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Mapping Research Trends in Digital Marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth in the Hospitality Industry: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: The rapid development of digital technology has transformed marketing strategies in the hospitality industry. Digital marketing and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) have become widely discussed topics due to their influence on consumer perceptions and behavior. This study aims to map research trends in digital marketing and electronic word of mouth within the hospitality industry during the period 2015–2026. A bibliometric approach was employed using publication data retrieved from the Scopus database. A total of 35 relevant articles were analyzed using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny to identify publication growth, leading sources, productive authors, highly cited documents, dominant keywords, and research topic trends. The findings reveal a significant increase in publications after 2020, with the highest number of publications recorded in 2025. The International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management and the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology emerged as the most productive publication sources. Keyword analysis indicates that digital marketing, online reviews, social media, and electronic word of mouth are the most dominant research themes. Furthermore, recent studies have expanded toward topics such as artificial intelligence, big data, consumer trust, brand reputation, and customer satisfaction. The results suggest that research in this field has evolved from focusing on digital promotional tools to a broader understanding of consumer behavior and digital technologies in the hospitality industry. This study contributes to the literature by providing an overview of research developments and identifying opportunities for future research.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Electronic Word Of Mouth; Hospitality Industry; Bibliometric Analysis; Research Trends.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers, particularly within the hospitality industry. Digital transformation has encouraged hotels to utilize various digital platforms as effective tools for promotion, customer communication, and relationship management. Consequently, digital marketing has become one of the most widely adopted marketing strategies because of its

ability to expand market reach, strengthen customer engagement, and support consumers throughout the decision-making process (Kotler et al., 2021; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). The importance of digital marketing in the hospitality sector has continued to increase alongside the widespread use of the Internet, social media, and mobile technologies, which have changed the way travelers search for information and make hotel reservations (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Leung et al., 2013; Kapri & Sharma, 2024; Ahmad & Gharde, 2026).

In addition to digital marketing, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as one of the most influential factors in hospitality marketing. eWOM refers to the exchange of opinions, experiences, and recommendations shared by consumers through digital platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Compared with company-generated promotional messages, user-generated content is generally perceived as more objective, authentic, and trustworthy by potential customers (Litvin et al., 2008). Consequently, online reviews, customer feedback, and recommendations shared through social media have become critical information sources that shape consumers' perceptions of hotel quality and influence their purchasing decisions (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). Previous studies have consistently reported that positive online reviews significantly increase consumers' intentions to book hotels through digital platforms, whereas negative reviews may reduce purchase intentions and damage brand reputation (Leung et al., 2013; De Pelsmacker et al., 2018).

The continuous development of digital platforms has further expanded the scope and influence of eWOM within the hospitality industry. Travelers no longer rely solely on official hotel websites but increasingly obtain information from social media, online travel agencies (OTAs), travel forums, and customer review platforms. This shift has strengthened consumers' dependence on digital information before making purchasing decisions (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Leung et al., 2013). Llorens-Marin et al. (2023) found that customer experiences shared through digital platforms significantly influence potential customers' perceptions of hotel service quality. Similarly, Li et al. (2024) reported that digital marketing activities play a crucial role in shaping consumer decision-making within the hospitality sector. More recently, researchers have begun to investigate the integration of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data into digital marketing strategies to enhance customer experience, personalize marketing activities, and improve organizational performance in hospitality businesses (Kumari et al., 2025).

The increasing adoption of digital marketing and eWOM has stimulated a growing body of research in hospitality and tourism marketing. Previous studies have examined the influence of social media on travelers' decision-making, the effectiveness of digital content in fostering customer engagement, and the role of eWOM in shaping hotel image and reputation (Clark et al., 2023; Vasumathi & Ambrose, 2024). More recent research has also explored the application of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data, to support digital marketing strategies in the hospitality industry (Kumari et al., 2025).

Despite the growing number of studies on digital marketing and eWOM, most existing research has focused on examining the relationships among variables within specific contexts. Comprehensive reviews that systematically map the development of the literature remain relatively limited, particularly those that analyze publication trends, leading publication sources, influential articles, keyword evolution, and the thematic development of research in the hospitality industry. Such literature mapping is essential for providing a comprehensive understanding of knowledge development, identifying dominant research themes, and uncovering potential research opportunities that warrant further investigation (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Donthu et al., 2021).

