



Review Article

Exploring the role of female travel influencers: A network and thematic analysis

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ABSTRACT

Considering the active participation of female travelers in various forms of tourism, particularly in nature-based tourism, and their content sharing on social media, an increased number of studies have emerged on psychological empowerment and well-being. However, the implications of this phenomenon can be expected in other arenas that entail economic effects. The objective of this research is to explore the knowledge structure of research on female travelers emerging as travel influencer micro-celebrities. By conducting network and thematic analyses on publications selected through a systematic literature review, this work assesses the current state of research and identifies potential gaps. Findings suggest a dearth of research that explores the intersection of economic empowerment with female travel influencers. While destination marketing appears to be a popular research theme, there seems to be a lack of studies examining the broader impact of these female digital entrepreneurs on influencer marketing strategies and consumer behaviour. This highlights the need for a more holistic approach that integrates the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of this phenomenon.

1. Introduction

In recent times, many female travelers have actively created stories and content on social media platforms, under the title “influencer” or “micro-celebrity” (Dutta et al., 2021), promoting nature tourism destinations and contributing to sustainable tourism. This phenomenon concerns women who act as both creators and consumers of online travel content. On the creator side, recent statistics highlight a strong female presence in travel influencing. For instance, Bianchi (2022) revealed that 9 out of the 10 most popular Spanish travel influencers on Instagram were women. As consumers, women also drive travel trends. Globally, 75 % of women leverage social media platforms to research destinations, including finding the best places to eat and things to do (Condorferries, 2022).

Scholars have largely evidenced traveling as a therapy for female travelers, taking into account its psychological implications in terms of empowerment and well-being, pointing out that travel research by women is predominantly psychology-centric (Buckley & Westaway, 2020; Karagöz et al., 2020; Mkono et al., 2021). It is only since the huge participation of women in social media that additional economic implications have emerged, linked to the surge of female travelers. Studies on female travel experiences have recognized that female travelers

participating on social media, especially if they become influencers, form a special group with great commercial potential for a female-oriented audience, particularly in sectors such as shopping (Yuksel, 2004), health care (Connell, 2012), and food tasting (Everett, 2008). They are considered as powerful social media personalities, perceived to be more reliable and trustworthy than other promotional sources because of their grounded and unbiased opinions (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Xu (Rinka) and Pratt, 2018). The benefits obtained through sharing their travel experiences have led some of them to turn this activity into their main livelihood, quitting their jobs, turning their globetrotting into a personal brand, promoting destinations, eradicating gender stereotypes (Mkono et al., 2021; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018), and often embracing digital entrepreneurship (Tajeddini et al., 2017) or micro-entrepreneurship (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2023; Jiménez-Zarco et al., 2021), ultimately achieving economic empowerment (Boley & McGeehee, 2014).

The economic impact extends beyond the influencers themselves. Female travel influencers can shape career aspirations for their followers. Their content can inspire women to pursue careers in tourism, break free from social constraints, and build financial independence. This influence can challenge traditional norms and encourage women to embrace economic and job opportunities in the travel industry (Arthur,

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2022; Muldoon et al., 2021).

Therefore, understanding the holistic impact of female travelers' participation on social media is of utmost importance, and goes beyond the psychological sphere (Khan et al., 2022; UNWTO, 2019). The relevance of the topic has encouraged some previous academic literature reviews (Dewangan et al., 2022), but all of them have applied a partial and limited scope. This is because (1) existing literature reviews have largely focused on separate aspects of this phenomenon (Adam, 2019; Martínez-Navalón et al., 2021), exploring either the role of influencer marketing and social media (Paül i Agustí, 2021; Ye et al., 2017), or the specific role of female travelers or female entrepreneurs within tourism, but have not examined these dimensions together (Booth et al., 2020; Madanaguli et al., 2021); and (2) previous literature reviews have primarily explored the psychological or economic implications of influencer marketing and digital entrepreneurship, but have not specifically focused on female travel influencers, pointing out the lack of research examining the intricate mechanisms linking influencer marketing and digital entrepreneurship within the context of female travel entrepreneurs (Booth et al., 2020; Madanaguli et al., 2021).

There are also significant theoretical gaps in explaining this phenomenon. While constructivist grounded theory, social cognitive theory, and social identity theory have provided valuable psychological insights—examining female travelers' experiences and gendered perspectives (Buckley & Westaway OAM, 2021; Sharifi-Tehrani et al., 2024), the motivational factors behind content-sharing behaviors (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014), and the role of social media in shaping role models—they fall short in addressing the economic and entrepreneurial dimensions of female travel influencers. From an economic standpoint, entrepreneurship and social capital theories have been applied primarily in the context of female entrepreneurship in hospitality and rural tourism, with little consideration for the role of social media. Consequently, these frameworks fail to capture the gendered dynamics of social media participation and overlook the intersection of social identity, entrepreneurship, and the economic impact of digital transformation in tourism. A more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach is needed to study female travel influencers, particularly in terms of their economic agency, business strategies, and evolving role as digital entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by contributing to female studies, destination marketing, economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and the psychological dimensions of travel influencers. Specifically, it aims to map the knowledge structure of female travelers evolving into travel influencers and establishing themselves as personal brands or micro-celebrities. Through a comprehensive and up-to-date systematic literature review, combined with network and thematic analysis, this research provides deeper insights into their influence, entrepreneurial strategies, and economic impact within the tourism industry.

