

Sentiment Analysis of Social Media Data in Tourism Destination Studies: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Sentiment analysis of social media platforms has become an important method for examining tourists' perceptions and behavioral patterns. This study provides a systematic review of tourism destination research applying sentiment analysis to social media data. It identifies methodological trends, highlights underutilized platforms and analytical approaches, and outlines directions for future research. A systematic review of studies published between 2016 and 2024 was conducted using major academic databases, including ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore, Emerald Insight, Springer, Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. Following a structured screening process, 30 relevant studies were selected for detailed analysis. The findings indicate a gradual shift from lexicon-based methods to machine learning and transformer-based models, although hybrid approaches remain limited. Research relies heavily on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and TripAdvisor, while visually oriented platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are comparatively underexplored. Overall, the evidence confirms that social media sentiment analysis contributes significantly to understanding destination image formation and visitor evaluation. However stronger theoretical integration and broader data representation are needed to advance the field.

Keywords: sentiment analysis, machine learning, lexicon based, tourist destination, Smart tourism

Introduction

Web 2.0 fundamentally changed the digital environment by enabling users not only to interact with online content but also to create and share it. Travelers now actively capture and share their experiences through reviews, comments, photos, and videos, generating large volumes of user-generated content (UGC). Global social media usage increased from 2.73 billion users in 2017 to 5.17 billion in 2024, and it is projected to exceed six billion by 2028(Statista, 2025). This growth is especially important for tourism research because it has generated a large volume of publicly available traveler-generated data.

Travelers now regularly share reviews, impressions, and stories across platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TripAdvisor, Instagram, and TikTok. Travel-related expressions (e.g., travel vlogs or social media content) have been shown to contribute to how destination image is perceived by audience and influence travel decision-making processes (Abad & Borbon, 2021; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Empirical evidence shows that peer-generated reviews and user-generated content shape tourists' initial destination evaluations and influence travel intentions

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and choices (Lam et al., 2020). Consequently, social media functions not only as a communication channel but also as a participatory and evaluative environment where perceptions and reputations are co-constructed and amplified (Feldkamp, 2021; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

The scale and complexity of user-generated content have increased the need for automated analytical techniques. Sentiment analysis (SA), also known as opinion mining, is a Natural Language Processing (NLP) technique used to identify and classify the sentiment polarity of textual data, typically as positive, negative, or neutral (Liu, 2017). In tourism research, SA has been used to examine tourists' attitudes toward destinations, attractions, accommodations, and services (Borrajó-Millán et al., 2021; Gupta & Kumra, 2024). By analyzing large volumes of online reviews and posts, this approach reveals patterns in satisfaction and travel behavior that are hard to identify manually. Recent methodological developments, including lexicon-based techniques, machine learning algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), and deep learning models, have enhanced the accuracy and scalability of sentiment classification in tourism research (Afrianto Singgalen et al., 2024; Erdoğan et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2015).

Although the use of sentiment analysis in tourism research has increased in recent years, the existing literature is still scattered. Past studies differ broadly in their analytical methods, data sources, thematic focus, and geographical settings. Some focus on destination image, while others examine service quality, tourist satisfaction, or behavioral intentions. Methodologically, approaches range from lexicon-based techniques to machine learning and deep learning models. While previous review studies have addressed social media analytics in tourism more generally, there is still a need for a recent and focused review that specifically examines how sentiment analysis has been applied in destination research between 2016 and 2024.

To address this need, the present study systematically reviews empirical research published during this period that applies sentiment analysis to social media data in the context of tourist destinations. It compares methodological approaches, identifies commonly used platforms, examines thematic areas of application, and considers the geographical distribution of studies. By bringing these findings together, the review highlights current research patterns, identifies gaps, and suggests directions for future research. Overall, it aims to provide a clearer picture of how sentiment analysis contributes to destination research and management.

