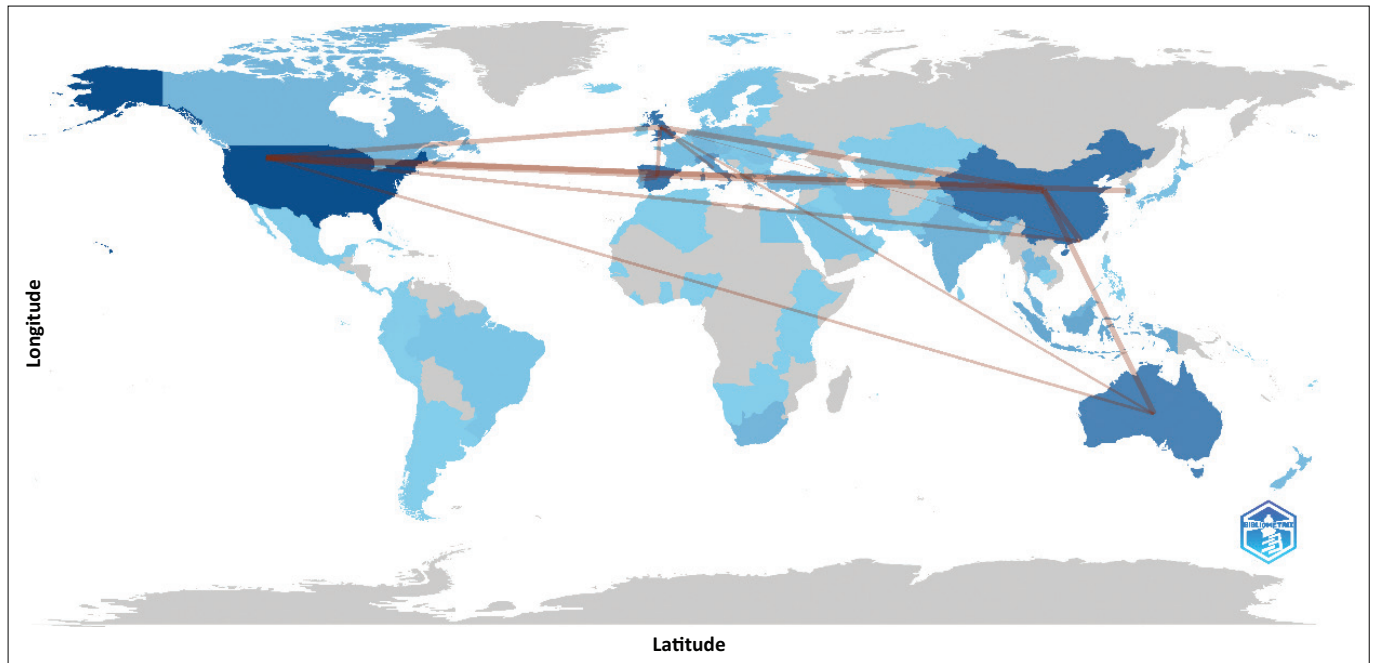
FIGURE 3: Country collaboration map.

TABLE 1: Most prolific sources.

Sources	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Sustainability (Switzerland)	29	42	2.417	3000	**179**	2013
Tourism management	62	117	1.476	**14 083**	153	1983
Current issues in tourism	30	56	1.250	3271	78	2001
Journal of sustainable tourism	42	68	1.400	4723	76	1995
Journal of travel research	30	64	0.732	4100	68	1984
Annals of tourism research	40	67	0.889	7153	67	1980
Journal of tavel and tourism marketing	30	48	0.938	2427	57	1993
Asia Pacific journal of tourism research	18	27	0.947	817	52	2006
African journal of hospitality, tourism and leisure	9	15	1.125	292	47	2017
Journal of vacation marketing	26	44	0.867	2319	44	1995

Note: The bold values indicate the highest values within their respective columns.