This study primarily aims to integrate insights from previous research on female travelers becoming influencers by analyzing the different dimensions of this phenomenon and identifying their intersections. It seeks to provide a holistic understanding while highlighting existing research gaps, particularly in integrating psychological, economic, sociocultural, and environmental aspects. The identification of these gaps outlines key directions for future research, particularly on how female travel influencers shape gender roles, social identity, and cultural norms, particularly in constrained environments. Their role as micro-celebrities raises questions about trust, authenticity, and digital entrepreneurship, warranting further study. More insights are needed into their economic impact on tourism, gender equity, and entrepreneurship, especially in patriarchal societies. Additionally, the relationship between authenticity, creativity, and well-being remains underexplored. Finally, research should assess how their participation in wilderness tourism influences environmental awareness and sustainable travel practices. From a practical perspective, this study provides policymakers, destination managers, and marketers with strategic

recommendations on leveraging female travel influencers to enhance destination marketing and management. These insights can support initiatives such as promoting favorable tourism legislation, securing startup funding, offering technical assistance, and providing training in digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills, among other key areas.

2. Theoretical framework

Previous research has conducted literature reviews and applied various theories to analyze the different dimensions of women becoming travelers and sharing their experiences on social media. However, these studies have primarily examined different aspects of this phenomenon separately.

2.1. Psychological and gender dimensions

To explore the psychological dimension of travel and tourism participation among women, many studies have employed theories such as constructivist grounded theory to provide psychological insights into female travelers' experiences and the gendered perceptions surrounding them (Buckley & Westaway OAM, 2021; Sharifi-Tehrani et al., 2024). For instance, an early study by Zhang and Hitchcock (2014) found that Chinese women travelers conceptualize travel as a means of reinforcing their self-identity. Moreover, their experiences in Macao were not merely leisure activities but also opportunities to strengthen and enhance personal relationships.

When focusing on the gender dimension, several important academic reviews stand out, such as the study by Yang et al. (2016), which applied a narrative synthesis approach to the existing literature on Asian female travelers. Their review highlighted the impact of cultural identity and gender stereotypes on these women's travel experiences, as well as their agency in challenging discriminatory practices. While this work offers valuable insights into the psychological aspects of travel for women, including empowerment and well-being, it does not examine the role of social media or the economic and entrepreneurial implications of female travel influencers.

2.2. The role of social media

Social media platforms serve as valuable sources of information about how women communicate their emotional connections (Xu & Zhang, 2021), negotiate risks, and achieve psychological empowerment by sharing their travel experiences both during and after their trips (Amaro et al., 2016; Sigala, 2016; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018). Therefore, many studies have focused on the role of social media due to the growing trend of female travelers using virtual platforms to share their travel experiences (Buckley & Westaway, 2020; Buckley & Westaway OAM, 2021). This has led scholars to emphasize these platforms as critical tools for understanding how women's voices and choices are expressed in society (Senutha & Hafizah, 2017).

In exploring the role of social media in the public visibility of female travelers through digital platforms, it is essential to consider theoretical frameworks such as social cognitive theory. This theory has been used to examine initiatives that leverage social media to collect and share stories of female role models, which is particularly relevant for female travel influencers. These influencers can be seen as powerful role models and micro-celebrities within their communities. For instance, Munar and Jacobsen (2014) applied this framework to explore gender differences in motivational factors, such as personal and community-related benefits, and the social capital that influences the sharing of user-generated content. Their study highlighted the dominance of visual content and emphasized the significance of altruistic and community-driven motivations, while also identifying motivational differences between various types of content creators.

Other notable studies in this research area that focus on social media include the work of Dewangan et al. (2022), who provided a

comprehensive review of the literature on the role of social media influencers in consumer buying behavior and their influence on the image and performance of companies. Their study highlighted the significant impact that social media influencers, particularly travel influencers, have on the tourism industry. They found that travel influencers positively affect their followers' travel and visit intentions and noted the increasing professionalization of influencers within the tourism sector. Similarly, Hausberg et al. (2019) conducted a bibliometric analysis and systematic review of 116 articles in digital transformation research, identifying tourism as a key area where digital transformation is leading to new business opportunities, such as e-tourism. Their content analysis revealed that common keywords in the digital context included social media, Facebook, and data analytics, underscoring the importance of social media for marketing purposes in tourism and demonstrating the positive impact of user-generated content on the success of tourism organizations and their customers. Although these reviews offer valuable insights into influencer marketing and social media in tourism, they fail to consider the gender dimension. This gap emphasizes the need for further research into the specific role of female influencers in the tourism sector, a critical area that remains underexplored.