Methodology

This study undertakes a comprehensive review of prior studies employing SA of social media within tourism destination studies. To achieve its purpose, this study applies a systematic literature review method to provide researchers with a clear and structured overview of prior knowledge in the field (Chandler & Hopewell, 2013; Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Mulrow, 1997). Systematic reviews offer a rigorous and objective method for synthesizing evidence across multiple studies, replacing traditional narrative reviews as the standard approach. (Riesenberg et al., 2014)

This research considers only English-language publications, emphasizing peer-reviewed journal papers and conference proceedings, while omitting books, chapters, theses, and dissertations. In line with the approach outlined by various researchers, the adopted methodology consists of the following key stages:

Development of research questions

The review process was guided by research questions defined at the beginning, aligned with the study's purpose and the structured methodology of a systematic literature review. This study aims to address following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What sentiment analysis techniques are used for social media data in tourism destination research?
- **RQ2:** What thematic areas are addressed in tourism destination studies applying sentiment analysis?
- **RQ3:** What platforms and geographic regions are most examined in tourism destination sentiment analysis research?
- **RQ4:** What methodological approaches and research areas are insufficiently addressed in tourism destination sentiment analysis research and should be explored further?
- **RQ5:** What are the key findings and policy implications of these studies?

Selection and Retrieval of Relevant Literature Sources

The literature search covered publications from 2016 to 2024 and was conducted using ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as “social media,” “sentiment analysis,” and “tourism destination” were combined using Boolean operators. The initial search yielded 211 records.

Titles and abstracts were first screened to remove irrelevant studies. Articles were included if they applied sentiment analysis to social media data within a tourism destination context and met the defined time frame and publication criteria. Studies were excluded if they did not focus on tourism destinations, used social media data without sentiment analysis methods, were review or conceptual papers, or were not peer-reviewed. After applying these criteria, 81 studies remained.

A full-text review was then conducted to assess methodological relevance and alignment with the research questions, resulting in a final sample of 30 studies for detailed analysis. The selection process was carried out by the author based on predefined criteria. For each selected study, key information including publication year, geographical focus, platform type, analytical technique, and key focus and main findings were systematically extracted and synthesized.

Integration and Analysis of the Literature

This review paper covers research published between 2016 to 2024, with 30 articles meeting the study objectives. The following table shows the data extracted from the selected articles.

Table 1. Summary of Studies Applying Sentiment Analysis in Tourism Destination Research (2016–2024)