Bibliometric analysis has become one of the most widely used approaches for mapping the development of scientific knowledge through the analysis of scholarly publications, citation patterns, author productivity, and the relationships among research topics (Aria & Cuccurullo,

2017; Zupic & Čater, 2015; Donthu et al., 2021). This approach enables researchers to obtain a systematic understanding of the intellectual structure of a research field while identifying emerging trends and future research directions.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to map the development of research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth in the hospitality industry using a bibliometric approach. The analysis is based on publications indexed in the Scopus database during the period from **2015 to 2026**. Specifically, this study seeks to identify publication trends, leading publication sources, influential articles, keyword evolution, and the thematic development of research related to digital marketing and eWOM in the hospitality industry. The findings are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the intellectual landscape of this research area and offer valuable insights for future studies.

This study is designed to address the following research questions:

1. How has research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the hospitality industry evolved during the period 2015–2026?
2. Which journals and authors have been the most productive in publishing research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth in the hospitality industry?
3. Which publications have had the greatest academic influence based on citation performance?
4. What are the dominant keywords and research themes in studies on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth within the hospitality industry?
5. What are the emerging research trends and future research opportunities in digital marketing and electronic word of mouth in the hospitality industry?

METHODS

This study employed a bibliometric analysis approach using Biblioshiny, a web-based interface of the Bibliometrix package developed in the R programming environment. The bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database by searching for publications related to digital marketing, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and the hospitality industry. The search strategy utilized a combination of predefined keywords, including *"digital marketing"*, *"electronic word of mouth"*, *"eWOM"*, *"hotel"*, and *"hospitality"*. These keywords were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR to ensure comprehensive and relevant search results.

The inclusion criteria comprised research articles and review articles published in English between 2015 and 2026 that focused on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth within the hospitality industry. In addition, only publications related to the disciplines of business, management, tourism, and hospitality were included to ensure consistency with the objectives of the study.

The initial search yielded a number of publications, which were subsequently screened based on topic relevance, document type, publication year, and alignment with the research objectives. After applying the inclusion criteria and screening process, 35 publications were retained for the final analysis.

The selected dataset was analyzed using Biblioshiny to examine publication trends, identify the most productive publication sources and authors, determine the most influential publications based on citation performance, and explore the evolution of author keywords and research themes over time. Furthermore, bibliometric techniques were employed to map the intellectual structure of the field and identify emerging research trends in digital marketing and electronic word of mouth within the hospitality industry. The overall research procedure adopted in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

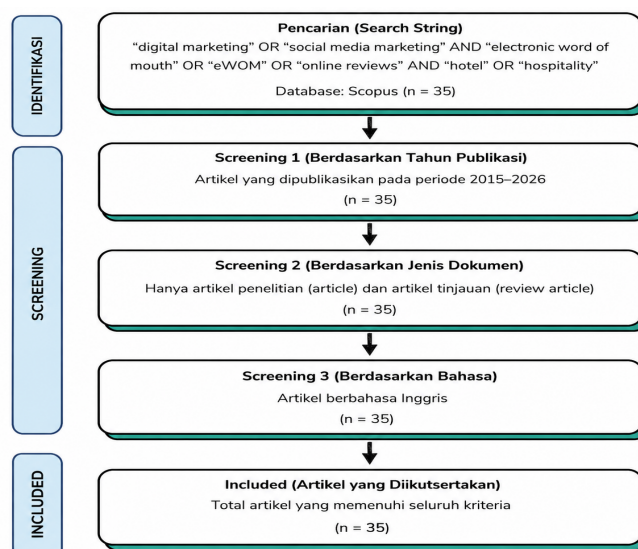


Figure 1. Article selection process prism diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Dataset Characteristics

The bibliometric analysis began by examining the general characteristics of the research dataset retrieved from the Scopus database. This initial analysis provides an overview of the dataset, including the number of documents analyzed, publication sources, authorship patterns, author keywords, citation performance, and collaboration indicators. These characteristics are essential for assessing the quality, reliability, and scope of the dataset used in the bibliometric analysis.

Based on the analysis conducted using Biblioshiny, a total of 35 documents published between 2015 and 2026 were identified from 29 publication sources. These publications involved 99 authors, with only two documents being single-authored. This finding indicates that research on digital marketing and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the hospitality industry is predominantly conducted through collaborative efforts among researchers.

The dataset also contains 148 author keywords (DE), reflecting the diversity of research themes explored in the selected literature. Collectively, the publications cited 2,646 references, with an average document age of 4.03 years. Furthermore, the average citation rate reached 62.2 citations per document, indicating that studies in this field have made a substantial academic contribution to the advancement of digital marketing and hospitality research.

