

## Understanding the Role of Social Media in Tourist Destination Search & Selection in Kolhapur Tourism.

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**Abstract:** In the modern era, social media has emerged as a powerful tool that influences nearly every aspect of our daily lives, including how we travel. The tourism industry, in particular, has seen a dramatic shift in how travellers discover and select destinations. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and travel-focused websites now play a central role in providing information, inspiration, and guidance to travellers. This study aims to explore the impact of social media on the process of destination search and selection, with a specific focus on travellers visiting Kolhapur.

Kolhapur, a city known for its cultural richness, historical monuments, and scenic beauty, is a prominent destination for many travellers. It boasts attractions such as the Mahalakshmi Temple, Rankala Lake, Panhala Fort, and more, drawing visitors from different parts of the country. With the rise of social media, travellers have access to user-generated content like reviews, photographs, travel blogs, and videos that provide authentic and detailed information about Kolhapur's tourist offerings. This content often plays a key role in shaping perceptions and influencing the decision-making process of potential tourists.

The primary objective of this study is to analyse how social media platforms contribute to the search and selection of tourist destinations among those visiting Kolhapur. The research seeks to understand how travellers use social media to gather information about the city, plan their trips, and make decisions regarding their itineraries. Additionally, it will examine the trustworthiness of social media content and its role in shaping the preferences and expectations of tourists.

This study is exclusively focused on understanding the experiences and perspectives of travellers visiting Kolhapur. It does not involve travel agencies or tour operators, ensuring that the findings are directly reflective of the end consumers—the travellers themselves. By analysing the influence of social media on these travellers, the research aims to provide meaningful insights into how digital platforms shape tourism in Kolhapur.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Tourist Destination, Tourism, Reviews, Travel Blogs, Kolhapur*

## 1.1 Introduction

In the modern era, social media has emerged as a powerful tool that influences nearly every aspect of our daily lives, including how we travel. The tourism industry, in particular, has seen a dramatic shift in how travellers discover and select destinations. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and travel-focused websites now play a central role in providing information, inspiration, and guidance to travellers. This study aims to explore the impact of social media on the process of destination search and selection, with a specific focus on travellers visiting Kolhapur.

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The primary objective of this study is to analyse how social media platforms contribute to the search and selection of tourist destinations among those visiting Kolhapur. The research seeks to understand how travellers use social media to gather information about the city, plan their trips, and make decisions regarding their itineraries. Additionally, it will examine the trustworthiness of social media content and its role in shaping the preferences and expectations of tourists.

Social media has transformed the way people approach travel planning. In the past, travellers relied heavily on brochures, travel agents, and word-of-mouth recommendations. However, with the proliferation of social networking sites, tourists now have access to a wealth of information at their fingertips. Platforms like Instagram allow travellers to explore visually appealing content, while reviews and ratings on platforms like Trip Advisor provide valuable insights about destinations. For Kolhapur, this means that the city's cultural and natural attractions can reach a wider audience, increasing its appeal as a tourist destination.

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One of the key aspects of this research is to understand the role of user-generated content on social media. Content created and shared by other travellers, such as personal experiences, photos, and videos, often carries a sense of authenticity that traditional marketing cannot achieve. This study will explore how such content impacts traveller's perceptions and trust in social media platforms when making travel-related decisions. It will also assess whether social media influences the overall satisfaction and experiences of tourists during their visit to Kolhapur.

By examining the strategic role of social media in promoting tourism, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of its impact on consumer behaviour. The findings will offer valuable insights for tourism stakeholders and marketing organizations, enabling them to harness the power of social media more effectively to promote Kolhapur as a preferred travel destination. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of digital influence in the tourism sector and its potential to enhance the travel experiences of visitors to Kolhapur.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The rapid growth of social media has revolutionized the way individuals plan and experience their travels. While there is a substantial amount of research on the general impact of social media on tourism, there is limited understanding of its specific role in influencing travellers visiting Kolhapur. Despite being a city with a wealth of cultural and historical attractions, the extent to which social media affects destination search and selection for Kolhapur remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need for a focused study to analyse how social media platforms influence traveller's decision-making processes and trust in user-generated content.

