



# Women travelers and social media: Charting the path to economic and entrepreneurial opportunities

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## ABSTRACT

An increasing number of studies have emerged to analyze the growing phenomenon of women travelers and their active participation on social media, especially dedicated to its psychological aspects. However, its economic and entrepreneurial implications have been mostly neglected. The objective of this study is to develop a two-facet theoretical framework on how lay women travelers become entrepreneurial travel influencers. A systematic literature review of 177 academic articles has been conducted and classified into 3 categories namely women-focused, gender-focused, and gender-variable. Topic modeling was applied to identify the top 5 topics from each category and concluded that previous works examining the economic and entrepreneurial prospects of women travelers from a destination marketing perspective are scarce, especially among the women-focused studies. This study is the first to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the holistic factors related to women travelers on social media, offering significant insights for destination marketing and entrepreneurial aspects within a broader economic context.

## 1. Introduction

The profound changes witnessed in the past century provoked massive social transformations that have affected, among other circumstances, the women's role in society, making it interesting to analyze economic and social realms through a gendered approach (Yang et al., 2016). It is the case, for example, of tourism and the development and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Thomas & Mura, 2019). UNWTO's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the crucial role of tourism and enabling technology in promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment. This commitment aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality, and SDG 8, which targets decent work and economic growth (UNWTO, 2019).

One of the most exciting developments of recent years has been the increasing permeation of technology, digital platforms, and social media across the tourism sector and the effects that this phenomenon is exerting (Bernard et al., 2022; Nguyen & Hsu, 2022). Frequently, research on this topic provides examples of the role of social media as an agency to empower the disempowered, affecting for example women's psychological empowerment and well-being. A common case of women empowerment analyzed by scholars has been focused on solo women

travelers (Berdychevsky et al., 2017; Chaudhuri, 2020; Mkono et al., 2021), and how they fight against risk perceptions by narrating authentic experiences in the form of social media posts (Ngwira et al., 2020). Another example is that of voluntary adventurous women travelers, who often exhibit on social media platforms risk-taking behaviors that are inconsistent with social expectations (Ngwira et al., 2020). However, the impact of social media in the tourism sector, is not just on women's psychological empowerment and mental well-being (Xu & Zhang, 2021), social media acts also as a destination image library, a micro-entrepreneurship platform (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2023), and a place for recommendations for lay consumers and tourists (Condorferries, 2022; Khan et al., 2022; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018).

Beyond these outcomes, many women travelers from different backgrounds have turned their globetrotting into a personal brand based on the perception that they provide grounded and unbiased opinions, valuable for influencing or inspiring other consumers, and promoting tourist destinations (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The huge number of followers and the influence exerted on them, convert these women into "micro-celebrities" (Dutta et al., 2021), who are perceived to be more reliable and trustworthy than other sources of information. Among them, many even have quit jobs (Morad, 2016), left their homes, pared down most of their belongings to the essentials, traveling and promoting

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tourist destinations despite potential risks (Karagöz et al., 2021). They are often termed “travel vloggers or bloggers”, “social media influencers” (Xu(Rinka) & Pratt, 2018), or more specifically, “travel influencers” (Whitaker, 2019).

Research on women’s travel is predominantly psychology-centric (Karagöz et al., 2021), with social media often studied to understand women travelers’ psychological aspects, their influences on travel intentions (Oktadiana et al., 2020), and their impact on their followers.

(Cheng et al., 2020; He et al., 2021; Le & Hancer, 2021). However, research examining other crucial impacts of women travelers’ participation on social media, particularly economic aspects related to destination marketing, entrepreneurial opportunities, and economic empowerment of women travelers, is quite scarce.

Given these gaps, the main objective of the present study is to propose a theoretical framework to better understand the process of becoming entrepreneurial travel influencers among women travelers. This involves a literature review that addresses two primary research questions: 1) What are the main components in the process of women travelers becoming travel influencers? and 2) What are the main components in the transition from travel influencer to entrepreneurial travel influencer for women? To answer these questions, a systematic literature review was conducted, adapted to social sciences as numerous studies within the tourism and hospitality field (Booth et al., 2020), to synthesize academic research on women travelers using social media. Content analysis was applied to classify studies based on the gendered perspective they employed, distinguishing between women-focused studies and other research with a broader gendered approach that is not exclusively focused on women. Subsequently, topic modeling was performed to systematically extract salient topics and variables within each category, facilitating a thematic comparison between them.

This research constitutes the first systematic review that integrates women’s travel with destination marketing aspects, illuminating how women can become travel influencers and potential entrepreneurs by promoting tourist destinations online. This study highlights the economic implications and opportunities of women travel influencers, the role of destination marketing as a powerful tool for them to gain influence, leverage their influence and presence on social media and digital platforms to build a business or generate income related to travel, and shape travel patterns among other women travelers.

## 2. Academic background of women travelers on social media: perceived risks, psychological empowerment, and economic implications

Historically, the term “tourist” was originally employed to indicate male tourists and the phenomenon itself has been traditionally characterized as masculine and was hardly associated with a feminist attitude (Thomas & Mura, 2019). After World War II, massive social transformations in circumstances and structural conditions for women have resulted in their improved access to education, employment, financial independence, and technology (Yang et al., 2016). Since the 1980s, the development of ICTs has undoubtedly contributed to such massive transformation of practices and roles, as well as industry structures, including tourism (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2015). Women have been positioned within the framework of globalization as the ideal neo-liberal subjects for post-industrial times, taking center stage in the reconfiguration of labor patterns, consumption practices, and gender roles (Almela & Calvet, 2021; Mooney, 2020). Particularly, within the tourism sphere, after the structural change of the 1980s, women started to become the protagonists of their own travel activities, fighting against gender stereotypes that even now, in many societies, constrain women’s participation in tourism (Bernard et al., 2022).

Consequently, understanding women’s participation in tourism benefits from the use of a gender-related perspective (Wilson & Little, 2011), which views tourism as a gendered diverse phenomenon. This perspective considers the different lived experiences, consumption

patterns, and conceptions of tourism between men and women, highlighting gender as a useful determinant of tourism processes, being increasingly used by scholars interested in uncovering the triggers, circumstances, and impacts of women’s participation in tourism activities (Nikjoo et al., 2021).

Risk perception emerges in previous studies as the cornerstone of research on women travelers (Ngwira et al., 2020; Nikjoo et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2017, 2018) and is influenced by different factors that, according to the leisure constraint model, could be classified into three dimensions: intrapersonal (individual psychological states like stress, depression, anxiety, perceived self-skills, etc); interpersonal (such as lack of companionship or family disapproval), and structural constraints (including among others the lack of financial resources, barriers related to the family life-cycle stage, or to the scheduling of work time) (Crawford et al., 1991).

These constraints are related to macro factors (such as ethnicity or culture) and micro factors (such as personality traits, beliefs, or perceptions) (Muldoon et al., 2021), that ultimately shape the women’s risk perception of traveling, which comprises social-psychological and destination-specific aspects (Karagöz et al., 2021). The socio-psychological aspects refer, among others, to the feelings of isolation or exclusion that women may have when traveling or participating in tourism activities, especially in culturally distant societies, as well as the feeling of threat related to sexual dimensions like harassment (Karagöz et al., 2021). The destination-specific risk dimension relates to debates on violence, safety, and security of dangerous destinations (Thomas & Mura, 2019). However, while women face the varied risks associated with traveling and tourism activities, they get to explore new cultures, environments, and people, which in turn affect their psychological empowerment through enhancing their independence and self-discovery, which mainly act as triggers and motivations for participating in these activities in the first place (Hassan & Damir, 2022).

A better understanding of women’s travel motivations and challenges is useful for the tourism industry given the economic value associated with this phenomenon (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Oktadiana et al., 2020; Osman et al., 2019; Su & Wu, 2021), and the role of the internet and social media is paramount for this purpose (Lund et al., 2018; Moin et al., 2020; Youssef et al., 2018). In particular, there is an increasing trend of women travelers using virtual platforms and social media to share their travel life, while they become a powerful outlet for their voices and choices to be heard (Senutha & Nor Hafizah, 2017). They represent a source of information about how women express their emotional connections (Xu & Zhang, 2021), negotiate risks, and attain psychological empowerment through writing or sharing their travel experiences during travel or post-travel (Amaro et al., 2016; Oliveira et al., 2020; Sigala et al., 2012; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018). Moreover, social media enables women travelers to assure themselves (Ngwira et al., 2020), become a role model for other women, and influence them to follow their lead, forming virtual communities among people of similar tastes (Adkins & Grant, 2007). These online women’s travel communities provide psychological support with positive effects on reducing the perceived risks of women regarding traveling, especially solo travelers and to specific dangerous destinations (Karagöz et al., 2021). Therefore, previous studies exploring the phenomenon of the participation of women travelers on social media have mainly focused on its influence on women’s psychological empowerment, achieved through processes of inner growth, self-discovery, and esteem, related to the construction of their self-identity and perception of independence (Berdychevsky et al., 2017; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019), achieved when women overcome the challenges and face the perceived risks linked to traveling.