2.3. Entrepreneurial implications

Few studies have explored the economic and entrepreneurial implications of female travel influencers, with most drawing on theories such as entrepreneurship theory (Makandwa et al., 2022; Surangi, 2024), social capital theory (Shrestha et al., 2023; Yaja et al., 2023), grounded theory (Ng et al., 2016; Sharifi-Tehrani et al., 2024; Shrestha et al., 2023), and self-identity theory (Gretzel & Bowser, 2013). A number of systematic reviews have also addressed this topic. Notably, Booth et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of 132 articles on the role of entrepreneurship in island economies, specifically within the tourism and hospitality sectors. Their thematic analysis identified a gender-related theme, focusing on the factors that influence women's decisions to become tourism entrepreneurs, the empowerment they gain through business growth, and the subsequent positive effects on their social and political status.

Similarly, Madanaguli et al. (2021) reviewed female entrepreneurship in rural and hospitality tourism, highlighting the significant barriers women face, such as societal expectations tied to traditional gender roles, concerns about legitimacy, and doubts regarding their entrepreneurial capabilities. Their study also underscored the positive impact of female entrepreneurship in tourism, particularly as a means to enhance women's economic participation, create income opportunities, and alleviate poverty, especially in underdeveloped regions. While these reviews emphasize the importance of networking and marketing activities for the success of female entrepreneurs in tourism, they largely overlook the pivotal role that social media play in these processes.

2.4. The need for a comprehensive approach

A deeper understanding of female travelers' motivations and challenges is crucial for the tourism industry, extending beyond psychological factors to include the significant economic value associated with female travel (Madawala et al., 2023; Morshed & Hernández-Lara, 2024; Osman et al., 2019). The role of the internet and social media is vital in this context (Lund et al., 2018; Owuor et al., 2023; Teles da Mota & Pickering, 2020). Female travelers' engagement on social media is expected to have a substantial impact on the economic aspects of tourism, particularly in areas like destination management and entrepreneurship. Despite the significance of these aspects, they have not been thoroughly explored and, more importantly, have often been examined in isolation, creating a notable gap in the comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon as a whole (Morshed & Hernández-Lara, 2024).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on female travelers' social identity processes in the context of social

media, and their economic and entrepreneurial implications (Dutta et al., 2021; Gretzel & Bowser, 2013; Morshed & Hernández-Lara, 2024). It seeks to address the need for an in-depth analysis of how social media influence female travelers' identities and behaviors. To offer a more nuanced and up-to-date understanding, we have drawn upon extensive previous reviews that focus on specific aspects of the phenomenon, such as the effects of female participation in tourism and the role of influencer marketing and social media.

The study aims to fill a notable gap in the research on the micro-celebrity effect (Dutta et al., 2021) of female travel influencers and its broader implications. Through network and thematic analysis, we will map the knowledge structure and identify key themes related to this emerging field, enhancing our understanding of how female travel influencers leverage their micro-celebrity status for entrepreneurial ventures. This integrated approach will offer valuable insights into the evolving role of female travel influencers and their global impact on the tourism industry.

3. Methodology

Our review began by identifying articles that have broadly examined the topic of female travelers using social media, expecting them to cover psychological, economic, social, and environmental implications, coinciding with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 5 and 8, and encompassing key concepts such as female empowerment (Tolentino, 2019), influencer marketing (Boerman et al., 2022), and sustainable tourism (Zeng et al., 2018). To identify the suitable articles, we combined searches in the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases using the keywords "social media" OR "social network*", and combining them with "female" OR "wom*", "tour*" OR "travel", and "leisure" OR "hospitality".

We retrieved articles published up to March 2025 using the selected keywords without any time limit. We used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement detailed in Fig. 1, to select the sample of papers. Our initial search using the defined criteria yielded 1338 articles from WoS and 726 from Scopus. After removing duplicates, the sample was reduced to 1710 papers. Following the screening and eligibility stages based on the inclusion criteria detailed in Table 1, the final sample was further narrowed to 265 papers.

The selected papers were manually classified into three categories, considering the role and relevance of the female dimension in each study. The first group, including 29 % of the articles, was labeled female-focused (FF) and included papers in our dataset that solely discussed the women's role. The second group (32 %), named gender-focused (GF), grouped papers considering gender differences or gender as the main discussion. The third group labeled gender-variable (GV) was composed of 39 % of the articles in the dataset and considered gender as a variable or unit of analysis, although the discussion was generally constructed and not focused on gender issues.

The most relevant category for our research is the one related to FF studies, but even so, GF and GV studies are also analyzed, mainly for the purpose of comparing them to the main category of FF studies.

