

# How Social Media Influences the Choice of New Travel Destinations among Tourists

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of social media on tourists' selection of new travel destinations. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 300 respondents aged 18 to 40 years, employing convenience sampling. Descriptive analysis was conducted to understand trends and patterns. The findings reveal that social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube play a significant role in influencing tourists' choices. Influencer posts, travel vlogs, and user-generated content emerged as key sources of travel inspiration. Visual appeal and authentic reviews further shaped destination preferences. The study concludes that social media acts as a powerful promotional and decision-making tool in tourism, and it recommends that destination marketers utilise these platforms strategically to attract and engage potential tourists.

**Keywords:** Tourism, social media, Influence, Destination Selection.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries, contributing nearly 10% to global GDP and generating over 330 million jobs (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). Choosing a travel destination is a crucial aspect of tourism, involving evaluation of attractions, accessibility, safety, costs, and personal interests before finalising a visit. Traditionally, travellers relied on travel agents, brochures, and word-of-mouth for such decisions. However, the process of destination selection has undergone a major transformation with the rise of social media.

Today, social media plays a pivotal role in modern travel decisions, enabling tourists to discover, evaluate, and visualise destinations before visiting. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and travel blogs provide abundant user-generated content, influencer recommendations, and real-time experiences that inspire people to explore new places. For example, studies indicate that over 60% of travellers are influenced by social media posts when deciding on a destination (Statista, 2023). Instagram's travel hashtags such as #wanderlust (over 160 million posts) and #travelgram (over 180 million posts) have become virtual libraries of destination ideas.

Practical examples include tourists visiting Cappadocia in Turkey for hot air balloon rides after seeing viral Instagram reels, or choosing Bali's iconic swings and rice terraces featured by influencers. Similarly, destinations like Santorini in Greece and Maldives water villas have experienced significant tourist inflow due to visually appealing posts shared by celebrities and travel bloggers.

The study addresses the gap that, despite the growing influence of social media, limited empirical evidence exists regarding its impact on travel decision-making in the Indian context.

The objective of this study is to analyse how social media platforms influence tourists' selection of new destinations. The sample included a mix of students, professionals, and experienced travelers, representing diverse user groups.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To analyse the role of social media platforms in influencing tourists' selection of new travel destinations.

To identify which social media platforms have the greatest impact on destination choice.

To examine the types of content (e.g. photos, videos, reviews, influencer posts) that most influence tourists' decisions.

To suggest recommendations for tourism marketers and destination management organisations to utilise social media effectively.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does social media influence tourists' choice of new destinations?

Which social media platforms do tourists rely on most while selecting travel destinations?

What types of social media content have the strongest impact on tourists' destination selection decisions?

What factors make social media content effective in inspiring tourists to visit a place?

How can tourism marketers leverage social media platforms to promote destinations effectively?

## Tourism and Destination Choice

Tourists' destination choice is influenced by various factors including personal motivation, socio-cultural influences, destination image, cost, and accessibility (Kotler et al., 2017). Traditionally, information sources such as travel agencies, brochures, and family recommendations were key determinants in the decision-making process.

## Role of Social Media in Tourism

Social media has transformed how people search for and evaluate travel information. According to Statista (2023), over 60% of travellers use social media to research destinations. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube provide visual and experiential content that builds destination image and reduces perceived risks. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) state that user-generated content significantly affects tourists' perceptions by providing authentic, relatable experiences.

## Impact of Influencers and User-Generated Content

Studies highlight that influencer marketing is a powerful tool in tourism promotion. Agrawal and Kaur (2022) found that Instagram influencers increase destination awareness and preference due to their perceived credibility and visual storytelling skills. For example, destinations such as Bali, Santorini, and Cappadocia have gained popularity due to influencer posts showcasing unique experiences. User-generated content such as reviews, reels, vlogs, and hashtags like #travelgram and #wanderlust further encourage tourists to visit these destinations.

## Research Gap

While multiple studies have examined social media's general role in tourism, there is limited research focusing on how specific platforms and content types influence destination selection decisions among Indian tourists. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing tourists' social media usage patterns and identifying effective strategies for tourism marketers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research design to analyse how social media influences tourists' choice of new destinations. Data were collected from 300 respondents aged 18–40 years, including students, working professionals, and frequent travellers, using convenience sampling. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool, distributed both online via Google Forms and offline in urban public places such

as colleges and travel cafes. The questionnaire included questions on demographics, social media usage, platform preferences, and the influence of content types on destination choice. For analysis, descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to interpret response trends, while cross-tabulation helped examine relationships between variables like age and platform preference. However, the study is limited to urban regions and self-reported responses, which may not fully represent the broader tourist population.

Rank	Variable A	Variable B	Correlation
1	Impact of social media on final decision	Extent of social media influence	<b>0.58</b>
2	Actively look for trending destinations	Popularity affects completeness of trip	<b>0.56</b>
3	Importance of visiting trending destinations	Popularity influences decision	<b>0.53</b>
4	Importance of trending visits	FOMO level	<b>0.50</b>
5	Monthly income range	Age	<b>0.50</b>
6	Motivated to visit before crowd builds	Social media helps discover places	<b>0.50</b>
7	Popularity on social media	FOMO level	<b>0.49</b>
8	Importance of trending visits	Look for trends actively	<b>0.49</b>
9	FOMO level	Changed destination due to trend	<b>0.47</b>
10	Importance of trending visits	Visited due to social media	<b>0.46</b>

The correlation analysis conducted on the survey data revealed several meaningful relationships between key variables influencing tourist behavior. The most notable positive correlation ( $r = 0.58$ ) was identified between the perceived overall impact of social media on travel decisions and the extent to which individuals feel personally influenced by social media platforms. This suggests that the more travelers perceive social media as influential in general, the more likely they are to be affected by it in their own travel choices. A significant correlation ( $r = 0.56$ ) was also found between the tendency to seek trending destinations and the perceived pressure to visit popular places, indicating that social expectations and online visibility strongly shape travel motivations. Additionally, a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.53$ ) was observed between the importance assigned to visiting trending spots and the influence of destination popularity, highlighting the role of social proof and digital trends in destination selection. Psychological drivers such as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) also showed a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.50$ ) with the desire to visit trending destinations, reinforcing the influence of emotional and social pressures on travel behavior. Interestingly, demographic factors like age and income were also positively correlated ( $r = 0.50$ ), suggesting that higher income tends to be associated with older age groups, likely due to career maturity and life-stage dynamics, which in turn affect travel spending and decision-making.

## FINDINGS

The study found that 73.7% of respondents chose travel destinations based on social media content, with Instagram (50%) and YouTube (26.2%) being the most influential platforms. Short-form videos and user-generated reviews emerged as the most persuasive content types. Although only 28% followed travel influencers, most still felt influenced by such content. Behavioral trends showed that FOMO and a desire for early, exclusive experiences significantly shaped travel choices. These findings highlight the powerful role of visual and authentic content in driving tourism decisions, urging marketers to focus on engaging, timely, and relatable social media strategies.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media significantly influences tourist destination choices, with platforms like Instagram and YouTube playing a major role. Visual content, especially short videos and user reviews, emerged as the most impactful. Psychological factors like FOMO and trend-following also shape travel behavior. Tourism marketers should focus on authentic, engaging content to attract and influence modern travelers.

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