The economic implications of women travelers’ participation on social media are significant, particularly on the demand side if they become influencers. They will form a unique group with substantial commercial potential, especially for a feminine-oriented audience

interested in topics like shopping (Yuksel, 2004), health care (Connell, 2012), and food tasting (Everett, 2008). On the supply side, women travel influencers can significantly impact destination marketing. Social media has become a primary channel for travelers to acquire travel-related information (Sigala, 2016), and companies and institutions in the tourism sector can benefit from partnering with social media influencers as part of their digital marketing strategy (Kapoor et al., 2022). This partnership can attract potential tourists and enhance visit intentions by creating a positive destination image (Gallarza et al., 2002; Putri & Yasri, 2020). The organic image formation, considered authentic, raw, and honest, is gaining momentum in research (Senutha & Nor Hafizah, 2017). It attracts future visitors seeking first-person, unbiased accounts (Martin et al., 2007), highlighting the importance of understanding how women travel influencers shape destination images and their role in tourism organizations' and companies' digital marketing strategies.

Additionally, the economic empowerment of women travel influencers, as they become entrepreneurs, is a notable implication from the supply side. Previous studies on women's tourism entrepreneurship have focused on initiatives and ventures undertaken by women in the tourism sector, analyzing factors influencing their decision to engage in tourism entrepreneurship, gender-based obstacles, and their impacts on tourism development and on their own personal empowerment, enhancing their social and political status even in patriarchal communities (Booth et al., 2020; Madanaguli et al., 2021). However, previous research has not specifically focused on digital entrepreneurship, the role of digitalization in facilitating women's entrepreneurship in tourism, or the influence of social media in encouraging it (Ng et al., 2016).

Therefore, despite the economic significance of destination marketing and the entrepreneurial dimensions of women travel influencers, tourism scholars have not fully explored their persuasive power in framing destinations and influencing potential travelers (Motahar et al., 2021). Additionally, the potential for women travel influencers to meet job criteria, including entrepreneurship opportunities, remains under-examined (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). To address these gaps, this research proposes a theoretical framework to understand the process by which women become travel influencers and entrepreneurs, emphasizing the specific roles of destination marketing and entrepreneurship within a broader economic context.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data collection

The PRISMA methodology was utilized to conduct the systematic literature review that underpins this research. Originally used in the physical and medical sciences, this methodology has become increasingly popular in tourism and hospitality studies, as well as other social science disciplines (Booth et al., 2020). However, previous studies have noted relevant differences depending on the field. For instance, systematic literature reviews in the medical sciences are more focused on applying exhaustive literature search processes and rigid selection criteria to summarize evidence for specific treatments. In contrast, in the social sciences, these reviews aim to understand the literature through specific frameworks, comprehend the evolution of a topic, or synthesize seminal streams and identify emerging trends (de Carvalho et al., 2020).

Given the increase in scientific publications in recent years, determining a method to select relevant literature has become a critical step (de Carvalho et al., 2020). This selection process may involve qualitative and/or quantitative criteria. The qualitative approach entailed in the PRISMA method was preferred over a traditional narrative review of the literature, which focuses more on synthesizing academic research but lacks the objective, replicable, transparent, systematic, and comprehensive coverage of a defined field. A qualitative approach was selected instead of a quantitative one, such as bibliometric reviews that use

bibliometric indexes to identify and select relevant publications based on their academic impact (de Carvalho et al., 2020), as the aim was to retrieve the most comprehensive sample of articles on women travelers using social media, regardless of their academic impact. The PRISMA method ensures that the process of selecting and analyzing papers is transparent and provides a clear reference point for other researchers in the field (Booth et al., 2020). To enhance reporting quality and process traceability, a flowchart is recommended to document the number of studies included and excluded at various stages of the literature search, a practice uncommon in traditional literature reviews (Yang et al., 2017).

The PRISMA checklist (Moher et al., 2009) outlines the necessary steps to conduct a review that is replicable by other researchers, emphasizing a systematic approach to literature search, extraction, and synthesis, which is clearly articulated and justified in the reporting. However, some steps in the PRISMA checklist are more suited to reviews in the medical and physical sciences. In other disciplines, such as tourism research, the PRISMA methodology has been simplified and adapted for extensive use, guiding its application in numerous publications (Booth et al., 2020; Madanaguli et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2017).

The data for this systematic review were scientific papers on women travelers and social media, collected from two databases, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, commonly used in other similar studies (Utkarsh & Sigala, 2021; Yang et al., 2017). The search was conducted in February 2023, leading to the identification of articles on the topic dating back to 2010.

The databases were searched for articles whose titles and abstracts contained keywords related to the three academic areas of interest: the tourism dimension were retrieved with keywords like "tour\*" for relevant words such as "tourists" and "tourism", "travel\*" to capture similar terms like "traveler", and alternatives such as "leisure" and "hospitality"; the women dimension was captured with keywords like "female" or "wom\*" because it relates to "womanhood", "woman" or "women"; finally, the social media dimension was captured with keywords such as "social media" and "social network\*". In this case, the term "wom\*", used to capture topics related to women, retrieved also "electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)", which is connected to social media. The search string is presented in Table 1.

Fig. 1 exhibits the PRISMA flow diagram adapted from Moher et al. (2009) providing a depiction of the multiple stages of the paper selection process until reaching the final sample of 177 papers.

#### 3.2. Analyses descriptions

Analyses to synthesize academic research on women travelers using social media involved two main techniques: content analysis and topic modeling. These methods were selected instead of others, such as bibliometric analysis, which primarily focuses on standard bibliometric

**Table 1**  
Search string (Source: Author's work).

Themes	Search String
Social Media and Women Travelers	Selected keywords: ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND tour* AND wom*, OR ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND tour* AND female OR ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND travel*, AND wom* OR ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND travel* AND, female OR ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND leisure, AND wom* OR ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND leisure, AND female OR ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND hospitality AND wom* OR ("Social Media" OR "Social Network*") AND hospitality AND female

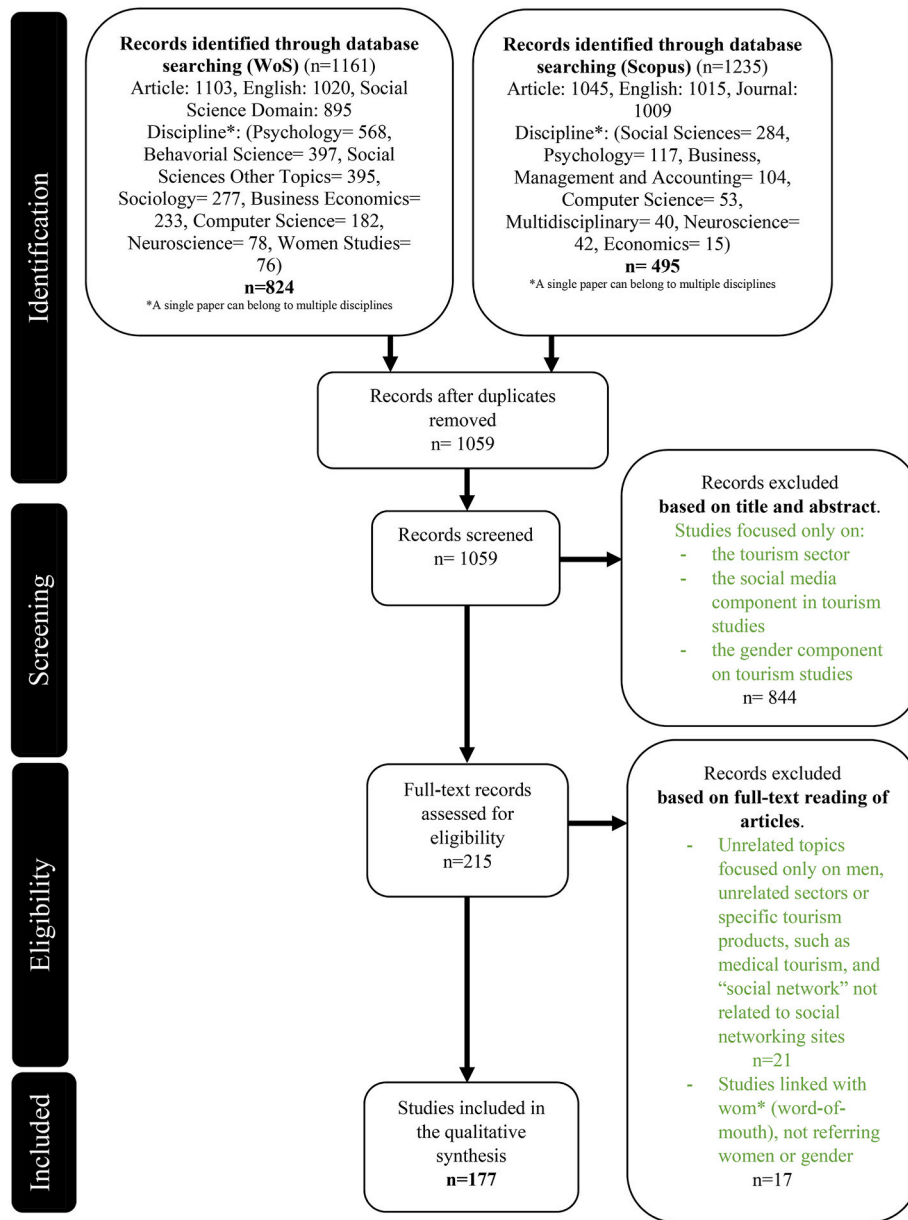


Fig. 1. PRISMA flow diagram (Source: Adapted from Moher et al. (2009)).

categories (e.g. publication, journal, methods, approach, region, co-occurrences, co-citations, etc). This choice was motivated by the desire to extract key content and relevant topics from the selected articles, with the aim of developing a theoretical framework to better understand how women travelers transition into entrepreneurial travel influencers.