Title and Country	Methodology	Data source	Research Focus	Application / Result	Authors
Combined sentiment score and star rating analysis of travel destination prediction based on user preference using morphological linear neural network model with correlated topic modelling approach (India)	Machine learning-based	67,871 TripAdvisor reviews	Prediction modeling	Sentiment + ratings improve prediction accuracy (95%).	(Kumar & Hanji, 2024)
Understanding Fine-Grained Sentiments of Super-Priority Destination Visitors using Multi-task Learning for Extraction of Aspect Terms and Polarity Classification on Reviews (Indonesia)	Machine learning-based	TripAdvisor Reviews	Aspect-based sentiment	Fine-grained SA improves expectation detection.	(Kusumawardani et al., 2024)
The world from the perspective of digital nomads: exploring sentiments in destination reviews (Turkey)	Lexicon-based	Twitter, and Reddit	Destination perception	Trust and joy dominate preferred destinations.	(Özgen Çiğdemli et al., 2024)
Destination image branding for world heritage sites: a methodology combining GIS with sentiment analysis (Malaysia)	Machine learning-based	Reviews from Weibo and Google map	Destination branding	Sentiment reveals distinct branding themes.	(SangKun et al., 2024)
Enhancing Sentiment Analysis of Indonesian Tourism Video Content Commentary on TikTok: A FastText and Bi-LSTM Approach (Indonesia)	Machine learning-based	TikTok comments	Platform-based analysis	Majority of comments classified as positive.	(Ariyus et al., 2024)
Sentiment analysis applied to tourism: exploring tourist-generated content in the case of a wellness tourism destination (Portugal)	Lexicon-based	1249 TripAdvisor reviews	Visitor satisfaction	Spa and massage services highly valued.	(George & Ramos, 2024)
Understanding Digital Engagement through Sentiment Analysis of Tourism Destination through Travel Vlog Reviews (Indonesia)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	442 travel vlogs reviews from YouTube	Digital engagement	Positive sentiment supports marketing engagement.	(Singgalen, 2024)
Visual Analysis of Social Media Data on Experiences at a World Heritage Tourist Destination: Historic Centre of Macau (China)	Lexicon-based	Tourist reviews from Ctrip and Mafengwo	Heritage experience	Strong positive perception of cultural heritage.	(Jia et al., 2024)
Exploring Tourist Feedback on Riau Attractions Through Indonesian Language YouTube Opinion Using Naive Bayes Algorithm (Indonesia)	Machine learning-based	1680 YouTube Comments	Feedback analysis	Predominantly positive; halal tourism potential.	(Kurniawan et al., 2023)
Are customer star ratings and sentiments aligned? A deep learning study of customer service experience in tourism destinations (Italy)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	20,954 TripAdvisor reviews	Service quality	Sentiment largely aligns with star ratings.	(Bigne et al., 2023)
Thematic analysis of reviews on the air quality of tourist destinations from a sentiment analysis perspective (China)	Machine learning-based	Reviews from Ctrip and Sina Weibo	Environmental perception	Platform differences in credibility and sentiment.	(Tao et al., 2022)
Extracting insights from big social data for smarter tourism destination management (Italy)	Machine learning-based	Flickr and X (Twitter) based data	Smart management	Overall high positive sentiment clusters.	(Solazzo et al., 2022)

Discovering a tourism destination with social media data: BERT-based sentiment analysis, (Spain)	Machine learning-based	90,725 Instagram posts and 235,755 tweets	Emerging destinations	BERT improves sentiment classification accuracy.	(Viñán-Ludeña & de Campos, 2022)
SmartSenti: A Twitter-Based Sentiment Analysis System for the Smart Tourism in Turkey	Machine learning-based	Twitter dataset of 5 tourist places	Smart tourism system	Transfer learning improved accuracy of SA.	(Umut SALUR et al., 2022)
Sentiment analysis of online destination image of Hong Kong held by mainland Chinese tourists (Hong Kong)	Machine learning and Lexicon-based	72,284 online reviews	Destination image	Positive image; cost concerns noted.	(Paolanti et al., 2021)
Do Tourists from Different Countries Interpret Travel Experience with the Same Feeling? Sentiment Analysis of TripAdvisor Review, 10 Countries	Lexicon-based	27,177 TripAdvisor reviews	Cross-country perception	Sentiment varies by tourist origin.	(Wang & Kirilenko, 2021)
Analyzing Tourism Reviews Using an LDA Topic-Based Sentiment Analysis Approach (Morocco)	Lexicon-based	39,200 TripAdvisor Reviews	Topic-based sentiment	VADER aligns closely with ratings.	(Ali et al., 2021)
Exploring destination loyalty: Application of social media analytics in a nature-based tourism setting (Canada)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	17,224 TripAdvisor reviews	Loyalty	Sentiment linked to loyalty patterns.	(Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021)
Using social media in Tourist Sentiment Analysis: A Case Study of Andalusia during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Spain)	Machine learning-based	25532 Tweets	COVID impact	Shift toward safer destinations.	(Flores-Ruiz et al., 2021)
Tourism destination management using sentiment analysis and geo-location information:" A deep learning approach (Italy)	Machine learning-based	Tourism-related tweets from social media	Geo-management	Geo-sentiment identifies hotspots.	(Paolanti et al., 2021)
Sentiment analysis as a tool for assessing the negative impact of tourism on a destination (Russia)	Lexicon-based	33,475 TripAdvisor Reviews	Negative impact assessment	Overall sentiment remains positive.	(Vetitnev et al., 2021)
Visitors' experience at Angkor Wat, Cambodia: evidence from sentiment and topic analysis (Cambodia)	Lexicon-based	32,394 TripAdvisor reviews	Visitor experience	Crowding and cost drive negativity.	(Baniya et al., 2021)
Mining Tourist's Perception toward Indonesia Tourism Destination Using Sentiment Analysis and Topic Modelling 2019 (Indonesia)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	X (formerly Twitter) Dataset	Emotion analysis	Joy identified as dominant emotion.	(Irawan et al., 2019)
Twitter Text Mining for Sentiment Analysis on People's Feedback about Oman Tourism (Oman)	Lexicon-based	X (formerly Twitter) Dataset	Feedback analysis	Major attractions linked to positive sentiment.	(Ramathan & Meyyappan, 2019)
Croatia as a Virtual Tourist Destination: A Linguistic and Sentiment Analysis. (Croatia)	Lexicon-based	Texts from official tourism websites and cultural platforms	Virtual image	Positive narrative dominates content.	(Suzana et al., 2018)
Analysis Sentiment and Tourist Response to Rinjani Mountain Tour Based on Comments from Instagram (Indonesia)	Lexicon-based	Instagram Comments	Engagement	Positive engagement via posts.	(Melati et al., 2018)
Is Xenios Zeus Still Alive? Destination Image of Athens in the Years of Recession (Greece)	Lexicon-based	TripAdvisor Reviews	Destination image	Athens' image largely positive.	(Gkritzali et al., 2018)