Network and thematic analysis were employed to explore the identified categories. We used graphical representations for identifying trending topics through word networks of titles, abstracts, and keywords, along with keyword correlation analysis. The network analysis consisted of graphical representations of frequent co-occurrences between words. In each figure or graph, the nodes represent the most frequent words, and the lines the co-occurrence of words in the same document, the line between nodes being wider the greater the frequency with which two terms appear together. After conducting the network analysis, the most frequent words in each network were manually coded by the authors in an iterative process that constitutes the thematic analysis, allowing the authors to determine the most salient themes in each category.

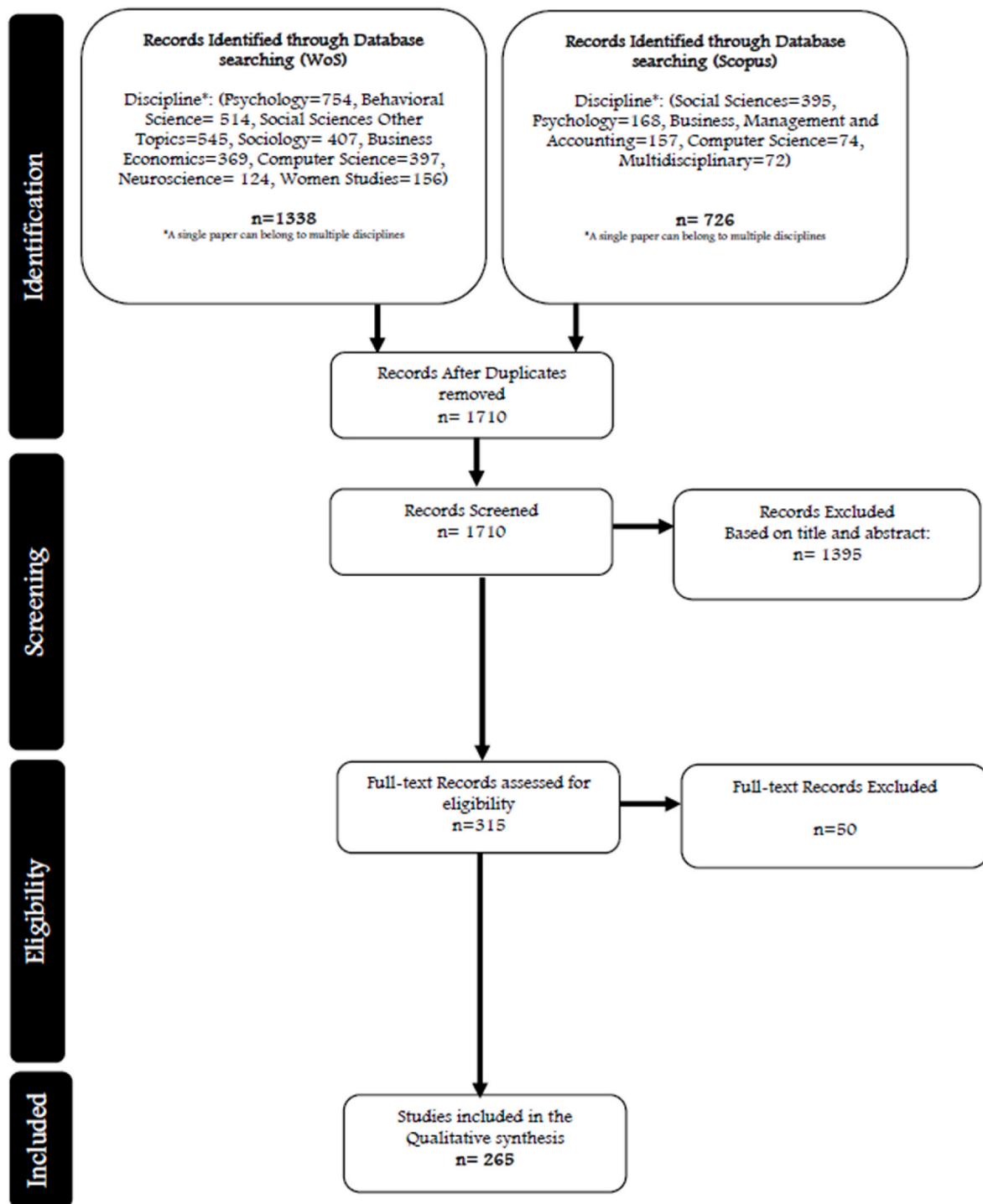


Fig. 1. Prisma statement.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the previous research, we employed network and thematic analyses on the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the papers in the dataset. Titles offer a concise overview of a paper’s core concepts, but may utilize broken words or lack context, sometimes not providing an accurate understanding of their relevance. Abstracts provide a more detailed summary and more complete information, often including methodological details, with the advantage of making it possible to extract additional insights that complement the information contained in the titles. However, they also provide broken words that again jeopardize the holistic understanding of the themes. Keywords, on the other hand, group relevant terms together, facilitating

the identification of prominent themes compared to abstract and titles, but they are human-selected and may not fully capture the nuances of the research. By analyzing all three elements (titles, abstracts, and keywords) together, we aim to achieve a more holistic and transparent understanding of the key themes within the research topic.