Initially, a content analysis was conducted as it is recognized as one of the most extensively used analytical tools for determining prominent topics and concepts within qualitative data and categorizing them (Odine, 2013; Thomas & Mura, 2019). Following the approach outlined by Yang et al. (2017), and based on the gendered perspective employed by the papers in the sample, they were categorized into three groups: women-focused (WF) studies (31.1%) that primarily centered their discussion on women; gender-focused (GF) (30.5%), which mainly discussed gender differences; and gender-variable (GV) studies (38.4%), not focused on gender issues but included gender as a variable. This categorization enabled the definition of distinct groups of studies based

on their consideration of the gender dimension, allowing for an effective comparison between women-focused (WF) studies and other studies at a later stage.

Subsequently, topic modeling was applied to extract salient topics, a recommended analytical technique when there is insufficient prior knowledge about a phenomenon (Rahmani et al., 2018). For this study, Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was employed as a probabilistic model for topic modeling. This method represents documents as a mixture of topics and topics as mixture of words (Blei et al., 2003). Specifically, words (or terms) were referred to, sourced from abstracts and human-assigned keywords. Metadata was created for 177 journal articles, referred to as documents, which included abstracts and their associated keywords (Silge & Robinson, 2017). Metadata was pre-processed by tokenizing the texts, removing English stopwords, and converting them into a Document-Term Matrix (DTM) in a tidy-text format suitable for LDA.

Given that abstracts typically consist of a single paragraph and

encapsulate the essence of the articles, terms from abstracts were considered as words for topic modeling. However, abstract words are often fragmented and lack clarity compared to keywords. Therefore, in addition to abstracts, topic modeling was also conducted using keywords, which offer a more comprehensive understanding as they are grouped (e.g. “social media” or “perceived risk”). Consequently, dominant topics were extracted by synthesizing insights from both abstracts and keywords.

#### 4. Results

A common result from the topic modeling analysis conducted in each category of papers reveals that the dominant words “women”, “tourism”, “travel” and “social”, or their synonyms, were observed in almost all the topics, since the articles were retrieved based on particular assigned keywords in the search procedure. However, there are meaningful differences between the collections of terms that allow for the differentiation and labeling of the various topics, considering two criteria together: the  $\beta$  value (per-topic-per-word probabilities, or the “terms” or words from abstracts that are most common within each topic), and the related keywords that each topic contains. The following sub-sections show the results for each category of papers.

#### 4.1. Women-focused (WF) studies

Fig. 2 shows the results of the topic modeling conducted over the abstract of WF studies.

In Fig. 2, Topic 1 points to vital aspects of women travelers participating on social media, with terms like “life” or “health”, together with tourism activities and types, including terms like “restaurants” or “solo”. Topic 2 emphasizes the gender aspect, and highlights the environmental and sustainable dimension, with the inclusion of terms like “conservation”, linked to the social component, observed in “communities”, or recreational activities involving the natural environment, like “fishing” or “poaching”. Topic 3 entails self-representation, with relevant terms like “images”, “body”, “fitspiration”, or “exposure”. Topic 4 highlights the digital or technological and the entrepreneurship dimensions, with terms like “entrepreneurs”, “skills”, “digital”, “data”, “entrepreneurship”, and “business”. Finally, the most differentiating element in Topic 5 refers to constraints, linked not only to tourism, traveling (“solo”) and gender issues, but also to economic (“entrepreneurs”, “business”) and cultural or religious aspects (“Muslim”).

Fig. 3 shows the results of the LDA topic model, pointing out the most common keywords from WF studies.

Topic 1 highlights well-being and psychological empowerment of women involved in tourism and social media, observed in terms like

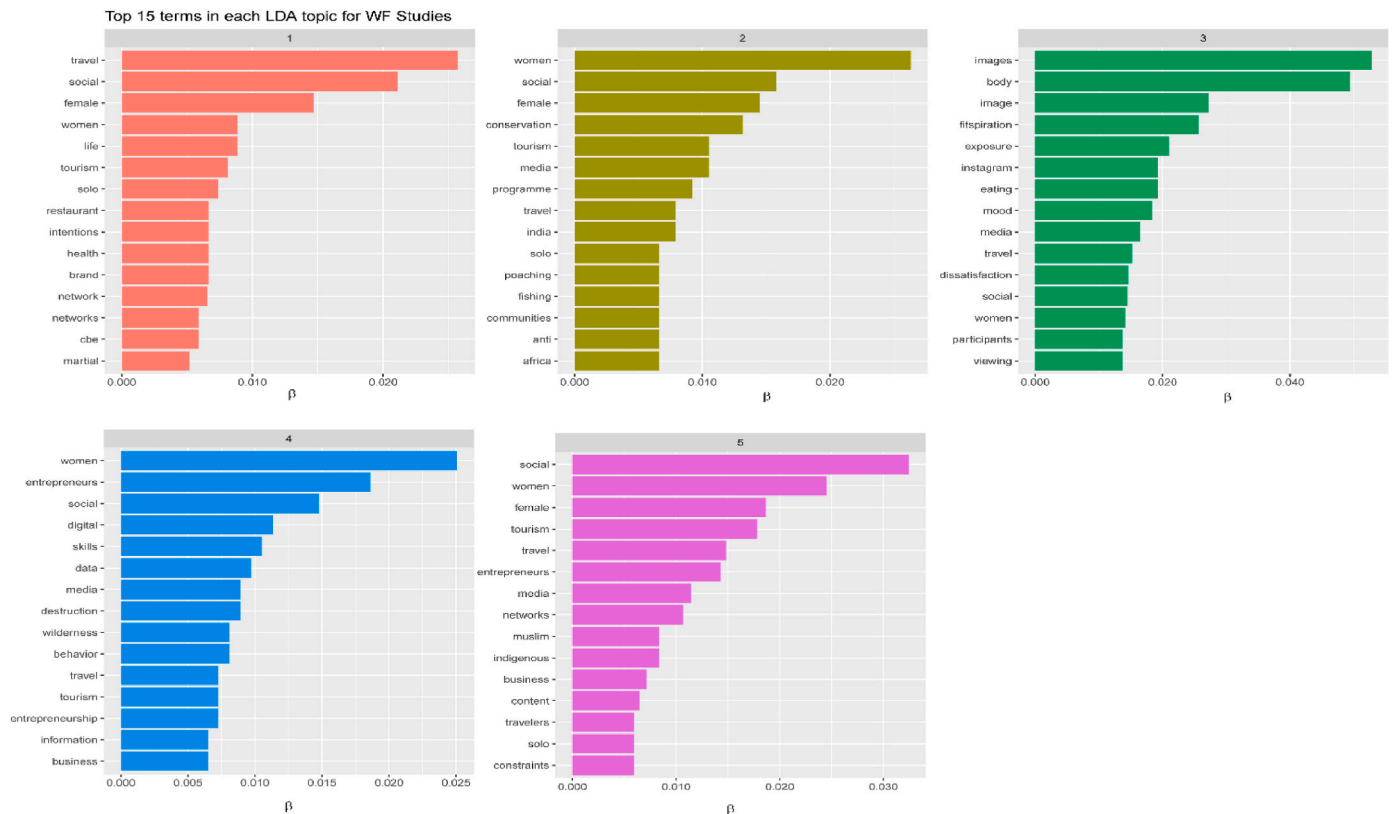


Fig. 2. Top 15 terms in topic modeling of WF Abstracts.