The problem lies in understanding the ways travellers utilize social media to discover and evaluate Kolhapur as a destination. Questions arise about the types of social media content that have the most significant impact, the level of trust travellers place in user-generated content, and whether such platforms effectively showcase Kolhapur's unique offerings. Furthermore, tourism stakeholders lack empirical data on how social media influences tourist behaviour, which could help them optimize their promotional strategies. This study addresses these issues by examining the influence of social media on the decision-making processes of travellers to Kolhapur, thereby filling a critical knowledge gap in the domain of digital tourism.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To identify the role of social media in the consumer's travel decisions in Kolhapur Tourism.
- To compare the online review travel decision and true experience.
- To analyse the impact of social media travel related content & advertisements on changing consumer psychology regarding travel decisions.
- To analyse the impact of social media on the business of travel agencies.

### 1.4 Scope of the Study

This study examines the role of social media in influencing tourists' search and selection of Kolhapur as a destination. It focuses on how different platforms impact awareness, perceptions, and decision-making processes among potential visitors. By analysing engagement patterns, the study aims to identify the factors that make social media effective in promoting Kolhapur's attractions and enhancing its appeal in a competitive tourism market. The findings will provide valuable insights for local travel agencies and stakeholders to refine their marketing strategies.

- **Role of social media in Travel Decisions:** The study will identify how social media platforms influence travellers' choices during the destination search and selection process. It will analyse the extent to which content such as reviews, images, videos, and advertisements shapes travel decisions.
- **Comparison of Online Reviews and True Experiences:** The study will examine the gap, if any, between travellers' expectations formed through online reviews and their actual experiences in Kolhapur. This comparison aims to shed light on the reliability of social media content in meeting tourist expectations.
- **Impact of Travel-Related Content and Advertisements:** The research will analyse how social media content, including travel-related advertisements, influences consumer psychology. It will explore whether such content changes travellers' perceptions and preferences regarding destinations.
- **Impact on the Business of Travel Agencies:** While the study primarily focuses on travellers, it will also briefly explore how the increased reliance on social media affects the business of travel agencies. This includes understanding how agencies adapt to the changing consumer behaviour driven by digital platforms

#### 1.5.1 Research methodology

Research methodology is a way of explaining how a researcher intends to carry out their research. It's a logical, systematic plan to resolve a research problem. A methodology details a researcher's approach to the research to ensure reliable, valid results that address their aims and objectives. Research methodology is a technique to solve the research problem methodically. It includes assembling the data and using arithmetical techniques to understand and draw decisions about the investigation data. Research methodology is a technique to solve the research problem methodically. It includes assembling the data and using arithmetical techniques to understand and draw decisions about the investigation data.

### 1.5.2 Research Design

Research design is the framework of research methods and techniques chosen by a researcher to conduct a study. The design allows researchers to sharpen the research methods suitable for the subject matter and set up their studies for success. It is a structure that directs and guides the research to be conducted. It provides an outline to collect and careful examination of information. It helps in determining a solution to the problem and including new information.

### 1.5.3 Source of Data & Data Collection

Once the research approach is decided which will be needed to investigate the research problem, the next step is to decide upon the type of data that is required to be collected to make an analysis. Commonly, there are primary and secondary data. To fulfill the aforesaid objectives and test hypotheses already stated, information from secondary as well as the primary sources has been gathered.

#### Primary Data Collection Method Individual Respondents:

For the collection of data from the primary source, individual respondents were contacted and data were collected utilizing a well-designed and pre-tested questionnaire. The survey was conducted by contacting the individual tourist who visited Kolhapur from early Oct 2024 to the end of Nov 2024. Respondents who have taken at least one trip in the above period were contacted at various tourist places of Kolhapur.

Some responses were collected personally from tourists who are using social media while some responses were collected online by emailing the questionnaire to tourist guides and hotels to forward it to their customers who visited Kolhapur in the above period. A questionnaire prepared in Google Form.