TC, total citations; NP, number of papers; PY_start, publication year start.

includes 875 journals, making it the largest zone with relatively few articles. Despite being less influential individually, they collectively provide a wide base of knowledge. This pattern – where the number of journals increases from Zone 1 to Zone 3, while the number of articles per journal decreases – perfectly aligns with the principles of Bradford's Law. It illustrates that a few journals are highly productive and central to the field, while the majority of journals contribute fewer articles and are less central.

This study examines 9665 author keywords. Among the top 10 most used author keywords, 'tourism' comes first with 548 occurrences, followed by 'social media' (n = 170), 'communication' (n = 136), 'COVID-19' (n = 101), 'sustainable tourism' (n = 98), 'sustainability' (n = 88), 'ICT' (n = 84), 'destination image' (n = 70), 'marketing' (n = 65) and 'hospitality' (n = 53). The keyword 'tourism' appears most frequently, indicating that it is the central theme of the majority of the studies. This suggests that the research field is heavily focused on various aspects of tourism. The second most frequent keyword is 'social media', which highlights the growing interest in the impact and role of social media within

the tourism industry. It may reflect studies on how social media influences tourist behaviour, destination marketing or community engagement. The prominence of 'communication' suggests a significant focus on how information is exchanged within the tourism context, potentially covering topics such as marketing communications, public relations and interpersonal communication in tourism services. This analysis of author keywords reveals the central themes and emerging areas of focus within tourism research. The dominance of 'tourism' as a keyword underscores the broad interest in various aspects of the tourism industry. Simultaneously, the notable occurrence of keywords such as 'social media', 'communication', 'COVID-19' and 'sustainability' points to current and evolving trends that are shaping the direction of research in this field. This data suggest that researchers are particularly interested in the intersections of tourism with technology, sustainability and the impacts of global events such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. What is more, by considering the author keywords, this study presents the thematic map below, which visually represents the relationship between different themes in the field of tourism communication.

The thematic map (see Figure 5) provides a snapshot of the research landscape in the field of tourism communication. It highlights the most important and well-developed themes ('tourism,' 'communication' and 'marketing') while also identifying foundational themes that are central to the field but may require further development ('social media,' 'COVID-19,' 'destination image,' 'sustainable tourism,' 'ict' and 'sustainability'). The presence of specialised topics ('satisfaction,' 'trust,' 'loyalty,' 'China,' 'ecotourism' and 'management') indicates niche research areas, while emerging or potentially declining themes such as 'cultural tourism,' 'cultural heritage' and 'climate change' suggest areas of growing interest or diminishing focus.