From the perspective of research collaboration, each publication was authored by an average of 2.94 researchers, while the proportion of internationally co-authored publications reached 22.86%. These findings suggest that research on digital marketing and electronic word-of-mouth has expanded beyond national boundaries and increasingly involves collaboration among scholars from different countries. The relatively high level of international collaboration reflects the growing global interest in this research area, driven by the rapid digital transformation of the hospitality industry.

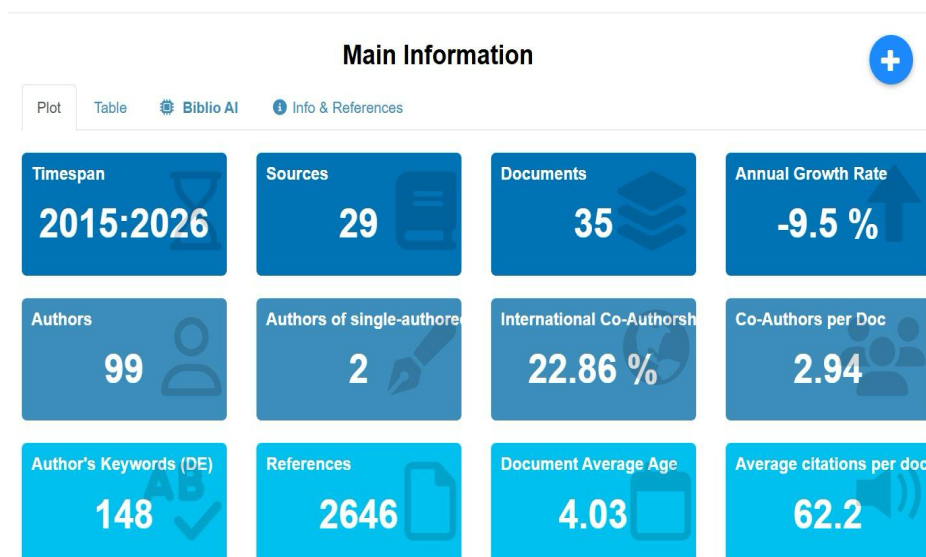


Figure 2. Characteristics of the Research Dataset

Annual Scientific Production

The annual scientific production provides an overview of the development of research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in the hospitality industry over time. This analysis is important for identifying publication trends and understanding the level of scholarly attention devoted to the topic.

Based on the Biblioshiny analysis presented in Figure 3, publications related to digital marketing and electronic word of mouth in the hospitality industry were relatively limited during the period from 2015 to 2022. During these years, the number of publications fluctuated between one and three articles per year, indicating that research in this field was still in its early stage and had not yet attracted broad academic attention.

A noticeable increase in publication output began in 2023, followed by substantial growth in 2024. The highest number of publications was recorded in 2025, with ten articles, demonstrating a significant rise in research interest. This upward trend reflects the increasing importance of digital technologies, online consumer engagement, and electronic word of mouth in the hospitality sector. The acceleration of digital transformation following the COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged researchers to investigate how digital marketing strategies and online customer reviews influence consumer behavior and business performance.

Although only one publication was recorded in 2026, this figure should not be interpreted as a decline in research activity because the data collection was conducted before the completion of the publication year. Therefore, additional publications are expected to be indexed in Scopus as the year progresses.

The publication trend indicates that digital marketing and electronic word of mouth have become increasingly important research topics in hospitality studies. The consistent growth in scientific output suggests that these topics will continue to attract scholarly attention as digital technologies evolve and become more integrated into hospitality marketing practices.