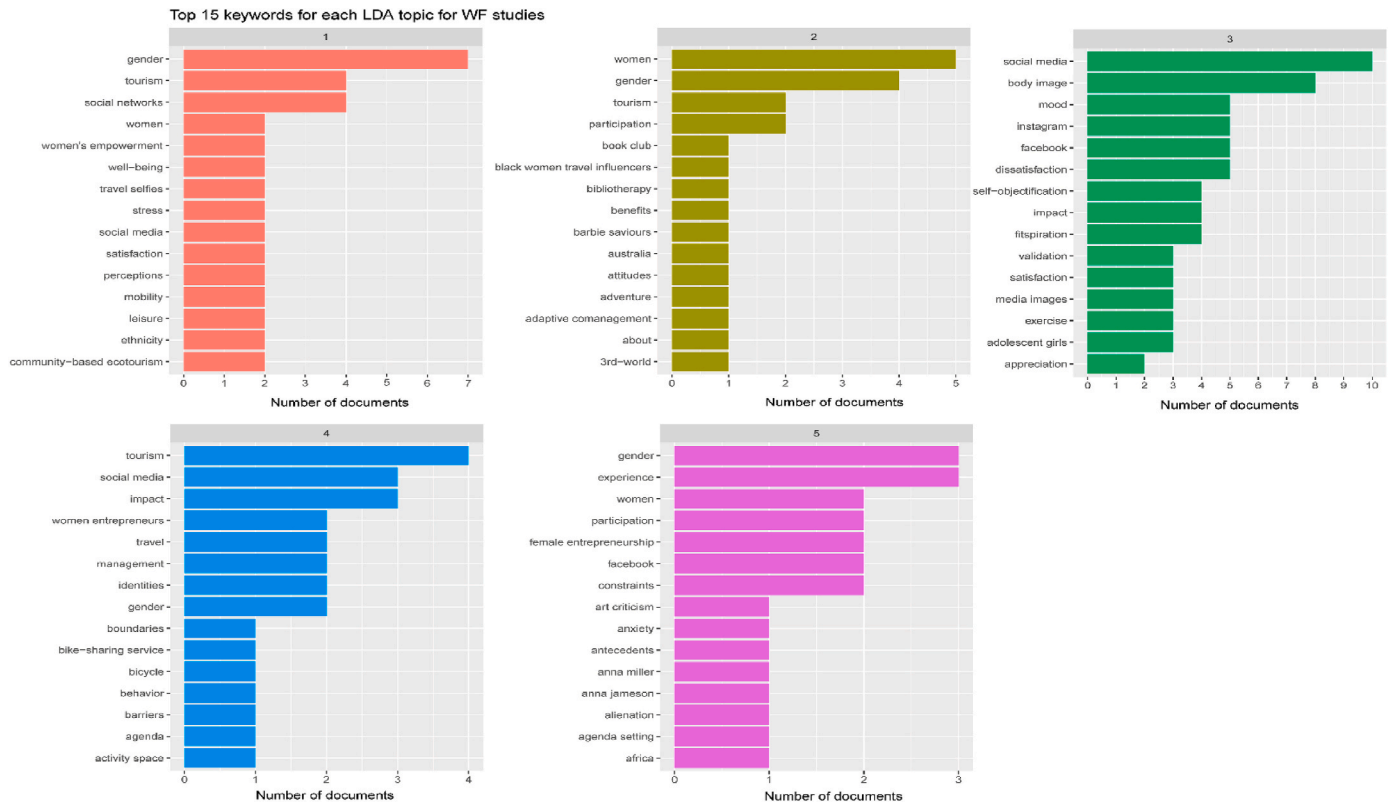


Fig. 3. Top 15 keywords in topic modeling of WF studies.

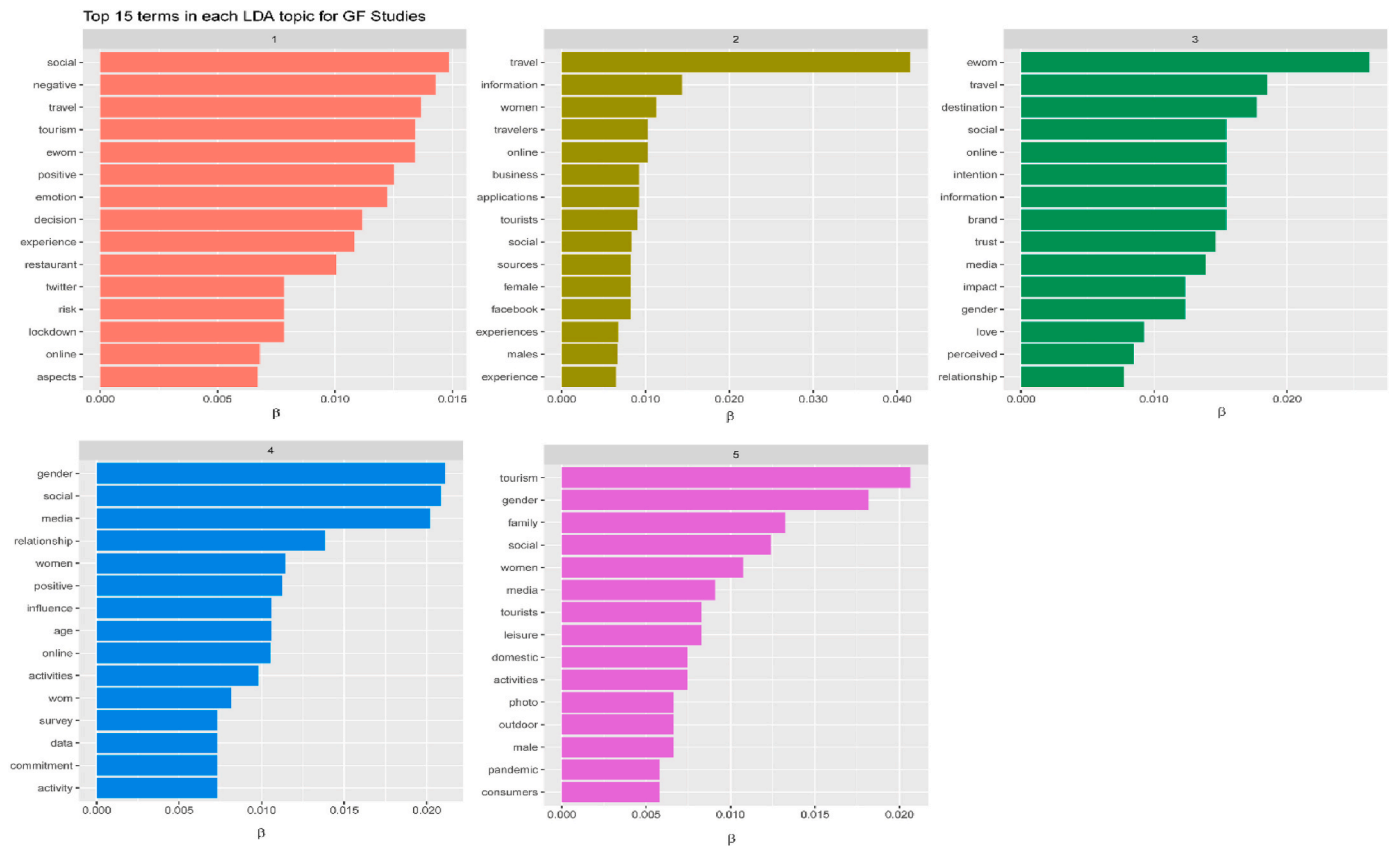


Fig. 4. Top 15 terms in topic modeling of GF Abstracts.

“women’s empowerment”, “well-being”, “stress”, “satisfaction”, which are also linked to the notions of “mobility”, “leisure” and “community-based-ecotourism”. Topic 2 points to the active role of women in WF studies, highlighting their influence (“participation”, “black women travel influencers”), together with “benefits” or “attitudes”, and specific online shared content, like “book club”, “bibliotherapy” or “adventure”. Topic 3 stresses the social media dimension, and like salient terms from abstracts, represents online self-representation (“body image”, “dissatisfaction”, “satisfaction”, “appreciation” or “self-objectification”). Topic 4 entails the management and entrepreneurial dimensions in studies focused on tourism and social media, with keywords like “women entrepreneurs” and “management”. In topic 5 again, keywords highlight aspects regarding “constraints” and “anxiety”, linked to notions of “gender”, “experience”, “participation”, “female entrepreneurship”, and in specific locations like “Africa”.

4.2. Gender-Focused (GF) studies

The findings about which words are associated with the abstracts of GF studies are displayed in Fig. 4.

Topic 1 stresses the social and social media components of traveling research, showing terms such as, “social”, “ewom”, or “twitter”. Topic 2

deals with business dimensions related to travel, including terms like “information”, “business”, or “applications”. In topic 3, the destination marketing dimension and online content emerge, in generic terms such as “ewom”, “information”, “destination”, “brand”, “intention” and “trust”. Topic 4 stresses the data and analytical components in GF studies, as shown in terms like “data” or “survey”. Topic 5 deals with online content and social aspects that include “family”, “social”, “tourists”, “leisure”, “domestic”, “activities”, or “outdoor”. It is worth mentioning the appearance of “males” and “females” as key terms in different salient topics of GF studies, given their comparative nature between genders, as well as the relevance of terms related to the recent pandemic.

Fig. 5 reveals the most commonly assigned keywords in GF studies.

Topic 1 focuses on the psychological dimension, connected to the social media phenomenon in tourism, including “motivation” or “attitude”. Topic 2 emphasizes the business component of traveling (“business travelers”, “business travel”, and “business travel cycle”) and the way of sharing via blogs and vlogs. Topic 3 points to the destination marketing dimensions, with keywords like “word-of-mouth”, “destination”, “destination trust”, “consumer engagement” and “brand love”. Topic 4 entails some psychological components linked to the gender dimensions, related for example to “trust”, “personality”, or “behavior”.