Science mapping results

The results based on science mapping techniques include the bibliographic coupling and co-citation results of the bibliometric analysis on the 'tourism communication' literature extracted from the Scopus database.
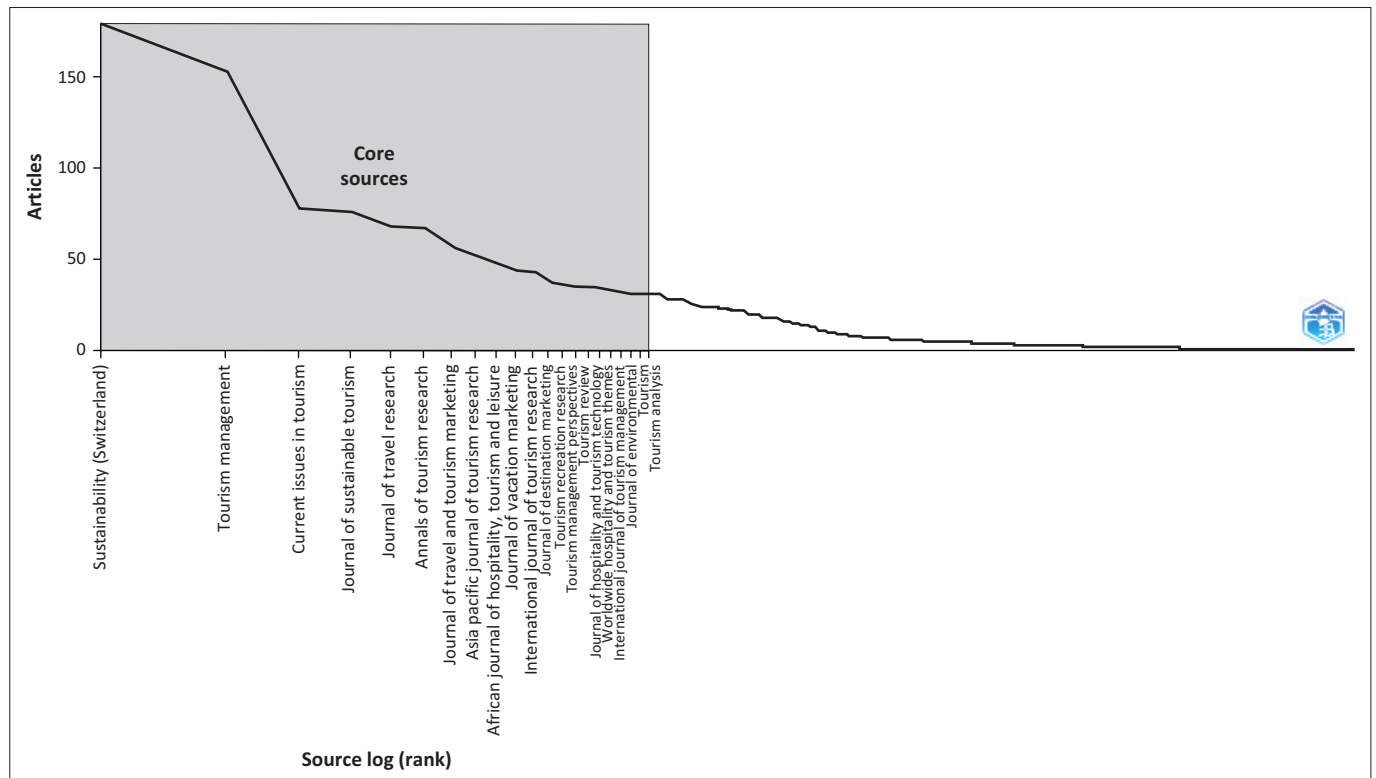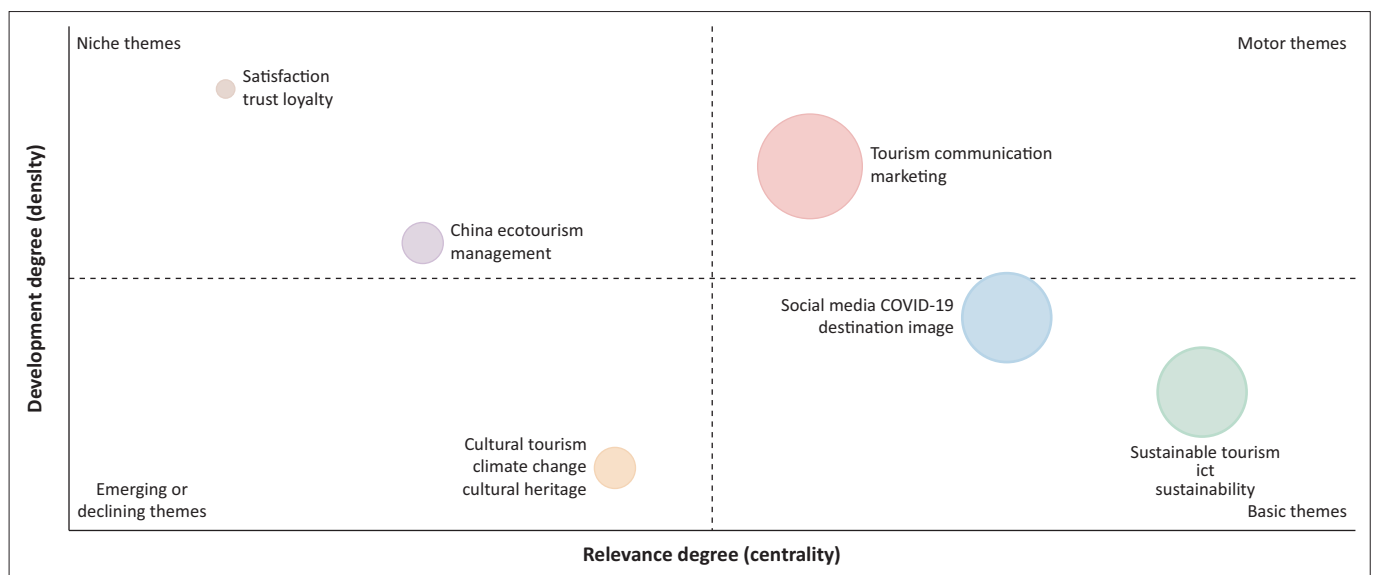