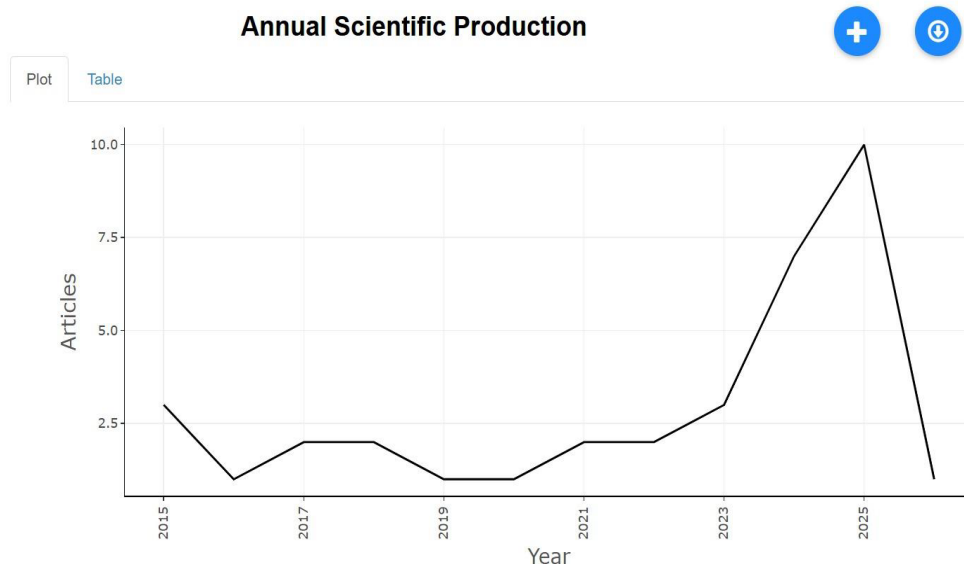


Figure 3. Annual scientific production (2015–2026).

Most Relevant Sources

The distribution of publications across scientific journals provides valuable insights into the primary sources contributing to the development of research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth in the hospitality industry. Identifying the most relevant sources helps researchers recognize leading journals and understand where scholarly discussions on the topic are predominantly published. As illustrated in Figure 4, the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* and the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology* were the most productive publication sources, with three articles each. Both journals are internationally recognized for publishing high-quality research related to hospitality management, tourism innovation, consumer behavior, and digital transformation. Their prominence indicates that digital marketing and e-WOM have become important themes within hospitality research.

Meanwhile, the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights* and *Tourism and Management Studies* each contributed two publications. These journals also play a significant role in disseminating research related to hospitality marketing, tourism management, customer experience, and service innovation. Their consistent contribution demonstrates the growing academic interest in understanding how digital communication influences consumer decision-making in the hospitality sector.

Several other journals, including *Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, *Advances in Science, Technology and Innovation*, *Anatolia*, *Applied Sciences (Switzerland)*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, and *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*, each published one article within the dataset. Although their contributions are relatively limited, the presence of these multidisciplinary journals indicates that research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth has expanded beyond tourism and hospitality into broader fields such as information technology, psychology, communication, and business management.

The findings suggest that research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth is increasingly interdisciplinary. While hospitality journals remain the primary publication outlets, contributions from technology and social science journals highlight the growing integration of digital technologies, consumer psychology, and data-driven marketing strategies in hospitality research.

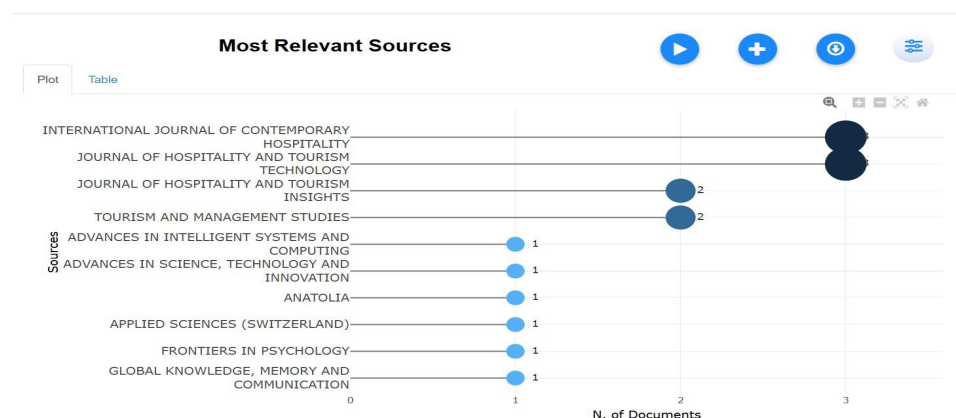


Figure 4. Most relevant publication sources

Most Relevant Authors

The analysis of the most relevant authors provides an overview of the researchers who have made significant contributions to the development of studies on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth within the hospitality industry. Identifying leading authors is important because it reflects the intellectual contributors who shape research directions and influence future studies in this field.

As presented in Figure 5, four authors, namely Hernandez A, Llorens-Marin M, Puellas-Gallo M, and Zhang Z, were identified as the most productive researchers, each contributing two publications to the dataset. Although the number of publications is relatively similar among these authors, their repeated contributions indicate a consistent research interest in digital marketing, online consumer behavior, and hospitality management.