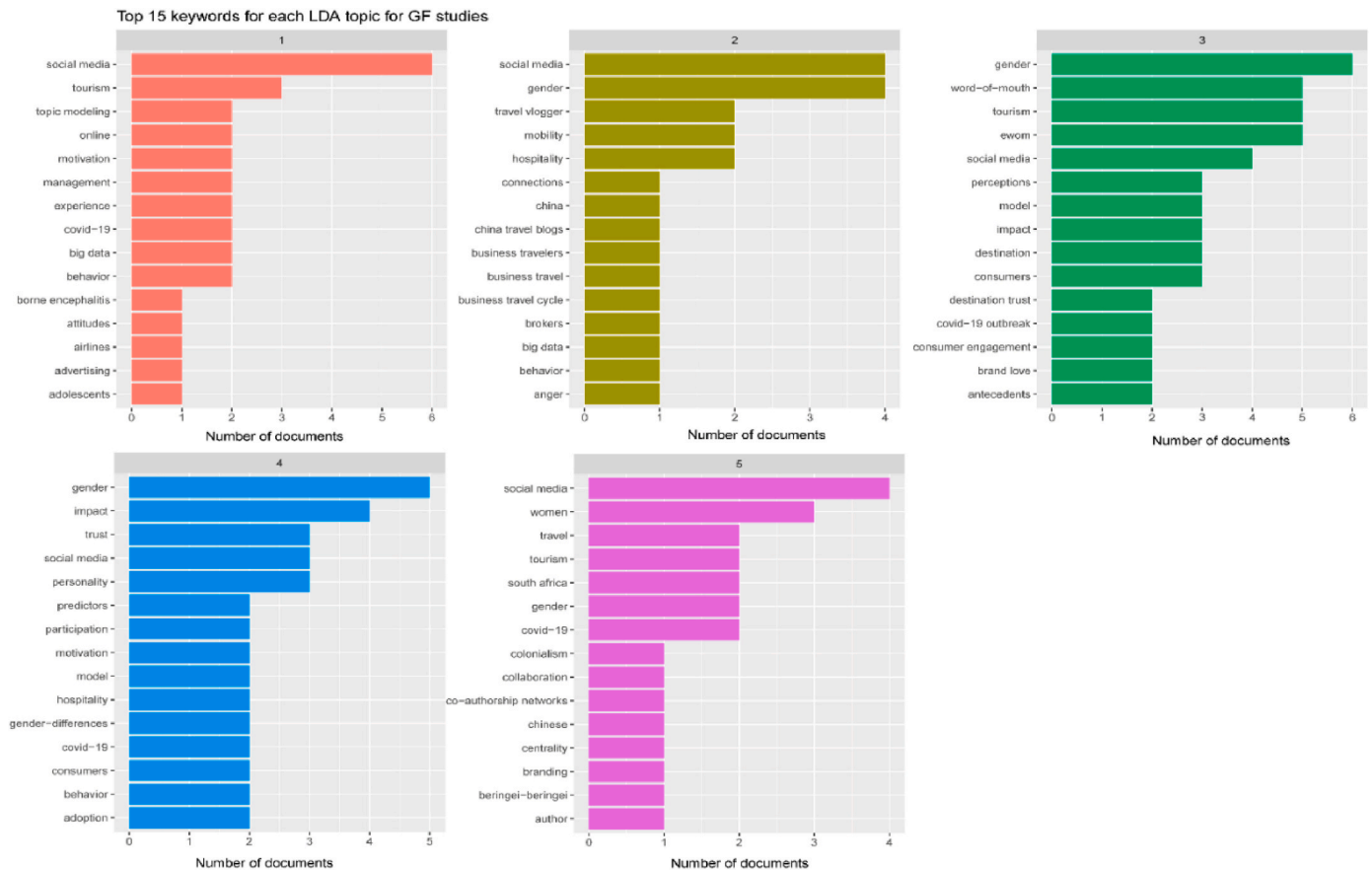


Fig. 5. Top 15 keywords in topic modeling of GF studies.

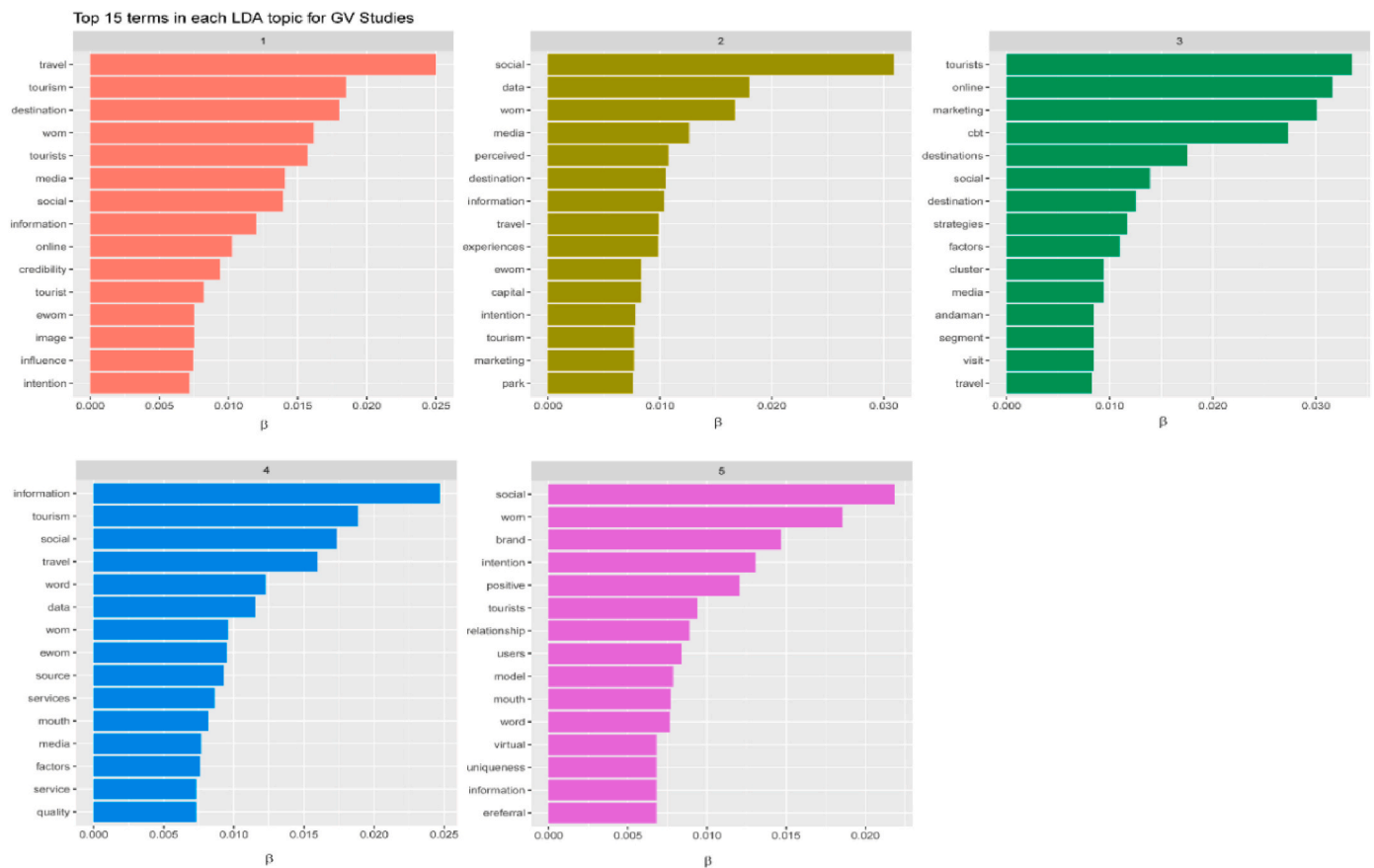


Fig. 6. Top 15 terms in topic modeling of GV Abstracts.

Topic 5 highlights keywords relevant to social dimensions and collaboration (“co-authorship networks”, “collaboration”). In the keywords’ analysis, the relevance of the pandemic was also observed, appearing “*COVID-19*” in four of the topics, as well as some methodological aspects, with keywords like “*big data*” or “*topic modeling*”.

#### 4.3. Gender-Variable (GV) studies

Fig. 6 displays the findings related to the words associated with abstracts in gender-variable studies. Studies in this category use gender as a variable or unit of analysis but not as a main topic of discussion, which explain their focus on not gendered topics. The term “*destination*” is included in three of the topics, and “*information*” in four, but their implications differ regarding their connections to other relevant terms.

Topic 1 stresses the general terms of travel, tourism and destinations, together with the “*credibility*” component of online information and social media. Topic 2 deals with destination-centric information-oriented terms such as “*data*”, “*destination*”, “*information*”, “*experiences*”, or “*ewom*”. Topic 3 entails notions of destination marketing strategies, like those captured in “*marketing*”, “*destination*”, “*strategies*”, “*segment*” and “*cluster*”. Topic 4 comprises terms relevant to service marketing and data (“*information*”, “*data*”, “*ewom*”, “*source*”,

“*services*”, “*quality*”). Topic 5 deals with the online and influencer marketing aspects, including terms like “*brand*”, “*intention*”, “*positive*”, “*tourists*”, “*virtual*”, “*information*” and “*ereferral*”.

Fig. 7 shows the results for the topic modeling on keywords of GV studies. It can be observed the relevance of the keyword “*destination image*” that emerges repeatedly.