Do Local Residents and Visitors Express the Same Sentiments on Destinations Through Social Media? (Europe)	Machine learning-based	6,000 tweets	Residents vs tourists	Generally positive with some neutrality.	(Jabreel et al., 2017)
What makes tourists feel negatively about tourism destinations? Application of hybrid text mining methodology to smart destination management (Paris)	Machine Learning-based	A total of 19,835 reviews were collected	Negative drivers	Identifies satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors.	(Kun et al., 2017)
Post-visit and pre-visit tourist destination image through eWOM sentiment analysis and perceived helpfulness. (Spain)	Lexicon-based	Online travel reviews	Expectation vs reality	Pre-visit sentiment more positive.	(M. Rosario et al., 2016)

Analysis of Sentiment Analysis in Tourism Destination Research

Methodological Trends

The 30 reviewed studies reflect a gradual methodological shift in tourism sentiment analysis research. Of these, 13 applied machine learning techniques, 12 relied on lexicon-based approaches, and 5 adopted hybrid models. While the distribution appears relatively balanced, earlier studies tended to use lexicon-based tools due to their simplicity, whereas more recent research increasingly used supervised and deep learning methods. Classical algorithms such as Naïve Bayes and Support Vector Machines remain common, but transformer-based models, including BERT, have gained prominence in recent years. Some studies combine sentiment classification with topic modeling techniques such as LDA to capture both polarity and thematic structure. This suggests a movement from basic sentiment scoring toward more aspect-level analysis.

Lexicon-based tools, particularly VADER, remain widely used for short and informal social media texts. Although these approaches offer transparency and ease of implementation, they may be less adaptable to contextual nuances. Hybrid approaches, though fewer in number, aim to balance interpretability and predictive performance.

Thematic Areas of Application

The reviewed studies can be grouped into five main thematic categories. First, a significant number of reviewed articles focus on destination image and branding, examining how tourists perceive cities, heritage sites, and regions. These studies consistently show that cultural heritage, landscape quality, and hospitality generate positive sentiment, while cost and crowding often contribute to negative evaluations.