In contrast, several other authors, including Aghaei I, Ahmad K, Ajmal MM, Akram U, Alansari MT, and Alwahashi AW, each contributed one publication. This distribution suggests that research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth is conducted by a diverse group of scholars rather than being dominated by a small number of researchers. Such diversity indicates that the field continues to expand across different countries, institutions, and research perspectives.

The relatively balanced distribution of publications also reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the topic. Researchers from marketing, tourism, hospitality management, information systems, and consumer behavior have contributed to the advancement of knowledge in this area. This interdisciplinary collaboration enriches the theoretical and practical understanding of how digital marketing strategies and online word of mouth influence consumer decision-making in hospitality services.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that no single author dominates the field. Instead, the existing body of knowledge has been developed through the collective contributions of numerous researchers, highlighting the dynamic and collaborative nature of digital marketing and electronic word of mouth research in the hospitality industry.

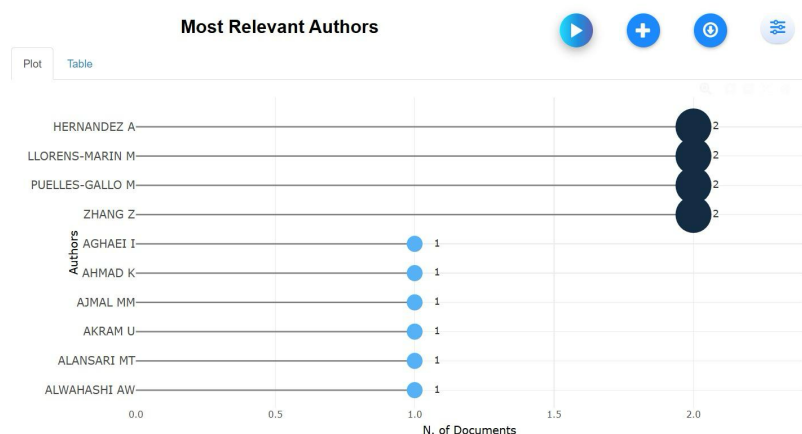


Figure 5. Most relevant authors

Most Global Cited Documents

Citation analysis is widely used in bibliometric studies to identify publications that have had the greatest academic influence within a research field. Highly cited articles generally represent studies that have introduced important theories, methodologies, or empirical findings that are frequently adopted by subsequent researchers. Therefore, examining the most cited documents helps explain the intellectual foundation of research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth in the hospitality industry.

As shown in Figure 6, the article published by Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) received the highest number of global citations among all documents included in the dataset. This publication has become one of the foundational references in hospitality research because it explains how electronic word of mouth transformed traditional interpersonal communication into a digital phenomenon capable of influencing travelers' purchasing decisions on a global scale. Its strong citation performance demonstrates that the concept of e-WOM continues to serve as a theoretical basis for contemporary hospitality marketing research.

The second most influential publication is De Pelsmacker et al. (2018), which investigates the relationship between digital marketing strategies, online reviews, and hotel performance. The study highlights the importance of integrating digital communication channels with customer-generated content to improve organizational performance. The high citation count indicates that researchers increasingly recognize digital marketing as a strategic capability rather than merely a promotional tool.

Several other highly cited articles focus on online consumer behavior, social media marketing, customer engagement, and the role of digital platforms in shaping hotel selection decisions. Collectively, these studies demonstrate a gradual shift in research attention. Earlier publications concentrated on understanding the influence of online reviews, whereas more recent studies explore broader digital ecosystems that integrate social media, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and customer relationship management.

Another interesting observation is that many of the highly cited publications were produced before the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence in marketing. Nevertheless, these studies remain highly relevant because they established the theoretical concepts that continue to underpin current investigations into digital marketing and consumer behavior. More recent publications tend to extend these earlier theories by incorporating emerging digital technologies and changing consumer expectations.

Rather than replacing earlier knowledge, recent studies build upon these influential works to explain how digital transformation continues to reshape hospitality marketing. This pattern suggests that the evolution of research in this field has been cumulative, with

foundational theories remaining relevant while new technologies introduce additional research opportunities.

