



From Hashtags to Holidays: The Impact of Social Media Content on Consumer Behaviour in India's Tourism Sector

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ABSTRACT:

This research seeks to explore the intricate relationship between social media engagement and consumer behaviour, specifically within the travel industry. The study aims to understand how social media platforms influence customer perceptions, decision-making processes, and behavioural tendencies, particularly in comparison to traditional marketing methods. By examining the evolving trends in consumer behaviour, the paper highlights the shifts in attitudes and practices driven by digital engagement. Through a combination of surveys and interviews, this study will gather valuable insights to identify current trends in the market, evaluate their impact on consumer choices, and uncover potential areas for improvement in how the travel industry leverages social media to engage its audience. The findings of this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media is reshaping consumer interactions and behaviours within the travel sector.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, social media, quantitative Research, Travel Industry

1. Introduction:

This study seeks to explore the factors that influence consumer behaviour in the selection of travel and tour packages, with a particular emphasis on the growing impact of social media on these decisions. As nowadays social media has become widespread It has altered the ways in which we interact with one another. According to studies 43% of people currently travelling won't even consider a destination without finding it on social media first. This research investigates whether individuals' travel choices are genuinely driven by a desire to visit specific destinations, or if their preferences are primarily shaped by the influence of social media personalities, such as travel bloggers. It also examines the degree to which consumers place their trust in social media platforms when making travel-related decisions. To gather insights, a survey was conducted among individuals who frequently travel, providing valuable data on their travel decision-making process. Additionally, interviews were conducted with social media influencers, particularly travel bloggers, to understand how their followers often emulate the destinations they promote and the activities they endorse. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how social media influences the decision-making process of tourists, highlighting the role of digital content in shaping consumer behaviour within the travel industry.

This Study on consumer behaviour analysis should reveal answers for the following questions:

- To what extent do individuals rely on social media content when making decisions about their travel plans?
- What motivates consumers to base their travel choices on the recommendations of bloggers, influencers, or content creators?
- How do macro-environmental factors, such as social trends, impact the broader travel industry?

2. Objectives of the study:

- To assess the impact of social media engagement on consumer travel decisions.
- To explore how influencers and content creators shape consumer travel choices.
- To examine the influence of social and cultural trends on travel behaviour through social media.
- To understand how social media trends alter traditional consumer behaviour in the travel industry.

3. Review of Literature:

1. The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour in the Indian Tourism Sector: A Systematic Review Using the PRISMA Approach Mansi Gupta¹, Dr. Amandeep Dhaliwal², European Economic Letters ISSN 2323-5233 Vol 14, Issue 2 (2024)
2. The Impact of Social Media Communication on Indian Consumers Travel Decisions, Jay P Trivedi, Mitali, Rozia, MICA, Ahmedabad, India, November 2019
3. The Role of social media in Influencing Consumer Buying Behaviour in Pune City: A Quantitative Analysis Deepak Balu Gaikwad Prof. Dr. Sulabha N. Patole, international Journal of Business and Management Invention, | Volume 12 Issue 7
4. Exploring the role of social media in shaping consumer buying behaviour: A factor analysis approach, hand Prakash, SGT University Dr. Sunil Kumar, Symbiosis University of Applied Sciences Amit Dangi, SGT University Kanchan Yadav, SGT University
5. From likes to luggage: The role of social media content in attracting tourists, Khalid Hussain, Mirza Mohammad Didarul Alam, Aqdas malik, Ali Tarhini, Maha Khamis Al Balushi, Volume 10, Issue 9.
6. The use of social media in destination marketing: An exploratory study, Abbas Alizadeh / Rosmah Mat Isa, May 2015

4. Social Media and Travel Industry: Harnessing Influencers and Personalized Campaigns to Shape Consumer Preferences

Social media platforms have enabled individuals to share their experiences with a broader audience than ever before, leading to the rise of influencers and travel enthusiasts. These influencers leverage their online following to encourage others to visit specific destinations or adopt similar travel behaviours. Through their content, they play a significant role in shaping the travel preferences of their followers, often creating trends and influencing decision-making processes within the travel industry.

Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools with the immense ability to influence individuals on a larger scale. With billions of active users, these platforms offer the quickest and most effective way to reach a vast audience. Travel companies and tourism businesses increasingly leverage social media to create more interactive and personalized campaigns, using promotions, giveaways, and targeted content to engage users. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have become key channels for these businesses to connect with customers. By interacting with users through comments, direct messages, and engagement with reels and stories, they can directly monitor customer interactions and track conversions. This approach allows travel companies to optimize their digital marketing strategies and improve the effectiveness of their campaigns.

a. According to social media statistics:

There are 4.8 billion social media users worldwide, representing 59.9% of the global population and 92.7% of all internet users.

- There were 150 million new social media users between April 2022 and April 2023 – a 3.2% increase year-over-year. If we break those numbers down, it equals approximately 410,000 new social users every day – and 4.7 every second.
- People use an average of 6.6 different social networks each month.
- The average time spent on social media daily is 2 hours and 24 minutes.
- If we add it all together, the world collectively spends 11.5 billion hours on social media platforms daily.
- TikTok is the most popular social platform in terms of time spent. On average, global users with an Android device spend 31 hours and 32 minutes on TikTok monthly.
- As of April 2023, the top most used social media platforms, ranked by global active users, were Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and WeChat

b. The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Decision-Making in the Travel Industry

Social media has increasingly become a pivotal influence in shaping consumer behaviour, especially in the travel sector. With its capacity to connect individuals to vast networks of experiences and information, social media platforms have fundamentally transformed how consumers make travel-related decisions.

- Shift from Traditional Information Sources to Digital Platforms

Until up to recently, travellers and tourist typically relied on traditional methods such as travel agencies, brochures, and word-of-mouth, Hoardings, recommendations for their travel planning. Today, social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok have become dominant sources of travel information. Travelers now turn to influencers, bloggers, and even their peers for travel advice and recommendations. These platforms provide a more personal and visual experience, where consumers often trust content shared by individuals, they follow more than traditional

advertisements. Research indicates that online recommendations, especially those from influencers or trusted peers, carry more weight than traditional promotional materials from businesses.

- **The Power of Visual Content in Inspiring Travel Choices (Psychology Behind their decisions)**

Social media platforms thrive on visual content, and travel-related images and videos are particularly effective in attracting potential travellers. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube are ideal for sharing captivating travel photography and videos, which can spark a strong emotional response from viewers. This visual appeal, coupled with the "fear of missing out" (FOMO), drives many individuals to book trips in hopes of experiencing the same activities or locations they've seen online. As consumers encounter posts of others enjoying unique travel moments, the desire to replicate those experiences often influences their travel decisions.

- **Hashtags and Social Media Trends**

Hashtags and viral trends play a crucial role in shaping travel decisions on social media. When certain destinations or travel activities gain popularity, they often spread quickly through hashtags (e.g., #TravelGoals or #BucketListDestinations), prompting users to explore these trending locations. The power of social media trends can lead to a sudden surge in interest for specific destinations, as users seek to be part of the larger conversation or movement. Hashtags offer consumers the opportunity to discover new destinations and make quick, spontaneous travel choices.

- **Instant Gratification in Travel Decisions**

One of the defining features of social media is its emphasis on instant consumption, which has had a profound impact on the travel decision-making process. With social media, consumers can immediately research, book, and share their travel experiences. Flash sales, time-sensitive offers, and last-minute deals are often promoted across platforms, appealing to travellers' desire for instant gratification. This has shifted travel decision-making from long-term planning to more spontaneous and impulse-driven choices.

- **Personalized Marketing on Social Media**

Social media platforms gather significant data on users, enabling travel companies to create highly targeted and personalized marketing strategies. With advanced algorithms, social media platforms can serve content that is tailored to individual preferences, behaviours, and previous travel experiences. This personalized approach increases the chances of conversion, as consumers are more likely to engage with travel offers that resonate with their personal interests, leading to more effective marketing outcomes for travel brands.

C. Influencer's Impact on Travel Decisions (YouTube and Instagram)

Influencers play a significant role in shaping travel decisions. Through their personal brand and substantial online following, they can sway their audience to visit specific destinations, try particular hotels, or engage in unique experiences. The authenticity and relatability of influencer content, which often feels less commercialized, allows followers to connect with the recommendations on a deeper level. As a result, influencers' travel suggestions are seen as more genuine and trustworthy, leading to increased engagement and higher conversion rates for brands.