Topic 1 focuses on the communication dimension and its influence or implications, with keywords like “*ewom*” or “*e-wom*”, “*intention*”, “*travel intention*”, “*impact*”, or “*attitudes*”. Topic 2 entails also the notion of word-of-mouth and the social component, with keywords like “*social network*” or “*social media*”, but connecting them with behaviors, mostly from the customer perspective (“*behavior*”, “*customer engagement*”). Topic 3 highlights environmental and sustainable dimensions (“*conservation*”, “*conservation marketing*”, “*biodiversity conservation*”), the technological component (“*technology*”), and marketing-based keywords (“*brand engagement*”, “*co-creation*”). Topic 4 stresses especially the impacts, being the keyword “*impact*” the most frequent, followed by others like “*satisfaction*”, “*trust*”, or “*consumption*”. Topic 5 involves consumer behavior dimensions that include “*customer satisfaction*”, “*consumer engagement*”, and “*consumer behavior*”.

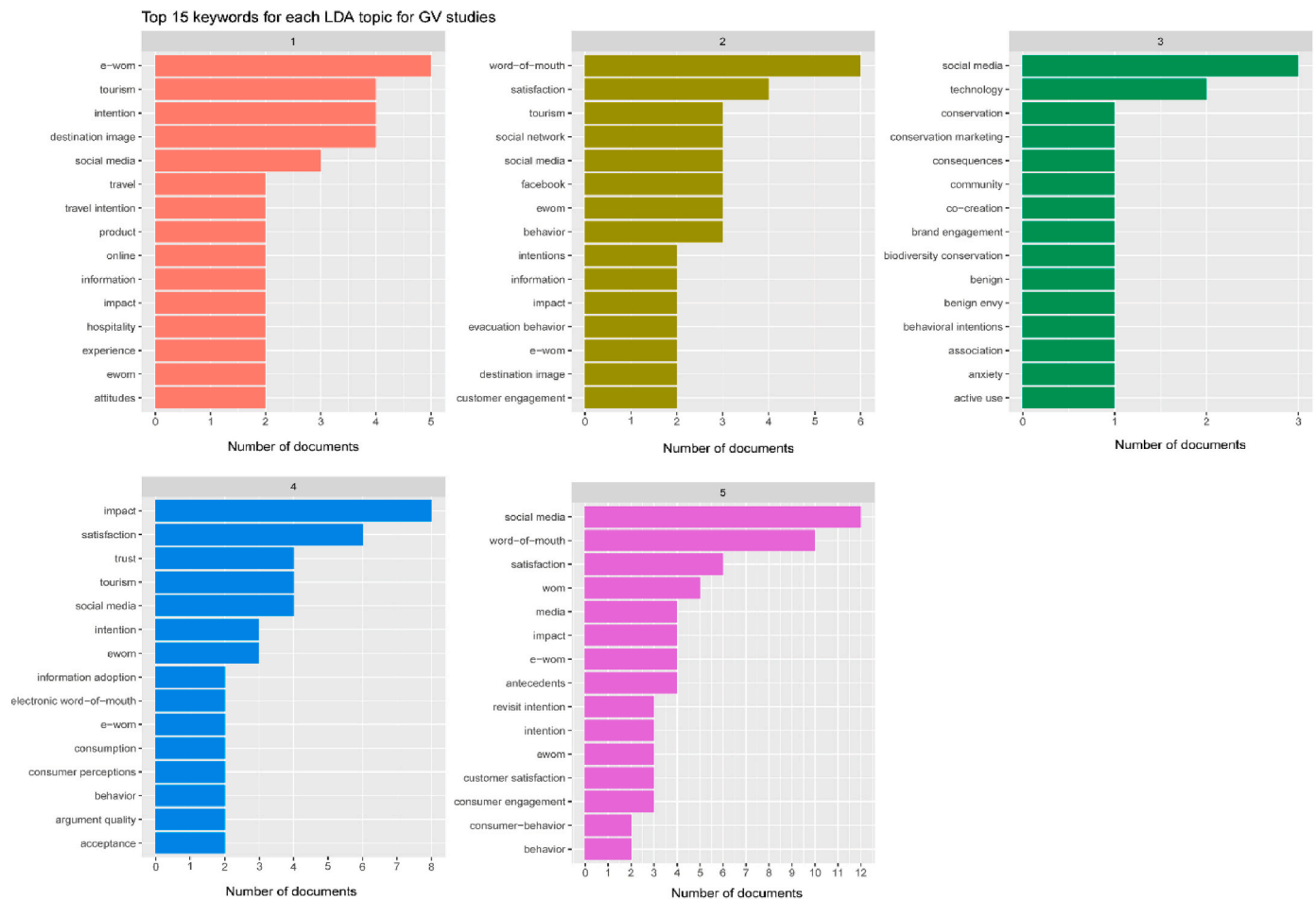


Fig. 7. Top 15 keywords in topic modeling of GV studies.

5. Discussion

The use of two-step topic modeling analyses captures a more complete view on the relevant topics in the research line of women travelers and social media because the topics retrieved from the abstracts are complemented by those in keywords topic modeling. The findings reveal that the entrepreneurial dimension is highlighted only in the WF studies. The topic “destination” is rarely observed in WF studies, being the research on “destination marketing” aspects mostly neglected in this category, although it is dominant in GF and GV studies.

The topic modeling approach evidences the void of specific research analyzing the phenomenon of women travelers becoming entrepreneurial travel influencers through social media, underlying the relevance of exploring related topics and of proposing a theoretical framework for its better understanding. The discussion of the topic modeling results and of related previous research will enable the proposal of a theoretical framework that can be divided into two distinct facets: the transition from women travelers to travel influencers, and the evolution from travel influencers to entrepreneurial travel influencers.

5.1. First facet: women travelers becoming travel influencers

The first facet aims to unravel the process by which women travelers become travel influencers, as outlined in the first research question. Previous studies have identified antecedents, features, and impacts within this process.

Among the antecedents, research has emphasized mostly the barriers and triggers encountered by women when they become travelers. Regarding the barriers, the results of the topic modeling point to the

relevance of terms like “constraints” or “risk” entailed in salient topics like solo travel topic, as stated in WF studies. These barriers have been frequently analyzed in specific contexts, like high-risk destinations, and in association with socio-cultural aspects, like religion. Therefore, among the terms and keywords entailed in the most common topics, studies on Muslim women’s travel barriers (Bernard et al., 2022; Oktadiana et al., 2020) and high-risk destinations (Nguyen & Hsu, 2022; Ngwira et al., 2020) are getting attention. In order to apprehend the whole spectrum of barriers encountered by women travelers it would be advisable to use a theoretical lens to classify these barriers, like the leisure constraint model (Crawford et al., 1991).

The triggers can be understood as the positive effects that women expect when becoming travelers. From the psychological dimension, observed in Topic 1 of WF and GF studies, psychological empowerment appears as a relevant topic in these studies, achieved through sharing their travel experiences online (Khan et al., 2022), building confidence and enhancing courage (Oktadiana et al., 2020), making breakthroughs in the social gender system (Muldoon et al., 2021), and affecting women’s well-being (Xu & Zhang, 2021), and self-esteem (Andreassen et al., 2017).

Among the features of the process of women becoming travelers, there are different elements mentioned by research, that mostly comprise two, the content shared by women travelers on social media and the facilitators of the process. Firstly, the results show the relevance of the “content” topic with terms and keywords like “information”, “experiences”, or “adventure”. Elements of online content dimension are common in GF and GV, linked with keywords like “e-wom”, or “electronic word of mouth”, and related to the notion of “trust” or “credibility”. The topic “self-representation” also appeared in the WF studies,

referring to body-image based articles (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016, 2020), as a common content shared by women on social media, which introduced the notion of “self-objectification” (Topic 3 of WF studies). Regarding digital placemaking, the practice of self-objectification through travel selfies has gained significant prominence, impacting both the psychological and social dimensions of both creators and viewers. Research indicates that women are particularly sensitive to how their social media appearances are perceived and often adjust their travel photos to mitigate self-objectification (Lyu, 2016). Further studies have highlighted how gender intersects with other power asymmetries—such as race, ethnicity, religion, and social class—contributing to the reinforcement of gendered identities (Wijesinghe et al., 2020). Halegoua and Moon (2021) also offered unique insights into women tourists’ strategic self-presentation behaviors, which often involved curating travel selfies for social media platforms. This phenomenon raises significant concerns about the authenticity and trustworthiness of destination images, even as these images might also have an empowering effect (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Conversely, Lyu (2016) contends that social media marketing strategies and user comments can provide authentic information about travel destinations. Additionally, social media often favors idealized, thin, and attractive images (Brown & Tiggemann, 2020), and there is evidence that a higher follower count on social media is associated with better psychological well-being (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

The second feature is related to the facilitators that women encounter when becoming travel influencers, being one of the most salient, the role of community. It can be observed from all other categories, that the social component associated with social media and the sharing of online content is thoroughly discussed and linked mostly with marketing and consumer behavior (significant topic in GV). However, for WF studies, the use of “communities” or “community-based” types of tourism (Topic 2) are more focused on empowerment through social capital (Karagöz et al., 2021). Keywords such as “bibliotherapy”, “book club” and “black travel influencers” (Topic 2) reflect the online community as a facilitator for mutual understanding and support (Arthur, 2022). Previous research also recognizes the role of community as a facilitator, for example using social media like Facebook groups (Gazit et al., 2022), which link to an interactive therapeutic process with stages of identification, projection, catharsis, insight, and commonality. Another relevant facilitator, i.e. “technology” aspects, are found across the three categories of studies, linked to terms and keywords like “digital”, “online”, or “electronic”. In some WF studies, the technological component has been associated with the notion of “skills” (Topic 4 of WF studies), which points out the role of digital skills (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021) and digital literacy (Sujarwo et al., 2022) as an important facilitator, acting as fuel for women’s empowerment in the process of technology adoption.