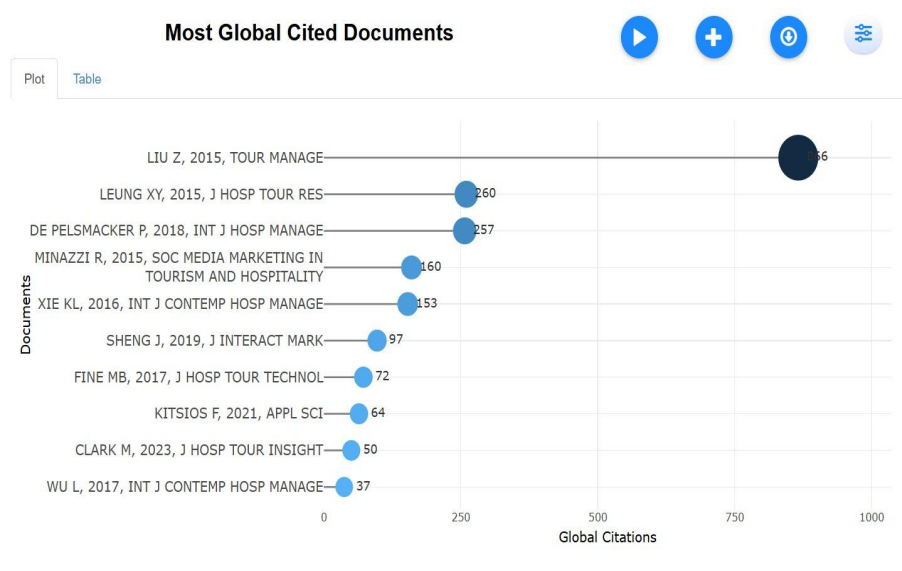


Figure 6. Most globally cited documents.

Keyword Analysis

Keyword analysis provides an overview of the concepts that have received the greatest attention from researchers within a particular field. In bibliometric studies, author keywords reflect the primary focus of each publication and help identify the evolution of research themes over time. Examining keyword frequency is therefore useful for understanding how scholarly interest has developed in digital marketing and electronic word of mouth within the hospitality industry.

As illustrated in Figure 7, the most frequently occurring keywords are digital marketing, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), social media, online reviews, and hospitality. The prominence of these terms indicates that researchers consistently investigate the influence of digital communication on consumer decision-making and hotel marketing performance. These keywords also demonstrate that customer-generated content has become an integral component of hospitality marketing strategies.

The frequent appearance of social media and online reviews suggests that hospitality businesses increasingly rely on digital platforms to communicate with potential customers. Unlike conventional promotional channels, social media enables hotels to engage directly with consumers, while online reviews provide authentic experiences that influence perceptions of service quality and purchase intentions. This combination has shifted marketing activities from one-way communication toward interactive and customer-driven engagement.

Another notable finding is the emergence of keywords associated with technological innovation, including artificial intelligence, big data, customer satisfaction, consumer trust, and brand reputation. Although these keywords appear less frequently than the core concepts, their presence indicates that recent studies are beginning to integrate advanced technologies with digital marketing practices. Researchers are no longer examining promotional activities in isolation but are exploring how intelligent systems, data analytics, and digital trust contribute to business competitiveness in the hospitality industry.

The coexistence of traditional marketing concepts and emerging digital technologies reflects the changing landscape of hospitality research. Earlier studies primarily focused on understanding the impact of electronic word of mouth and online reviews, whereas recent publications increasingly investigate technology-enabled marketing strategies that support personalized services and enhance customer experiences. This evolution illustrates how digital

transformation continues to redefine both marketing practices and research priorities in the hospitality sector.

These findings suggest that future research is likely to move beyond measuring the effectiveness of digital marketing alone. Instead, greater attention may be directed toward understanding the integration of artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, personalization, and consumer behavior to create more adaptive and sustainable hospitality marketing strategies.

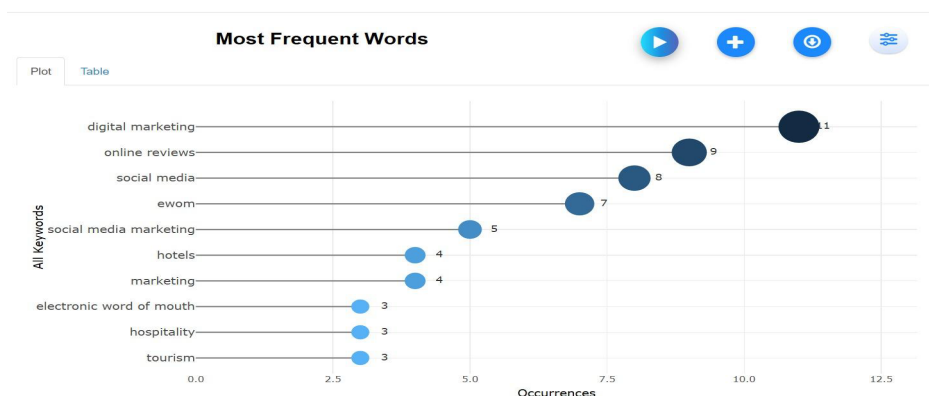


Figure 7. Most relevant author keywords.