To further examine the relationships between keywords and identify prominent themes, we employed correlation analysis alongside network analysis. Network maps reveal which keyword pairs co-occur frequently, but correlation analysis goes a step further. It measures the strength and direction of the association between keywords. This means that even keywords appearing together infrequently can exhibit a strong

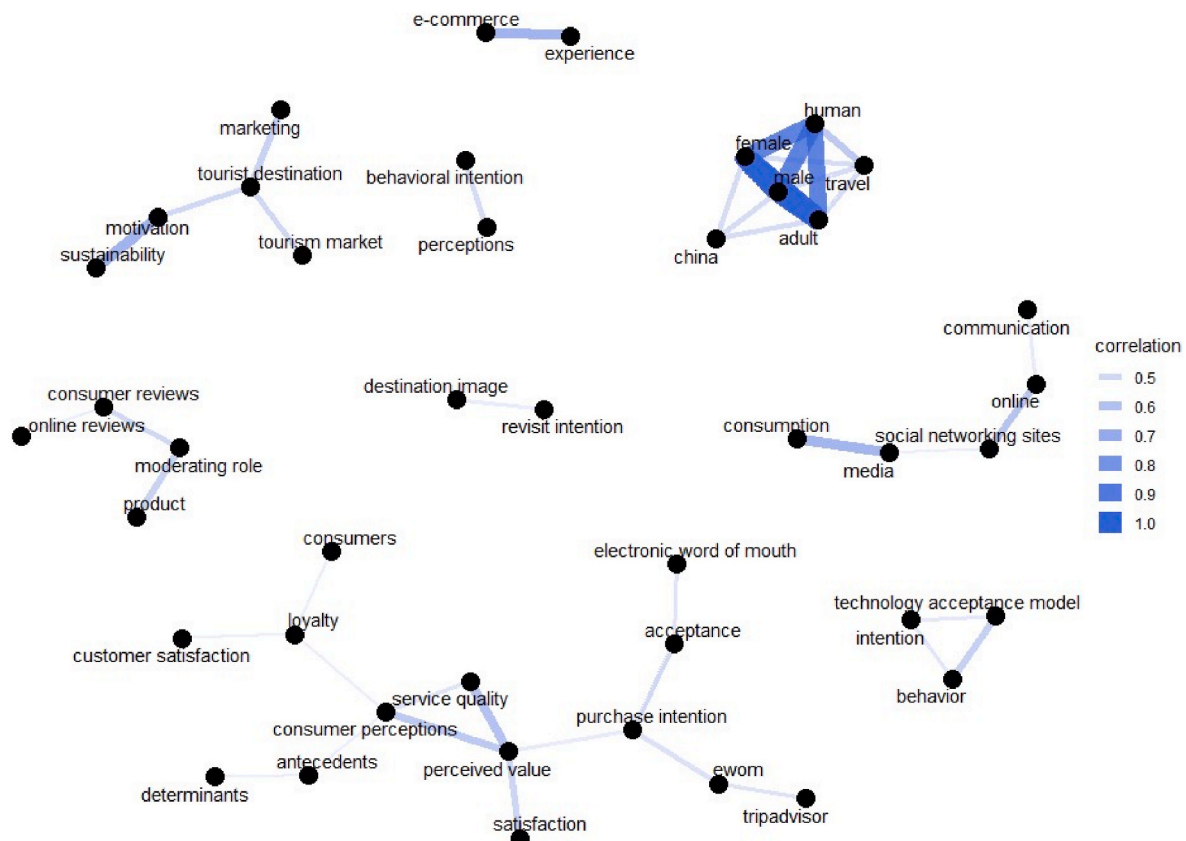


Fig. 13. Keyword correlation of GV studies.

Table 2
Summary of the thematic analysis of FF, GF, and GV studies.

FF themes	GF themes	GV themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women/Female • Tourism • Travel • Leisure • Social media • Participation • Empowerment • Solo traveling • Body image • Identity • Management • Entrepreneurship • Environmental aspects • Social aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Tourism • Social media • Online communication • Women-men differences • Data • Information • Methodological issues • Destination management and marketing • Destination image • Consumer perceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital and online communication • Online platforms • Tourism • Travel Social media • Marketing management • E-commerce • Consumption • Destination marketing • Destination image

Source: Compiled by authors

Muslim female travelers to build confidence and enhance courage. Another important study by Khan, Sahadev, Rashid, & Banerjee, 2022 indicated the significance of social media for psychological empowerment in the decision-making of Muslim females. This study largely highlighted the possibility of social capital targeting Muslim females through informal community-based networks and their participation in such networks to freely exchange information, share views and opinions, and build sufficient agency to make decisions. In this case, social media act as an agency to empower the disempowered through the involvement of Muslim females as independent decision-makers for holiday planning.