D. Stages of Travel trip (Role of social media)

Pre-Trip (Planning & Preparation)

- **Inspiration & Discovery:** Social media platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube are key sources of travel inspiration. Travelers often explore travel bloggers, influencers, and user-generated content (UGC) that showcase destinations, activities, and experiences. Hashtags like #Wanderlust or #TravelGoals can fuel the desire to visit a particular place.
- **Research:** Social media acts as a real-time source of information, where travellers can find reviews, recommendations, and first-hand experiences shared by other travellers. Platforms like Facebook groups, Twitter, and specialized travel forums provide valuable insights into destinations, hotels, activities, and more.
- **Community Engagement:** Travelers can interact with other people who have already visited their desired destinations, ask questions, and get advice. Travel bloggers or Instagram influencers also share tips, guides, and travel itineraries that help in planning the trip.
- **Brand Exposure & Offers:** Travel companies use social media to share promotional content, deals, and limited-time offers. Travelers may see ads or posts on Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok about discounts on flights, packages, or exclusive deals, influencing their decision to book early.

2. During the Trip (The Travel Experience)

- **Live Sharing & Interaction:** social media provides travellers with the ability to share their experiences in real-time. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow them to post photos, videos, and stories, showcasing the excitement and beauty of their travels. These real-time updates may inspire others or help travellers connect with fellow travellers in the area.
- **Engagement with Brands and Locals:** During the trip, travellers often use social media to tag hotels, restaurants, tour companies, and local attractions. By sharing their experiences, they might receive engagement from the brands themselves, like reposts, comments, or even special offers.

- **Influence of Peer Recommendations:** Travelers may also be influenced by content shared by others, such as local recommendations or guides, which can lead to spontaneous decisions to visit a nearby restaurant, museum, or scenic spot. Reviews and recommendations from fellow travellers (via social media posts or comments) often lead to itinerary adjustments during the trip.
- **Social Proof & Validation:** Travelers often look to social media to validate their choices. Seeing friends, influencers, or other travellers share their experiences at a destination gives them a sense of satisfaction or approval, reaffirming their decisions.

3. Post-Trip (Reflection & Return)

Role of Social Media:

- **Sharing Memories:** After the trip, social media plays a major role in preserving and sharing memories. Travelers post photos, videos, and blogs to highlight their experiences, often tagging destinations or using relevant hashtags to connect with others. This sharing creates a virtual scrapbook of their trip and may inspire others.
- **Feedback & Reviews:** Many travelers use social media to give reviews of their experiences—whether on Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube. They might share thoughts on accommodations, airlines, attractions, and overall experiences. This feedback influences future travelers and contributes to the ongoing conversation about travel destinations and services.
- **Building Post-Trip Connections:** social media keeps travelers connected to the places they've visited. They might continue to engage with the destinations through social media pages or local groups, or they may follow other travelers who share similar interests. For example, a traveler who enjoyed a cultural experience might follow artists or local businesses they encountered during their trip.
- **Reflection & Anticipation:** After returning, many travelers continue to follow the places they visited on social media for future reference or inspiration. They may look for tips on future trips or find new destinations to explore based on their experiences shared by others.

5. From Borchers to Socials: The Shift from Traditional to social media-Driven Travel Experiences -

Traditional	Advanced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Travelers relied on traditional sources of information: travel agencies, brochures, word of mouth, and advertisements (newspapers/TV). ❑ Destinations were marketed through print ads and TV commercials, with little interaction between travellers and brands. ❑ Travel decisions were influenced by personal experiences, family/friend recommendations, and established guides like Lonely Planet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Social media has turned travel into a global conversation, where experiences are shared and shaped by millions in real-time. ❑ Visual storytelling and instant connectivity have transformed travel planning, making it more interactive and immediate. <p>Travelers now curate personal travel personas, influencing not only their peers but larger travel trends.</p>

6. Research Methodology:

➤ Need of the Study:

This research is essential to understand how social media influences consumer decision-making in the travel industry, helping businesses adapt their strategies and offering consumers more informed travel choices. It addresses a gap in current literature regarding the specific impact of digital platforms and influencers on travel behaviour.

1. Research Design:

The study will use a descriptive research design to explore and describe the relationship between social media engagement and consumer behaviour in the travel industry. Also The research will combine both quantitative data (from surveys) and qualitative insights (from interviews) to provide a comprehensive understanding.

2. Sampling Method:

Travelers who actively engage with travel-related content on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, A **stratified random sampling** technique will be used to ensure diversity, selecting travellers based on factors like age, travel frequency, and platform usage.