Research Trend Analysis

Research trend analysis was conducted to identify the evolution of scholarly attention toward digital marketing and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the hospitality industry over time. By examining the temporal distribution of author keywords, this analysis provides insights into how research interests have developed and highlights the transition of dominant themes across different periods.

As illustrated in Figure 8, the evolution of research topics demonstrates a gradual shift in focus between 2016 and 2025. During the earlier stage of the observed period, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) emerged as one of the most persistent research themes, spanning from 2016 to 2024. Its continuous presence suggests that researchers have consistently recognized online consumer communication as a key factor influencing customer perceptions and behavioral intentions within the hospitality sector.

From 2017 onward, online reviews and social media marketing became increasingly prominent. The sustained appearance of online reviews until 2023 reflects growing academic interest in understanding the influence of customer-generated content on hotel evaluation and booking decisions. Meanwhile, studies on social media marketing were particularly active between 2017 and 2021, indicating that researchers initially concentrated on promotional activities conducted through social networking platforms.

A noticeable transition occurred in the later years of the study period. In 2024, social media and digital marketing became the dominant research topics, indicating a broader perspective on digital marketing practices. Rather than focusing on individual communication channels, recent studies increasingly examine integrated digital strategies that combine social media engagement, online reputation management, and customer interaction to improve organizational performance in the hospitality industry.

Overall, the temporal evolution of research topics reflects the changing priorities of hospitality marketing research. Earlier studies primarily emphasized the influence of eWOM and online reviews on consumer behavior, whereas more recent publications have adopted a more comprehensive view of digital marketing as an integrated ecosystem. This progression suggests that future research is likely to explore more complex interactions among digital

platforms, consumer engagement, and technological innovation to enhance marketing effectiveness and sustainable competitiveness in the hospitality sector.

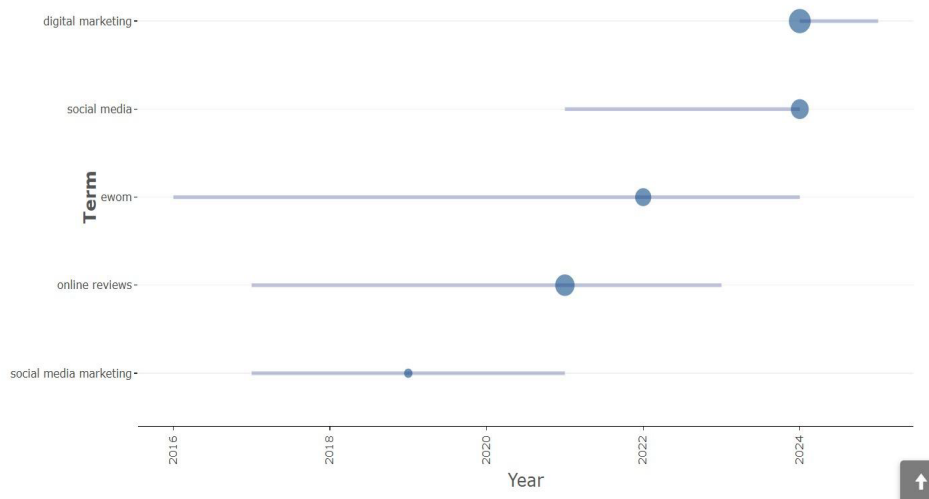


Figure 8. Research trends based on the temporal distribution of author keywords (2016–2025).

Keyword Frequency Analysis

Keyword frequency analysis was conducted to identify the dominant research themes and the conceptual structure of the literature on digital marketing and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the hospitality industry. The treemap visualization illustrates the relative frequency of author keywords, where larger rectangles indicate topics that have received greater scholarly attention.

As shown in Figure 9, digital marketing is the most dominant keyword, appearing 11 times (10%), followed by online reviews with 9 occurrences (8%), social media with 8 occurrences (7%), and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) with 7 occurrences (6%). The prominence of these keywords indicates that existing research has primarily focused on understanding how digital communication influences consumer behavior, hotel marketing activities, and customer decision-making processes.