FIGURE 4: Core sources by Bradford's Law.

ict, information and communication technologies.

FIGURE 5: Thematic map.

The bibliographic coupling analysis conducted via VOSviewer using a minimum of 250 citations per document resulted in five clusters with 28 items connected with 56 links. Bibliographic coupling clusters documents according to the number of works cited in common, signifying that materials within each collection are tightly interconnected regarding the literature referenced (Donthu et al. 2021). The interrelationships between sources spread across clusters, as it appears in Figure 6, yet articles belonging to a single grouping demonstrate pronounced interconnections through shared references. When the clusters were examined closely, it was observed that the first cluster (A) was comprised of seven items and based on the topic they addressed, it was determined that cluster A was dealing with issues related to the role of ICT and stakeholders in sustainable tourism communication. The second cluster (B), formed with six items, was found to address the issues, which could be named under the theme of 'SoCoMo marketing strategies in tourism and hospitality'. The third cluster (C) also included six items concentrated on the issue of 'the impact of social media and user-generated content in tourism communication'. The fourth cluster (D) with five items addressed the theme of 'the role of professionalism and smartphones in the tourist experiences of the tourism services.' Ultimately, the theme of the fifth cluster (E), containing four items, was determined to be 'the role of electronic word-of-mouth and information search behaviour in destination image'.

The clusters of the documents illustrated in Figure 7 were derived from a co-citation analysis of a minimum of 250 citations of a cited reference. In this type of analysis, documents are assembled based on co-citations; that is, they have been cited together in other research articles (Donthu et al. 2021). The five clusters with 36 items and 354 links available in the figure show five different research themes in tourism communication and management.