Finally, among the impacts of the process of women becoming travelers, an interesting result of the study indicates that destination-centric terms such as “destination image” is mostly used in GV studies, moderately in GF studies, and negligible in WF studies. In the topic modeling results, one of the most popular terms has been “destination image”, due to its impact on tourists’ behaviors and attitudes, with further influences on destination choice (Al-Htiibat & Garanti, 2019), being the availed online information a solid source for the formation of tourists’ cognitive image of a destination. This fact explains the interest of researchers in investigating the link between “eWOM”, “social media influencers”, “destination image”, and “visit intention” from tourists’ and travelers’ perspectives (Irfan et al., 2022; Ran et al., 2021).

The influence of online information on destination image, and the specific role of travel influencers, is also understood under the lens of “trust”, which emerges as a recurrent term and keyword in different topics like the psychological dimension in GF studies or the impact dimension in GV studies. This result stresses the credibility of travel influencers (Dedeoglu, 2019), who are perceived to be more reliable and trustworthy than other sources of information, confirming results of

previous studies on micro-celebrities (Dutta et al., 2021).

Among the impacts, it is also central the influence on “consumers” and “tourists” (salient terms in GV and GF studies), and more specifically on followers, because the psychological empowerment of women who become travel influencers, based on a process of inner growth, self-discovery, self-esteem, self-identity, and independence (Berdychevsky et al., 2017) could act as a positive reinforcement for other women, who through a more passive role, as followers, could also experience these benefits, being encouraged to travel and eventually pursue traveling as an entrepreneurship opportunity (Bigne et al., 2020).

## 5.2. Second facet: the transition from travel influencer to entrepreneurial travel influencer for women

The second facet aims to explore the transition process from travel influencer to entrepreneurial travel influencer for women, as outlined in the second research question.

The use of social media by women travelers has been analyzed mostly under the lens of its psychological implications being the economic and entrepreneurial dimension almost forgotten. However, the benefits obtained by travel influencers have provoked that some of them have turned this activity into their main livelihood, quitting their jobs, and becoming micro-celebrities (Dutta et al., 2021). Some of the previous studies highlighted women’s economic empowerment in the tourism context (Mkono et al., 2021; Odine, 2013) but lack evidence from women travel influencers’ perspectives or as a type of entrepreneur.

Tourism and technology seem to offer a wide range of income-generation opportunities, particularly for vulnerable groups in terms of employment or economic involvement, like women, being recognized the potential of digital platforms to provide access to a global market and open new avenues for economic activity and entrepreneurship (Tolentino, 2019). However, as the results reveal, only WF studies address the topic of entrepreneurship, which has been neglected in the rest of the categories. Specifically, these studies focused on women entrepreneurs (Ng et al., 2016; Surangi, 2018), tourism entrepreneurship (Gretzel & Bowser, 2013), and digital entrepreneurship (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021), but not considering the specific case of women travel influencers, and their implications for destination marketing and management.

Among the WF studies entailing entrepreneurial topics, some dimensions of the process of becoming women entrepreneurs can be observed. For example, motivations are considered as antecedents of women’s entrepreneurs in cultural tourism (Makandwa et al., 2022), women entrepreneurs’ personalities have been linked to their business models and entrepreneurial behaviors (Ng et al., 2016; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021), and elements like “identities” and “leadership” have highlighted commercially successful entrepreneurs in underdeveloped nations (Sarpong et al., 2022).

Among the features of the process of becoming women’s entrepreneurs, the content dimension has been considered in studies that have highlighted the “feminine” focus of the content shared on social media, emphasizing the higher impact achieved by women’s representation online and travel images (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Besides, another feature emphasized by WF studies considering entrepreneurial topics has been some facilitators, like “skills” and “digital skills” (Sarpong et al., 2022).

Finally, regarding the impacts highlighted in WF studies, it could be expected some positive internal impacts of women entrepreneurship on “women’s empowerment” and “well-being” from an economic perspective. Literature also supports the alignment of women’s entrepreneurship with external dimensions, not just economic, but also social and environmental, impacting positively on their communities under sustainable principles, for example in the case of rural women entrepreneurs utilizing abundant cultural tourism resources to support household livelihoods (Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2017), and significantly

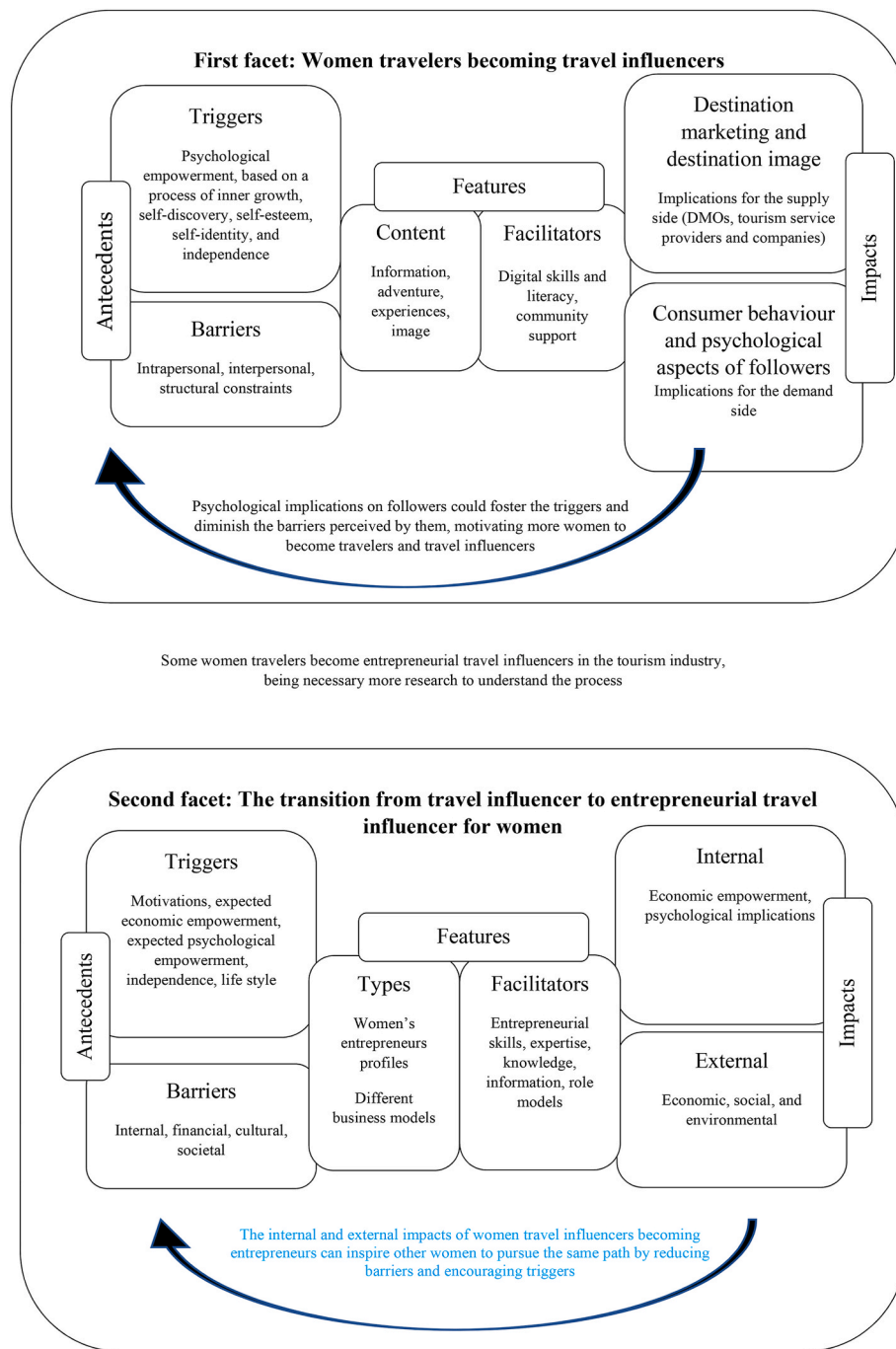


Fig. 8. Theoretical framework.

participating in nature tourism (Weatherby & Vidon, 2018).