In addition to these dominant themes, social media marketing, hotels, and marketing also appear with relatively high frequencies, suggesting that scholars continue to investigate the application of digital marketing strategies within hospitality businesses. The presence of hospitality and tourism further confirms that most studies are situated within the tourism and hospitality context, where digital technologies play an increasingly important role in attracting, engaging, and retaining customers.

Several supporting keywords, including customer satisfaction, hotel performance, hotel reviews, purchase intention, marketing effectiveness, and consumer behavior, indicate that researchers have expanded their attention beyond promotional activities to examine the outcomes of digital marketing initiatives. These themes demonstrate that digital marketing is increasingly associated with business performance, customer experience, and consumer decision-making rather than functioning solely as a communication tool.

The treemap also reveals the emergence of technology-oriented keywords such as artificial intelligence, big data, brand reputation, consumer trust, and user-generated content. Although these concepts appear less frequently, their inclusion suggests that hospitality marketing research is gradually incorporating advanced technologies and data-driven approaches to improve marketing effectiveness and customer engagement. This development reflects the ongoing digital transformation of the hospitality industry, where technological innovation is becoming an integral component of marketing strategy.

The keyword distribution demonstrates that the current literature is centered on four interconnected themes: digital marketing, social media, online reviews, and electronic word of mouth. These themes form the foundation of contemporary hospitality marketing research and indicate a shift from traditional promotional approaches toward integrated digital ecosystems that emphasize customer interaction, online information sharing, and technology-enabled marketing practices.

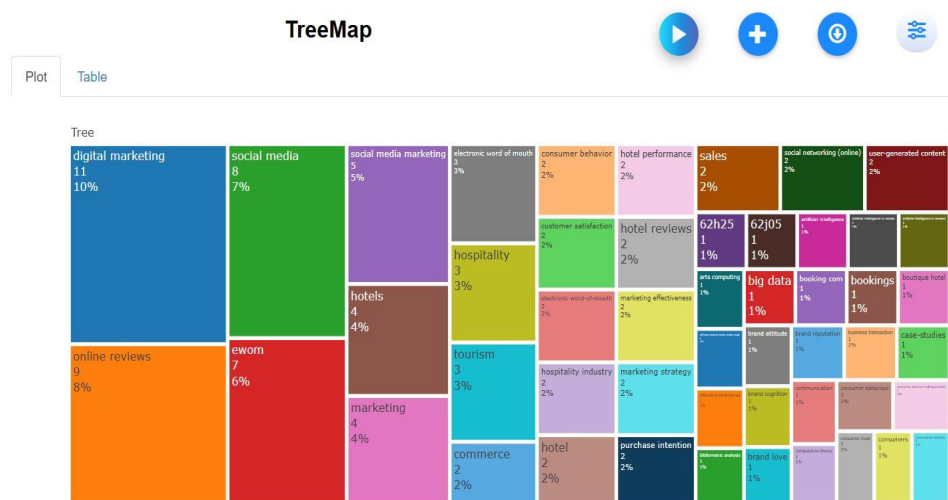


Figure 9. Treemap visualization of author keyword frequencies in the selected literature.

CONCLUSION

This study mapped the development of research on digital marketing and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the hospitality industry using a bibliometric approach based on 35 Scopus-indexed publications published between 2015 and 2026. The findings demonstrate a substantial increase in research output after 2020, indicating growing academic interest in the role of digital technologies in hospitality marketing. The analysis also identified the leading publication sources, influential authors, highly cited documents, and the dominant research themes that have shaped this field.

Keyword and trend analyses reveal that digital marketing, online reviews, social media, and electronic word of mouth remain the core research topics. At the same time, the literature has gradually expanded toward emerging themes, including artificial intelligence, big data, customer trust, brand reputation, and customer satisfaction. This transition suggests that current research is moving beyond the evaluation of individual digital marketing tools toward a broader understanding of technology-driven customer engagement and strategic digital transformation in the hospitality industry.

This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive overview of the intellectual structure and research evolution of digital marketing and eWOM in hospitality. The findings offer useful insights for researchers in identifying influential references, major publication outlets, and potential research directions. Future studies should expand the bibliometric dataset by incorporating additional databases such as Web of Science and Dimensions, applying advanced science mapping techniques, and examining emerging topics such as artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, personalization, sustainability, and omnichannel customer experience to enrich the understanding of digital marketing in the hospitality sector.

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