As is clear from the co-citation analysis figure (see Figure 7), the clusters are seemingly close to each other, showing the interrelationships between the clusters. The first cluster (A) was formed with 10 items, and this cluster centres on smart tourism and the strategic role of ICT in tourism management. It highlights how technology, especially smart tourism, is leveraged to enhance destination competitiveness and the
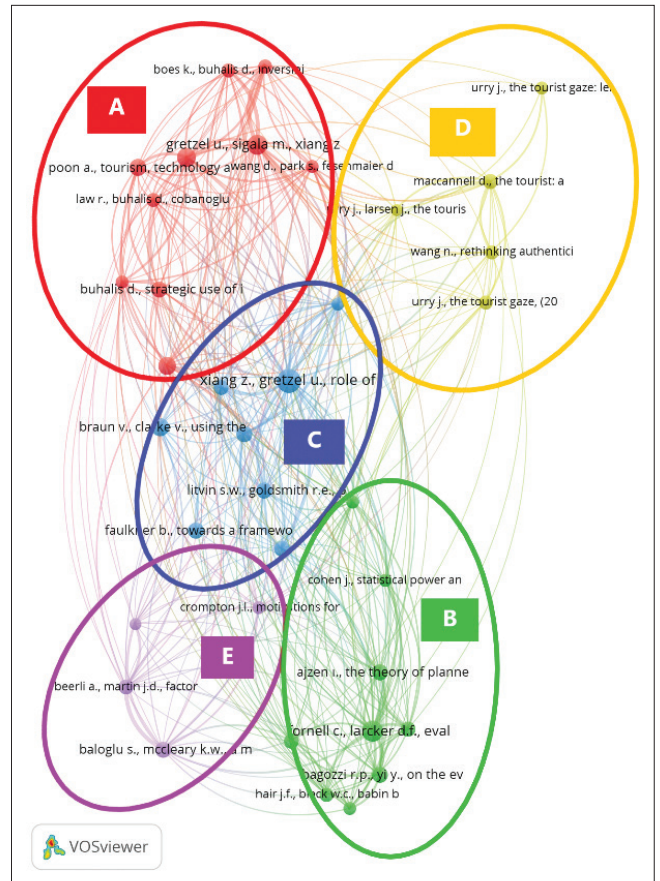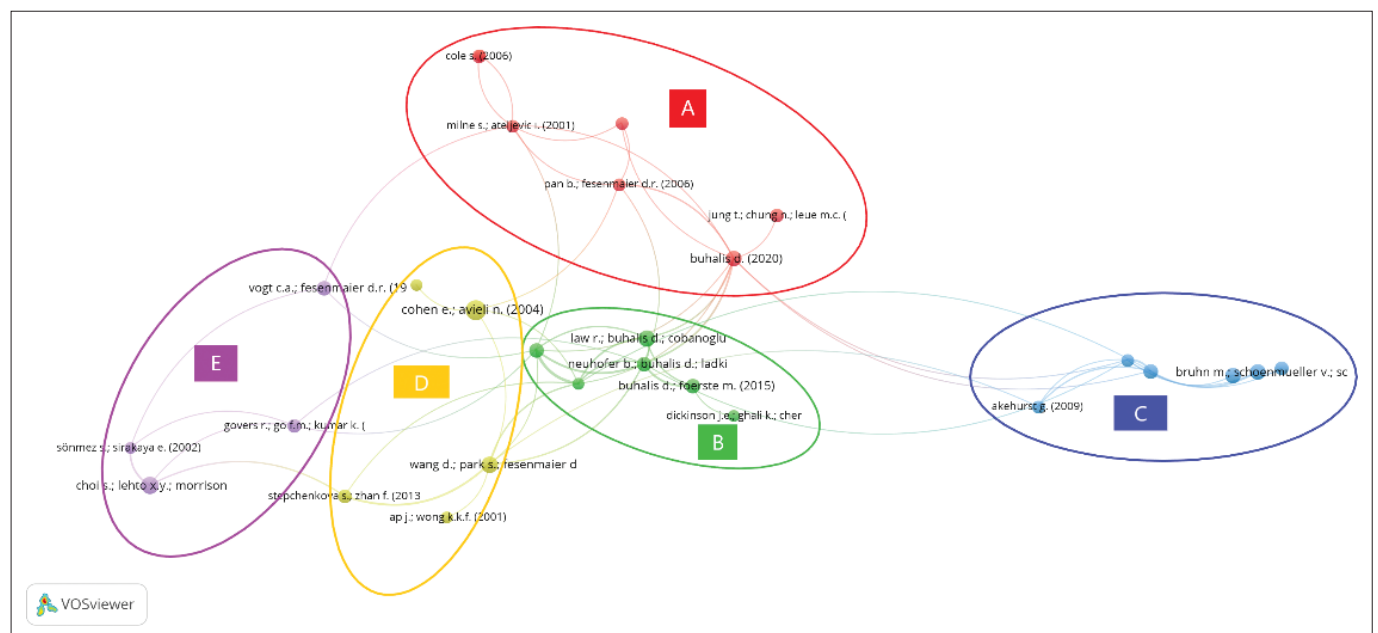

FIGURE 7: Co-citation.