Previous studies within the FF category have also explored the psychological aspects of female travelers' use of social media, particularly

through the lens of travel selfies, often employing identity theory. For example, research in the South Korean context has applied identity theory to examine the psychological dimensions of travel selfies, arguing that these images function as placemaking practices. This perspective highlights the empowering and productive potential of such photographs, which both conform to and challenge neoliberal consumerist ideologies (Halegoua & Moon, 2021). Additionally, another recent study used identity theory to explore the social aspects of online and offline leisure activities among married Taiwanese women with young children, shedding light on the intersection of identity and social engagement in this context (Ho, 2023).

FF studies have also particularly stressed the psychological benefits for female travelers in certain types of tourism, highlighting "leisure constraints" (Morshed & Hernández-Lara, 2024; Ngwira et al., 2020; Ron & Nimrod, 2018). In nature tourism, scholars identified some novel outcomes that include psychological rescue, missing life-component, and family flow-on effects (Buckley & Westaway, 2020, 2021). Adventure tourism constitutes another good example. It has normally been conceived as a masculine landscape and considered a threat to femininity, it not being uncommon for females to avoid venturing into wilderness alone for personal security and possible corruption of body and spirit (Brown & Tiggemann, 2020; Khoo et al., 2025). However, research indicates a faster rate of female travelers' participation in nature tourism than that of men and the positive impact of sharing travel experiences on social media to achieve well-being and psychological empowerment (Mkono et al., 2021; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018). Previous studies have also highlighted the connection between *leisure tourism and psychological empowerment, particularly in wilderness settings. Travelers, especially those seeking extraordinary experiences (e.g. 'once-in-a-lifetime', expensive, challenging, or solo travel), often view travel as the catalyst for personal transformation and a way to experience 'self in place'. While women may prioritize comfort during travel (e.g., temperature, crowdedness, and safety,*

especially at night) (Luo & He, 2021), international travel becomes a space for women to break free from socio-economic constraints and traditional gender roles (Bernard et al., 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024).

Beyond psychological implications, another significant conclusion from female-focused (FF) studies is the role of entrepreneurship, particularly linked to tourism and women (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2023; Madawala et al., 2023; Sarpong et al., 2022). This aspect has been uniquely detected in this category of studies within our sample. Keywords such as "female entrepreneurs" and "female entrepreneurship" appear in FF studies, though they are not dominant. This indicates an interest in the topic, although it still remains underexplored, especially in the context of destination and social media intervention. While previous studies have addressed the importance of digital skills and literacies, few have highlighted commercially successful indicators that entail economic empowerment and digital entrepreneurship for women in the tourism industry (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021).

Recent studies have introduced social capital theory into the management aspects of entrepreneurship within the social media context (Alhakimi & Albashiri, 2023; Moyano Castolo et al., 2024; Promburom, 2024; Yaja et al., 2023). This framework emphasizes the perceived benefits and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, particularly in terms of psychological, social, and economic empowerment. A recent study by Alhakimi and Albashiri (2023) examined the role of social media adoption in shaping the entrepreneurial activities of women in the tourism industry, highlighting both non-technical and technical challenges. The study identified soft factors, such as management attitudes, alongside hard technical obstacles, including costs and other practical considerations. These factors collectively influence how social media foster entrepreneurial intentions among women in this sector.

Similarly, environmental and social aspects, retrieved from terms like "community-based ecotourism" or "ethnicity," are present but not prominent in FF studies. Indeed, social media can serve as a platform for both psychological and economic empowerment of women, with social and sustainable implications. They allow women not only to express their emotions and gain financial autonomy and independence but also to contribute to community growth with conservation outcomes (Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2017; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018; Zeng, 2017).

Table 3 (in Supplementary material) provides a summary of the objectives, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and analyses of key studies within the FF category.

The analysis in the case of the GF category reveals the use of specific terms, like gender instead of women or female. In the network analysis, how the word "differences" appears together with the main notions of travel, tourism, and social media is also relevant, this type of study mostly being centered on considering differences in terms of gender, or on comparison between males and females.

Results on the GF category networks revealed themes related to data, information, and methodological issues. Interestingly, marketing and managerial concepts also emerged, albeit to a lesser extent. These included terms like destination trust (Abubakar et al., 2017; Mladenovic et al., 2019; Mohammed Abubakar, 2016), destination image (Amaro et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2022; Pabel & Cassidy, 2022; Wei & Tasci, 2017), destination visit and marketing (Lee et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2022), consumer perceptions, and behavior (Basu & Swaminathan, 2021), and e-wom (Amaro et al., 2020; Bilal et al., 2022; Hervás-Cortina et al., 2024; Tapanainen et al., 2021), all connected to the central theme of gender, tourism, and social media.