The scarce research devoted to analyzing the transition process from travel influencer to entrepreneurial travel influencer for women does not permit the provision of additional insights, but suggests a theoretical framework that include: 1) triggers that could entail not just the psychological but also the expected economic empowerment associated with entrepreneurship, and barriers that could be related to personal, financial, cultural and societal issues; 2) features of the process that could be analyzed considering the facilitators, the different business models, and the different profiles of women travel influencers as entrepreneurs; and 3) expected impacts for women entrepreneurs themselves, and also general economic, social and environmental impacts derived from their entrepreneurial activity. Fig. 8 presents graphically the theoretical framework proposed.

## 6. Conclusions

The main objective of this study is to better understand the process of becoming entrepreneurial travel influencers among women travelers. To do so, a systematic literature review was conducted that integrates women's travel with destination marketing aspects and economic and entrepreneurial opportunities, enlightening the process by which women travelers can become entrepreneurial travel influencers by promoting tourist destinations online. This study is pioneering in its precise evaluation of the comprehensive concepts related to women travelers using social media, extending beyond psychological factors to significantly address destination marketing within an economic framework.

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

This research makes a theoretical contribution by proposing a framework to better understand the influence of women travel influencers across economic, social, and environmental domains. It specifically addresses the research gap regarding economic empowerment from the perspective of women travelers.

Content analysis enabled the identification of three categories of studies based on their gendered approach. Using topic modeling, the dominant topics were articulated within the broad spectrum of women, social media, and tourism. This facilitated a comparison between women-focused studies and other research. These analyses, supported by an extensive literature review, revealed dominant topics in the women-focused category, including psychological empowerment and well-being (Buckley & Westaway OAM, 2021; Khan et al., 2022), gender and online participation (Gazit et al., 2022; Odine, 2013), self-representation (Lyu, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), entrepreneurship and economic empowerment (Sarpong et al., 2022; Sujarwo et al., 2022) and constraints (Karagöz et al., 2021; Nguyen & Hsu, 2022). The review highlights a prevalent psychology-centric approach in women's travel research, revealing a significant gap regarding economic and entrepreneurial aspects from a destination marketing perspective. Previous studies have either focused on destination marketing and image while neglecting economic implications for women (Irfan et al., 2022; Ran et al., 2021), or they have explored women's tourism entrepreneurship without considering the social media component and without integrating destination marketing aspects (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021).

The theoretical framework presents destination marketing as a powerful online tool that highlights the emergent recognition of women travel influencers as potential entrepreneurs (Karagöz et al., 2021; Motahar et al., 2021). It emphasizes the need for theories and concepts from management, such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Madawala et al., 2023), digital entrepreneurial traits (Ng et al., 2016; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021), and micro-entrepreneurship (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2023), to support the idea that travelers can use social media as a start-up platform, thereby framing women travel influencers as entrepreneurs.

From a social perspective, this research critically explores the triggers and barriers faced by women travelers, contributing to the recent discourse on the value of social media for enhancing community support and social capital among women (Karagöz et al., 2021; Ngwira et al., 2020). This is crucial for navigating interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural constraints. The study underscores the importance of social media in understanding the authentic opinions of women travel influencers, capturing their diverse viewpoints (Karagöz et al., 2021). It highlights how their travels and online activities often challenge social expectations shaped by religion or socio-demographic factors (Bernard et al., 2022; Muldoon et al., 2021; Oktadiana et al., 2020). Additionally, the research identifies significant constraints faced by women travelers, such as issues of self-representation online (Lyu, 2016).

In the environmental aspect, this research emphasizes the role of sustainable tourism and community-based natural resources in achieving women's empowerment (Lenao & Basupi, 2016; Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2017). It aligns with previous studies that explore the potential of nature tourism psychotherapies for women travelers and community-based ecotourism led by women residents. This approach is seen as a form of sustainable development that promotes local livelihoods, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation (Zeng et al., 2018).

### 6.2. Practical implications

This research also entails practical implications and provides specific recommendations for tourism marketers, policymakers, and practitioners. This study highlights the strategic advantages of collaborating

with women travel influencers, who are seen as authentic, unbiased promoters of destinations. Tourism and destination managers can harness the insights provided by these influencers to better tailor offerings and experiences to the diverse preferences of women travelers (Nguyen & Hsu, 2022). Beyond this, women travel influencers offer broader advantages that indirectly benefit their partners, as they actively support the achievement of SDGs (Khan et al., 2022; UNWTO, 2019). Their contributions to community-based tourism, including wilderness, adventure travel, ecotourism, and eco-friendly hospitality services, further drive sustainable growth in the tourism sector (Makandwa et al., 2022; Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2017; Zeng et al., 2018). Women travel influencers are not just key figures in the digital era but also powerful agents of change, promoting both gender equality and economic growth in line with SDG 5 and SDG 8. By challenging gender norms, advocating for women's rights, fostering entrepreneurship, and championing sustainable tourism, they contribute to building a more inclusive and prosperous world for all.

In addition to these advantages, this research highlights several key needs that tourism marketers, policymakers, and practitioners must address. For instance, although the start-up capital required is relatively low (UNWTO, 2019), enhanced financing programs are necessary to support women travel influencers and promote entrepreneurship. Governments should establish dedicated funds for women becoming travel influencers and micro-celebrities (Dutta et al., 2021; Le & Hancer, 2021), enabling them to acquire essential equipment (smartphones, cameras, drones), while also covering initial start-up costs and employment opportunities.

Adequate training in digital literacy, entrepreneurial skills, and leadership is also essential for commercial success. Workshops on destination marketing, affiliate marketing, travel photography, and quality content creation, supported by guidelines for originality and authenticity, should be offered within the tourism sector.

Governments also need to enhance infrastructure by providing access to accurate information and protocols related to taxes, paid subscriptions, and tourism legislation. They should streamline visa processes, reduce airport hassles, and support regulations to prevent online sexual harassment, address privacy concerns in digital negotiations (Ngwira et al., 2020), and ensure sufficient resource access.

Finally, tourism managers and marketers should support women in overcoming socio-cultural barriers that limit their entrepreneurial initiatives. This includes helping women leverage social media for entrepreneurial purposes, recognizing their value, and promoting a positive image that counters societal prejudices about women's roles. Encouraging their participation in adventure tourism and high-risk destinations is also crucial.

### 6.3. Limitations

The systematic literature review was limited to the WoS and Scopus databases, excluding other sources that might provide valuable insights. Additionally, only studies focusing on women or employing a gendered approach were included, which prevents a comprehensive comparison with more general gender-neutral studies. Moreover, while a theoretical framework was proposed, it requires empirical validation. Further empirical studies, including longitudinal analyses, are necessary to explore the relationships proposed in the framework. These studies should use actual data to investigate the potential role of social media in enabling women travelers to become entrepreneurial travel influencers, thereby providing a more in-depth understanding of the framework's applicability.

### 6.4. Future research agenda

Several research avenues emerge from the literature review, particularly addressing prominent gaps in women-focused studies on travelers and social media.

First, there is a lack of robust theoretical frameworks concerning women's travel and travel influencers. The review identifies existing theories, predominantly rooted in psychology and marketing, and underscores the need for approaches from entrepreneurship and management. These could recognize women travelers as potential entrepreneurs through destination marketing. Future research should aim to theoretically understand how these women become successful influencers and identify the traits that shape travel trends and styles (Gretzel & Bowser, 2013; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018). A more holistic comparison between women-focused and non-gender-focused studies would enhance the understanding of how women travelers become influencers and entrepreneurs, compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, future studies can validate the proposed framework to advance the understanding of women travelers becoming entrepreneurial travel influencers, examining their motivations, barriers, personality traits, success indicators, and creativity from a destination marketing perspective.

Second, the challenges faced by women travelers who become entrepreneurial travel influencers are multifaceted and insufficiently explored. These include travel constraints related to gender and religion, necessitating more pragmatic and transformative approaches to understanding the challenges imposed by socio-demographic factors, especially in highly patriarchal and conservative societies. More research is needed to explore women's travel challenges in high-risk destinations. Additionally, there are constraints related to online content, such as self-objectification. Experimental studies indicate that travel images can be catalytic, but research on self-objectification issues among women travel influencers is lacking (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

Third, this study identifies a significant gap in understanding the impact of women travel influencers on destination marketing and image. Future research should explore how destination marketing can serve as a powerful online tool (Xu & Zhang, 2021) and a criterion for job roles (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). Research should investigate the process of becoming a travel influencer, highlighting the role of destination marketing and image, and examining the specific contents and facilitators that influence these outcomes. Further studies are needed on various aspects of tourism, such as follower engagement, travel styles, and trends (Ballester et al., 2023) as well as the authenticity of destinations, branding, imitations, information quality, and the excessive use of social media.

Fourth, regarding the environment and sustainable tourism, the findings suggest the need to explore beyond the psychological, economic, and social implications of women travel influencers becoming entrepreneurs. Future research should examine ecotourism, eco-friendly restaurants, and eco-friendly hospitality sectors to understand the motivations of women travel influencers in persuading general women tourists. Additionally, more empirical research is needed to provide solutions for collaborations and positive relationships with stakeholders promoting responsible behavior (Ballester et al., 2023).

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Tasneem Binte Morshed:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Ana Beatriz Hernández-Lara:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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#### Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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