FIGURE 6: Bibliographic coupling.

overall tourism experience. The second cluster (B) comprised nine items and was methodological, focusing on behavioural theories and advanced statistical techniques (such as SEM – structural equation modelling) commonly applied to research in tourism. These methods are significant for the validation of the models used to predict tourist behaviour and attitudes. The third cluster (C) with eight items revolves around the role of social media in tourism, particularly in terms of user-generated content and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). The fourth cluster (D), including five items, centres on the theoretical foundations of tourism, especially the concept of 'the tourist gaze' and issues related to authenticity and perception in tourism. It delves into how tourists perceive and experience destinations, influenced by cultural and social factors. Finally, the last cluster (E) with four items focuses on the destination image and the factors that impact how tourists perceive and experience the destinations. The items in this cluster are based on studies on the travelling motivations and how these motivations shape the perception and image of the destinations, especially in terms of the online context.

Conclusion, implications and limitations

Theoretical implications

The findings of this study offer several theoretical implications. Firstly, the research expands the theoretical framework by emphasising the intricate interaction between ICTs and the evolving research domain of tourism communication. These findings align with existing frameworks that emphasise the strategic role of technology in enhancing destination competitiveness and tourist experiences (Buhalis 2000; Gretzel et al. 2015). Similarly, the prominent role of 'social media' as a frequent keyword and research theme highlights its theoretical importance in understanding modern tourism dynamics. The impact of social media on tourist behaviour, destination marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) suggests that communication in tourism is becoming increasingly decentralised and user-centred. This shift aligns with technological determinist communication theories, such as Harold Innis's, as social media and ICTs enable users not only to actively receive targeted messages but also to co-produce or even generate their own content on digital platforms, where the tourism sector engages with (potential) customers for sustainable management. Thus, this shift challenges traditional communication models and requires an updated conceptual framework that integrates digital and social media platforms into the tourism ecosystem (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Xiang & Gretzel 2010). Secondly, through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of scholarly contributions since 1964, this study reveals the multifaceted nature of tourism communication, providing a deeper understanding of the intellectual progression within the field. Identifying emerging and basic themes such as sustainability, COVID-19 and destination image suggests theoretical discussions that have evolved in response to global challenges. These themes encourage a rethinking of traditional tourism communication

theories, encouraging scholars to include sustainability practices, crisis communication and resilience-building in their frameworks. The rapid expansion of research on sustainability reflects the increasing need for theoretical models that consider the long-term environmental, social and economic impacts of tourism. Moreover, it uncovers theoretical gaps in tourism communication, emphasising the necessity of integrating interdisciplinary approaches. By looking at tourism communication as a field of study, this article informs that the field is not restricted only to the field of tourism or communication as a base, but also inclusive of topics addressed by disciplines such as medicine and information engineering. This stresses that the relevant field is directed by the theoretical perspectives embodied in different disciplines. Thirdly, this analysis enriches the theoretical discourse by mapping the evolution of core research clusters, such as trust, satisfaction, loyalty in tourism, the impact of social media and crisis communication. The topics driving the development of this field include the core research interests in the fields of psychology, sociology, engineering and sustainability science. Eventually, the research findings reinforce the relevance of behavioural theories and advanced statistical techniques, such as SEM, as evidenced by a cluster of methodological works. These theories are critical for validating models of tourist behaviour and motivations, which are crucial in predicting destination choice, satisfaction and loyalty. The use of these quantitative techniques enriches the theoretical understanding of how tourists make decisions, interact with destinations and form perceptions, supporting established models such as the 'Theory of Planned Behaviour' (Ajzen 1991). In conclusion, this research establishes a solid foundation for future theoretical advancements, particularly those exploring the intersection of and communication within tourism and hospitality.