3. Data Collection Methods:

Online surveys will be distributed through social media platforms and travel-related groups to gather quantitative data. The survey will include closed-ended questions to assess consumer behaviour, trust in social media influencers, and the impact of social media on their travel decisions. **Observational**

data is used as well to Analyze social media posts, comments, and engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments) of top influencers and travellers to supplement the primary data.

5. Variables to be Studied:

Independent Variables: Social media engagement (measured through likes, shares, comments, influencers' content quality). Dependent Variables: Consumer behaviour in the travel industry (measured by decision-making processes, trust in influencers, willingness to travel to promoted destinations). And Control Variables: Demographics (age, gender, income), social media usage habits (frequency of use, preferred platforms).

6. Ethical Considerations:

All personal information and responses will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. And The research process and findings will be presented honestly, with full transparency regarding methods and any potential conflicts of interest.

7. Limitations:

Bias in Self-Reported Data: Responses in surveys and interviews may be subject to social desirability bias. Platform Bias: The study may focus on the most popular platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube), potentially overlooking emerging platforms that may influence travel behaviour. Time Constraints: Due to the dynamic nature of social media, trends and behaviours may change rapidly, making it difficult to capture long-term patterns.

➤ Survey Questions:

1. Which Social Media platform do you use the Most?
2. Do you like following, Watching Travel - Related content Online? (E.g: Influencer, Travel blog, Destinations etc.)
3. How Influential are social media Posts (Photos, videos, Stories) in your Decision-Making Process for Choosing a travel destination?
4. What type of Content do you find most helpful when planning trip on Social Media?
5. How likely are you to book travel service (destination, trek, holiday, hotel) directly through social media?
6. Do you follow content on travel, Nature, Trek OR Influencer, Blogger who influenced your travel choices?
7. How Likely are you to share your own travel experience (Photos, Reels, Videos, Reviews) on Social Media?
8. How do you feel about the authenticity of travel content shared on Social Media?
9. Do you think Social Media will Continue to play a significant Role in Travel Industry in the Future?

➤ Summary of the Methodology

- Research design: Descriptive research
- Data Collection: Primary data through a Survey
- Sample size: 50 Travelling Individuals
- Research Tool: Online Survey Platform (Google Forms)

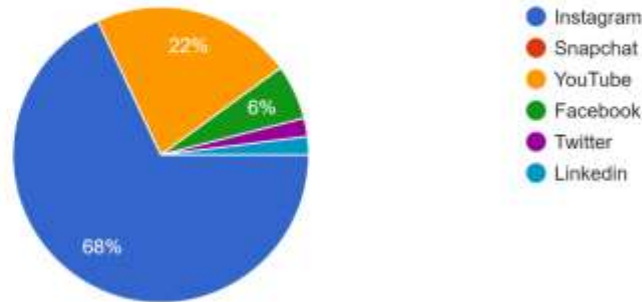
8. Data analysis:

Following are the analysis of the Questions asked in the survey:

1. Which Social Media platform do you use the Most?

Name of social media platforms	Percentage %
Instagram	68%
Snapchat	1%
YouTube	22%
Facebook	6%
Twitter	2%
LinkedIn	1%

Which Social Media platform do you use the Most?
50 responses



Interpretation:

The survey results show that Instagram is by far the most popular social media platform, with 72.3% of respondents indicating they use it regularly. YouTube ranks second, with 21.3% of participants considering it their primary social media app.

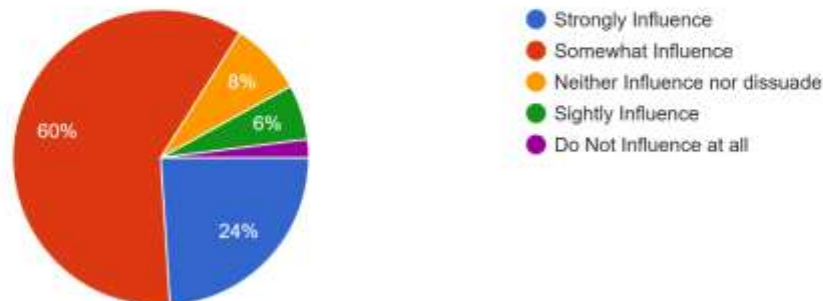
Conclusion:

Instagram continues to dominate the social media landscape in terms of user engagement, with a clear preference for its content style and features. However, YouTube also holds a substantial portion of the social media market, especially for those interested in video content.