The most frequently used theoretical frameworks in the GF category include motivation theory (Ahn et al., 2020; Król & Zdonek, 2021, p. 11193; Long et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2025; Wei & Tasci, 2017), which is predominantly applied to understand the psychological aspects of travelers as online consumers. Additionally, social identity theory has been widely utilized in GF studies (Huang & Wei, 2019; Wang et al., 2024) to examine demographic differences and travel behaviors.

Finally, the GV category networks differed from the others by exhibiting a weaker focus on the gender or women's axis. These studies

primarily concentrated on the tourism and social media axes. Notably, they emphasized the significance of digital communication facilitated by online platforms and marketing concepts (Martínez-Navalón et al., 2021). Terms like brand, eWOM, information technology, source, credibility, consumers, purchase, and loyalty appeared frequently, suggesting a stronger emphasis on marketing management compared to other categories (Al-Htibat & Garanti, 2019; Irfan et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2023). The notion of destination image is particularly relevant in this category of studies (Adam et al., 2023; Aziz & Al Alam, 2024; Xu et al., 2021; Yannacopoulou & Kallinikos, 2024), and has been frequently used in GV studies to focus on the effect of user-generated content (UGC), tourist loyalty behavior, and eWOM.

Social identity theory has been a dominant framework in this category of studies, particularly in understanding branding and consumer behavior in social media contexts (Al-Htibat & Garanti, 2019; Huang et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Strandberg & Styvén, 2020). Research has highlighted the role of brand love, brand awareness, and word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in shaping destination branding and marketing (Barreda et al., 2015). Additionally, theories like the elaboration likelihood model and information adoption model have been applied to explore how opinion leaders influence consumer perceptions through content quality and social closeness (Huang et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2023; Meng et al., 2024). Overall, these studies emphasize the intersection of branding, influencers, destination marketing, and eWOM in the evolving digital tourism landscape.

The review of the three study categories also highlights key methodological differences. Qualitative research is more prevalent in FF studies (46%), whereas quantitative approaches dominate in GF (52%) and GV (83%) studies. Additionally, mixed methods have emerged as a growing research approach across all categories, particularly in recent FF studies (8%) (Madawala et al., 2023; Morshed & Hernández-Lara, 2024; Yaja et al., 2023).

Our research highlights the particular importance of the studies in the FF category for their unique focus on women's experiences in travel and social media participation, which aligns directly with our research objective. These studies stand out not only for their emphasis on female travelers but also for being the only ones to explore tourism entrepreneurship through a social media lens. FF studies, supported by existing literature, reveal a dominance of psychology within female tourism research, emerging in destination aspects (Bernard et al., 2022; Nguyen & Hsu, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024). However, this overlooks destination marketing aspects, which are more prominent in GF and GV studies, but largely absent in FF research. Considering that FF studies represent only 29% of the sample, these findings expose a significant theoretical gap and a limited understanding of how women travelers become travel influencers or micro-celebrities and digital entrepreneurs, and the subsequent social, economic, and environmental implications for sustainable tourism.

6. Conclusion

Our research conducts a systematic literature review of the research on female travel influencers, revealing the complexity of the transformation of females into travelers, and from there, into travel influencers and digital entrepreneurs. The topic is gaining momentum for female travelers in nature tourism using social media and the transformation of some of them into travel influencers as micro-celebrities. This transformation empowers women to explore and promote diverse destinations, engage in adventure and alternative tourism experiences, challenge stereotypes, and gain therapeutic benefits. Additionally, they become role models, micro-celebrities, brand personas, and contributors to the prosocial behavior of female tourists, leading to significant impacts not only on a psychological level for travelers and followers but also on broader economic, environmental, and social dimensions associated with sustainable tourism. However, research on this topic remains scant, with limited studies adopting a female-focused approach. Among

these, only a handful address themes related to female entrepreneurship or the environmental and sociocultural issues pertinent to sustainable tourism.

6.1. Theoretical and academic implications: future research lines

Our research has significant theoretical implications, revealing the lack of a consistent framework for the branding strategies of micro-celebrities as digital entrepreneurs, analyzing the phenomenon beyond its psychological aspects. While prominent studies have focused on psychological empowerment, mental health, and well-being, very few have integrated the psychological, economic, sociocultural, and environmental dimensions of travel influencers in the context of sustainable tourism. This underscores the need for a robust theoretical approach that comprehensively understands the various aspects of women travel influencers becoming digital entrepreneurs.

As our research is a literature review, our primary contribution lies in the academic domain. We propose multiple future research directions in the sociocultural, economic, and environmental spheres (see [Table 3 in Supplementary material](#)).