Managerial implications

This study provides several important practical insights for tourism managers, marketers and policymakers. A key managerial implication is the identification of ICT and social media as critical themes in tourism communication, which emphasises the need for tourism businesses to strategically invest in digital platforms and technologies. Destination marketing organisations (DMOs) should leverage social media and user-generated content (e-WOM) to engage tourists, shape destination images and drive engagement. Given the growing influence of social media, managing an effective online presence is crucial for enhancing customer experience and boosting destination visibility.

Another managerial implication of this study is that the strong focus on 'sustainability' highlights the growing importance of sustainable practices in the tourism industry. Managers should prioritise environmentally responsible operations and promote sustainable tourism options to meet rising consumer demand. In addition, the increased attention to themes such as 'COVID-19' suggests that tourism operators must develop resilient crisis communication strategies to manage disruptions and maintain trust with travellers during crises. The study also underscores the value of

collaborations across countries and institutions, which can lead to innovation and best practices sharing. Policymakers and tourism leaders should foster international partnerships to enhance knowledge transfer, improve tourism policies and support destination recovery efforts post-pandemic. Furthermore, the analysis of top-performing journals and prolific institutions provides managers with insight into the leading research outlets and key experts in the field, enabling them to stay informed on cutting-edge trends and innovations in tourism communication. Engaging with these sources can support evidence-based decision-making and strategy development.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This article is not free of some theoretical and methodological limitations, which can be addressed and eliminated by future research. Firstly, this study relies exclusively on data from Scopus, which, while comprehensive, may not include all relevant publications from other databases such as WoS, Google Scholar or regional journals. This could lead to the omission of important works, particularly those published in non-English or regionally focused journals. Future studies could expand the dataset by incorporating publications from additional databases such as WoS or subject-specific repositories. This would offer a much more holistic view of the field and capture regionally focused or non-English publications.

Secondly, because of the authors' linguistic capabilities, this study included only English-language articles, potentially excluding valuable research published in other languages. This may skew the analysis towards Western perspectives and under-represent studies from non-English-speaking regions. To eliminate this, future research can expand the scope to include non-English language publications, offering a more globally representative view of tourism communication. This could reveal unique trends and theoretical developments in regions under-represented in current analyses.

Thirdly, the study limited its scope to publications in social sciences, which may overlook relevant interdisciplinary contributions from fields such as environmental sciences, economics and technology. This narrow focus may reduce the comprehensiveness of the findings related to tourism communication. Future research can overcome this limitation by employing a more comprehensive perspective, not only restricting itself to the social sciences.

Fourthly, the study focused solely on peer-reviewed journal articles, excluding grey literature (e.g. reports, theses and conference proceedings). This limitation means that potentially significant practical contributions from the industry or early-stage research may be omitted, leading to a less comprehensive understanding of tourism communication research.

Finally, this study relies on the bibliometric method, which primarily focuses on quantitative data such as citation counts and publication numbers. This approach may overlook qualitative aspects of research contributions, such as the depth, originality or practical impact of individual studies. As a result, some influential works with fewer citations or those published in less-cited journals might be under-represented. Similarly, it utilised two specific tools, VOSviewer and Biblioshiny, for bibliometric analysis. While these tools are robust for visualising networks and performing performance analyses, they are limited in terms of analysing more nuanced relationships between articles or authors. More advanced techniques, such as text mining or natural language processing (NLP), could reveal deeper insights into thematic patterns that traditional bibliometric tools may miss. Furthermore, bibliometric analysis typically counts citations without considering the context in which an article is cited. Not all citations are positive or indicative of high-quality work; some could be critiques or disagreements. Future research could include qualitative citation analysis to understand how and why certain works are cited, providing a more nuanced picture of an article's influence.

Acknowledgements

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