2. How Influential are social media Posts (Photos, videos, Stories) in your Decision-Making Process for Choosing a travel destination?

Level of Influential	Percentage %
Strongly Influential	24%
Somewhat Influence	60%
Neither Influence nor dissuade	8%
Sightly Influence	6%
Do Not Influence at all	2%

How Influential are Social media Posts (Photos, videos, Stories) in your Decision-Making Process for Choosing a travel destination?
50 responses



Interpretation:

According to the survey 60% of respondents believe that social media has a notable influence on their choices, with about 24% of participants considering social media to be "Highly Influential." This suggests that a significant portion of individuals acknowledge the impact of social media in shaping their opinions and preferences, particularly when it comes to decision-making processes.

Conclusion:

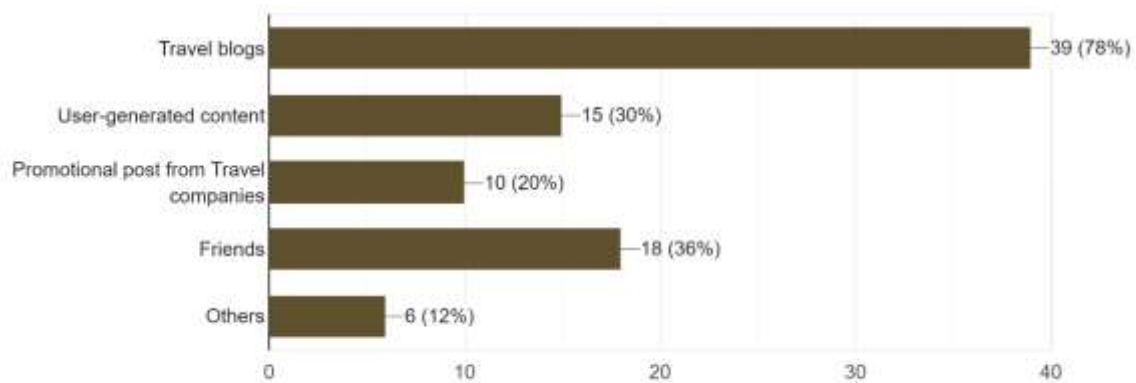
Social media has become a crucial factor in influencing travel decisions, with many individuals relying on it to help them choose travel destinations. As these platforms continue to shape the way people gather information and interact with brands, it's clear that social media plays an essential role in modern travel planning.

3. What type of Content do you find most helpful when planning trip on social media?

Name of the Content	Percentage %
Travel Blogs	78%
User-generated content	30%
Promotional post from Travel companies	20%
Friends	36%
Others	12%

What type of Content do you find most helpful when planning trip on Social Media?

50 responses

**Interpretation:**

The survey reveals that a significant 78% of respondents consider travel blogs to be the most useful source of travel-related information. In contrast, 30% of participants rely on user-generated content, 20% trust promotional posts, and 36% seek recommendations from friends.

Conclusion:

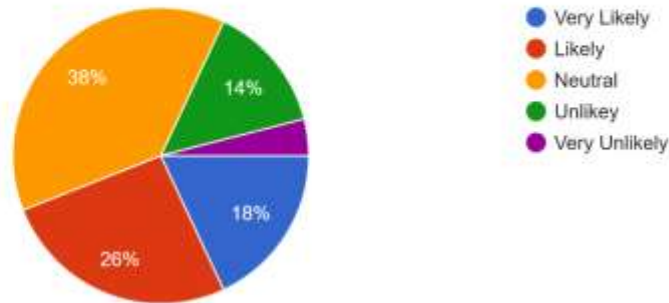
Travel blogs hold considerable weight in shaping people's travel decisions, suggesting that detailed, personal, and insightful content is highly valued. This indicates that while various sources are available still majority of the respondent depend on social media.

4. How likely are you to book travel service (destination, trek, holiday, hotel) directly through social media?

How likely	Percentage%
Very Likely	18%
Likely	26%
Neutral	38%
Unlikely	14%
Very Unlikely	4%

How likely are you to book travel service (destination, trek, holiday, hotel) directly through social media?

50 responses



Interpretation:

Based on the survey results, 26% of respondents are "likely" to book a travel destination directly through social media, while 18% are "very likely" to make bookings through these platforms.