Firstly, in the sociocultural domain, in the social media era, academic research has an increased responsibility to conduct rigorous research and offer meaningful insights for female travel communities to restart and reset tourism growth. From a theoretical understanding, social identity theory can be utilized to understand the micro-celebrity effects ([Gretzel & Bowser, 2013](#)) aligned with digital entrepreneurship. Recent studies have emphasized the crucial impact of social media on women travelers in both Eastern and Western contexts, primarily focusing on psychological aspects. However, the business, social and cultural dimensions have been analyzed less, leaving significant gaps in understanding the effects of women travel influencers as micro-celebrities or brands on specific female groups affected by cultural or religious considerations. Additionally, the impact of these influencers on changing social stereotypes related to gender roles, as well as the factors determining these impacts, remains underexplored. Studies from Muslim-dominated and Muslim-majority high-risk destinations, which are more prone to socio-cultural constraints, are particularly lacking.

Moreover, the strategic self-presentational features of objectified travel selfies raise important concerns about trust and authenticity ([Audrezet et al., 2020](#); [Hu, 2023](#)). The composition of the image, the situation, and the location photographed reflect esthetic and ontological choices that reveal cultural values, performances of identity, and the social position of the person taking the selfie. Many friends and followers may have inaccurate knowledge about a destination, as they often encounter manipulated travel selfies ([Halegoua & Moon, 2021](#)). Therefore, it would be valuable to investigate how travel photographs function as political and performative expressions of women. This could enhance our understanding of the self-presentational features of women travel influencers across different cultural contexts.

Secondly, considering economic aspects associated with digital entrepreneurship and influencer marketing, social media have increasingly been a subject of study for understanding travel intentions and the psychological implications of traveling for females, but more research is needed to understand the role of female participation in social media to boost their entrepreneurship behavior and to assess the economic value and implications of this phenomenon, not only for female travel influencers in particular, but also for the tourism sector overall. Future studies should provide evidence on the contributions of female travel influencers to gender equity, economic prosperity, and female economic empowerment. Additionally, their role in encouraging other women to choose travel as a career path, especially in patriarchal societies, should be explored. More research is needed on the cycle of empowerment involving female travel influencers from the supply side (e.g. local tourism, homestays) and their followers from the demand side. Finally, since entrepreneurs are often perceived as creative individuals, there should be more research on the relationship between authenticity,

creativity, mental well-being, economic well-being, and entrepreneurial intentions.

Thirdly, regarding the environmental dimension, despite the risks, several voluntary adventurous female travelers are exhibiting risk-taking behaviors, participating in wilderness tourism, that are inconsistent with social expectations, and sharing their actual travel experiences through different social media platforms. Given the higher rate of female travelers' participation in nature tourism than that of males, their share of travel experiences online enables them to achieve psychological benefits, but additionally, on a broader scale, to promote sustainable tourism ([Ballester et al., 2023](#)). The interconnections between female travel influencers and environmental sustainability deserve more research and additional insights.

6.2. Practical implications

Our study also emphasizes several practical and managerial implications. Market research underscores the importance of identifying and satisfying tourists' needs and desires, which is essential for effective destination marketing (such as branding) and aligns with SDGs 3, 5, and 8 ([UNWTO, 2019](#)). This underscores the necessity for policymakers, destination managers, and marketers to collaborate with female travel influencers, who are viewed as impartial micro-celebrities promoting destinations ([Dutta et al., 2021](#)). Recognized as a potentially lucrative segment of digital entrepreneurship, female travel influencers require support in destination marketing through favorable tourism legislation, startup funding, and technical assistance.

Policymakers should focus on enhancing digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills among women travelers interested in becoming digital entrepreneurs ([Ditta-Apichai et al., 2023](#); [Khoo et al., 2023](#); [Madawala et al., 2023](#); [Sujarwo et al., 2022](#)) and advocate regulations that enhance economic opportunities for women entrepreneurs, thereby overcoming existing barriers relevant to nature tourism and recreation.

Furthermore, hospitality and tourism marketers should endeavor to create informal online community networks tailored to specific socio-demographic segments such as region, gender, religion, race, and ethnicity, to effectively promote their offerings and services ([Khan, Sahadev, Rashid, & Banerjee, 2022](#); [Oktadiana et al., 2020](#); [Wijaya et al., 2024](#)).

6.3. Limitations

This research is not exempt from limitations. First, we exclusively considered academic articles from WoS and Scopus, excluding books, book chapters, and conference papers that may also provide more evidence on female tourism and social media implications.

Additionally, our analysis focused on academic papers highlighting social media related to female-specific travel aspects and detailed explorations of FF studies in comparison with other types of studies (GF and GV). To gain deeper insights, future reviews could broaden the scope of tourism and social media research in each individual specific domain, particularly integrating psychological aspects with economic, sociocultural, and environmental aspects of female travel influencers as micro-celebrities and potential digital entrepreneurs. Finally, the specific purpose of this study, focused on exploring the knowledge structure of the field, inhibits further progression that should be boosted by future empirical studies based on actual data of female travel influencers.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

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

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Declaration of the use of AI

We have not used AI.

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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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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