Second, many studies focus on visitor satisfaction and service quality. In most cases, sentiment scores are broadly consistent with star ratings, indicating that combining textual feedback with numerical ratings can improve performance evaluation. Aspect-based analyses also show that safety, authenticity, and personalized experiences are important factors shaping positive perceptions.

Third, some studies use sentiment analysis to support smart tourism and destination management. By combining sentiment data with geolocation information, they identify areas of high satisfaction or concern. These findings show how social media analytics can help monitor public perception and guide strategic planning.

Fourth, some studies examine behavioral outcomes such as loyalty and engagement. In this area, machine learning models are often used for prediction and forecasting. Finally, several studies focus on environmental and crisis-related issues, including air quality and the impact of COVID-19. While overall sentiment toward destinations is generally positive, these external factors often generate negative responses.

Overall, the thematic range shows that sentiment analysis in tourism is not limited to measuring positive or negative opinions, but also supports branding, management decisions, behavioral prediction, and crisis monitoring.

Platforms and Geographic Distribution

The reviewed studies rely on multiple social media platforms. TripAdvisor and X (formerly Twitter) are the most frequently used sources. TripAdvisor is commonly applied in satisfaction and image studies, while X (formerly Twitter) is used to capture real-time public discourse. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok appear less frequently despite their growing role in tourism communication. Regional platforms such as Ctrip and Weibo are mainly used in studies focused on Chinese tourism behavior. Cross-platform comparative research remains limited. Geographically, most studies primarily focus on European and Asian destinations, so there are opportunities for expanding research into underrepresented regions.

Underexplored Methods and Direction

Despite increasing methodological techniques, several gaps remain. Advanced transformer models beyond BERT are not often applied in tourism studies, and multimodal analyses integrating text, images, and video are still limited. Hybrid approaches, although promising, are not yet widely adopted. In terms of data sources, research continues to rely heavily on TripAdvisor and X (formerly Twitter), while visually oriented platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok remain underexplored. Expanding analytical techniques and diversifying data sources would enhance both methodological robustness and practical relevance in future research.

Key Findings and Policy Implications

Across the reviewed studies, tourist-generated content is generally positive, while negative sentiment tends to focus on specific operational issues rather than overall destination image. This indicates that social media interaction often highlights targeted areas for improvement. Studies also show that combining textual sentiment with numerical ratings improves the reliability of visitor evaluation. In addition, analyses incorporating geolocation or platform-specific data reveal that sentiment varies across locations and contexts within the same destination.

From a policy perspective, these findings suggest that sentiment analysis can serve as a continuous monitoring tool. Regular analysis of digital feedback can help Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) detect emerging concerns and support more responsive, evidence-based management decisions.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This review combines the use of sentiment analysis in tourism destination research and highlights key methodological trends. It shows that, despite technical advances, stronger links to established tourism theories particularly those related to destination image, visitor evaluation, and behavioral intention are still needed.

For practitioners, sentiment analysis can act as an ongoing decision-support mechanism rather than a simple monitoring tool. Integrating sentiment data with ratings and spatial information may enable more targeted service improvements. Broadening analysis to include emerging platforms can strengthen destination strategies and support more responsive policy decisions.

Conclusions

This review examined how sentiment analysis has been applied to social media data in tourism destination research between 2016 and 2024. The findings show a gradual shift from lexicon-based methods to machine learning and transformer-based models, although advanced and hybrid approaches remain limited. Research also relies heavily on a small number of platforms, particularly TripAdvisor and X (formerly Twitter), while visually driven platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok remain underrepresented.

The analysis demonstrates that sentiment analysis contributes to understanding destination image, visitor behavior, and management decisions, but stronger integration with established tourism theory is still needed. Future research should expand methodological approaches and diversify data sources to improve both analytical depth and practical relevance.

This review is limited to English-language, peer-reviewed publications published between 2016 and 2024, which may exclude relevant studies in other languages. In addition, recent advances in sentiment analysis methods may not yet be fully represented in the reviewed literature.

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