Conclusion:

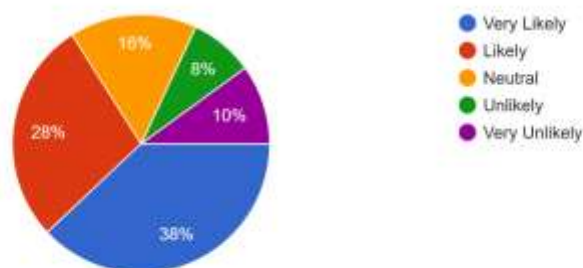
This indicates a growing trend of individuals relying on social media not just for inspiration, but also for the actual booking process. With nearly a quarter of respondents either likely or very likely to book directly from social platforms, it's clear that social media is evolving into a significant tool in the travel booking process.

5. How Likely are you to share your own travel experience (Photos, Reels, Videos, Reviews) on social media?

How likely	Percentage%
Very Likely	38%
Likely	28%
Neutral	16%
Unlikely	8%
Very Unlikely	10%

How Likely are you to share your own travel experience (Photos, Reels, Videos, Reviews) on social Media?

50 responses



Interpretation:

The survey shows that 38% of respondents are very likely to post reels and photos on social media, while 28% are likely to share pictures.

Conclusion:

This indicates that a significant portion of individuals actively engage in sharing their travel experiences online, particularly through visual content like photos and videos. By sharing their experiences, travellers not only document their journeys but also inspire their followers to explore these places. Additionally, this behaviour reflects a desire to avoid the fear of missing out (FOMO), as individuals feel compelled to participate in popular trends and showcase their own travel adventures. Social media has thus become a powerful tool in shaping travel choices and fostering a sense of community and aspiration.

8. Findings of the study:

- **Instagram as the Leading Platform:** Instagram stands out as the most widely used social media platform, shaping consumer behaviour by offering visually engaging content that drives interest and interaction.
- **YouTube's Influence:** YouTube remains a popular platform for users, particularly for those seeking in-depth, long-form content like travel vlogs, which play a key role in shaping travel preferences and decisions.
- **Social Media's Impact on Decision-Making:** social media has become a powerful tool in influencing consumer decisions, particularly in areas like travel, where it is seen as a major factor in shaping opinions and choices.
- **Trust in Travel Blogs:** Travel blogs are highly trusted sources for travel information, with consumers often seeking detailed, authentic recommendations before making decisions, rather than relying on promotional content.
- **Behaviour Driven by Social Sharing:** Many individuals are likely to share their travel experiences on social media, using posts and videos to inspire others and influence their decisions on where to travel.
- **Social Media's Growing Role in Booking:** Consumers are increasingly turning to social media for booking decisions, as platforms now offer easy access to information and direct booking options, reflecting a shift in how people approach travel planning.

9. Interpretation:

1. **Understanding Social Media's Influence:** The findings of the study offer valuable insights into how deeply individuals depend on social media platforms to shape their decision-making processes. Social media has evolved beyond entertainment and socializing to become a critical resource for gathering information and making choices.
2. **Social Media's Crucial Role in Travel Decisions:** social media has emerged as a vital factor in influencing travel decisions, with many people now turning to platforms to help them select destinations. As these platforms continue to play a central role in how people gather information and engage with brands, it's evident that social media is an essential part of modern travel planning.
3. **Rising Dependence on social media:** The study highlights the growing need for social media in daily life, with its influence extending beyond just leisure and entertainment to significant areas like travel, shopping, and decision-making. This trend shows how social media platforms are increasingly integrated into various aspects of personal and consumer behaviour.

10. Conclusion:

In Summary, the findings from this study highlight the profound impact social media have on modern consumer behaviour and decision-making, particularly in the realm of travel. Social platforms like Instagram and YouTube are not just tools for entertainment, but are now central to how people gather information, share experiences, and make decisions about where to go and what to do. Travel blogs and user-generated content play a crucial role in building trust, as individuals turn to authentic, detailed recommendations before committing to travel plans. Social media's influence extends beyond inspiration, with many users now booking directly through these platforms, reflecting their growing role in the travel industry. As consumers continue to rely on these platforms for everything from destination choices to travel bookings, it's clear that social media will remain a dominant force in shaping modern travel behaviour. The increasing reliance on social platforms also underscores a broader shift in how people interact with brands, seek advice, and make purchasing decisions, marking a pivotal change in consumer behaviour. Social media has truly transformed from a leisure activity to a powerful decision-making tool, especially in travel.

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