#### 1.5.4 Sample Size:

Sampling is a process of selecting a smaller number of units from a population of interest as a basis for concluding the total population from which the units were chosen. A sample is a subset of a population that is used to represent the entire population. In this study as it was impossible to include all the elements of the population, so it was decided to take a sample from the population. The survey was conducted by contacting the individual tourist who visited Kolhapur from early Oct 2024 to the end of Nov 2024. Respondents who have taken at least one trip in the above period were contacted at various tourist places of Kolhapur. A **sample size of 102 Tourists** has been taken into the consideration for the study.

### 1.5.5 Sample Method:

**The research was based on Non-Probability Sampling Approach.**

As a nature of the study, it requires the individual responses of tourists who are using social media to analyze the impact of social media on their behavior for travel purposes, and there was no information available about who are the tourists who are using social media. So, in this research, no sampling frame could be constructed, due to this limitation therefore for the ease of conduct the sampling technique used in the study was judgmental sampling. An opening question was asked by the researcher to identify respondents for the study among 104 tourists. Judgmental sampling technique is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her judgment when choosing elements of the population to participate in the study.

### 1.6 Limitations of the Study

Adopting social media for tourism promotion in Kolhapur faces challenges, especially for smaller agencies with limited resources and expertise. Constraints in budget, time, and personnel may hinder effective content creation and platform management. To overcome these, agencies can prioritize high-impact platforms, focus on user-generated content, and partner with local influencers to amplify reach. Collaborating with community businesses can also help pool resources, enhancing visibility without incurring high costs.

## 2 Data Analysis

### 2.1 Age Group of Respondents.

Age Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Under 18	15	14.70%
18-25	48	47.10%
25-35	23	22.50%
36-45	10	9.80%
46 & above	6	5.90%

#### Interpretation:

The 18-25 age group (**47%**) dominates the sample, showing they are the most active on social media for tourism-related decisions, making them a key target for Kolhapur tourism marketing. The 25-35 age group (**22%**) represents young professionals who rely on social media for detailed travel planning and local experiences. Under 18 (**15%**) includes teens who influence family travel decisions through social media trends. The 26-35 age group (**10%**) shows moderate engagement, likely preferring structured or group travel options. The 46 & above category (**6%**)

is the least active on social media, likely relying on traditional methods or family recommendations. This data highlights that younger audiences (**18-35**) are the primary users of social media for travel, emphasizing the need for vibrant, youth-oriented digital strategies to promote Kolhapur tourism effectively.

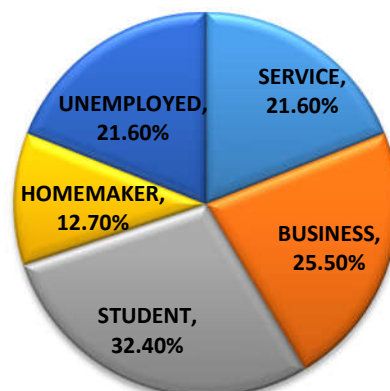
## 2.2 Gender.

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	57	55.88%
Female	45	44.11%

### Interpretation:

The gender distribution of the sample, consisting of 102 respondents, shows that **56% are male** and **44% are female**. This indicates a slightly higher participation of males in using social media for searching and selecting tourist destinations in Kolhapur. While males may have a marginally greater influence in travel-related decision-making or a higher engagement with social media platforms, the significant representation of females highlights their active involvement in travel planning as well. This balanced gender participation suggests that promotional strategies for Kolhapur tourism should cater to the interests of both males and females. Marketing campaigns could focus on male audiences by emphasizing adventure, historical, and eco-tourism activities, while simultaneously appealing to female travellers by highlighting safety, cultural experiences, and family-friendly attractions.

## 2.3 Occupation Category.



### Interpretation

The education level distribution of the 102 respondents highlights the diverse backgrounds of individuals engaging with social media for searching and selecting tourist destinations in Kolhapur. **Students** constitute the largest group, making up **32.4%** of the sample, indicating their significant reliance on social media for travel planning, likely due to their familiarity with digital platforms. **Business professionals** account for **25.5%**, showing a strong interest in

tourism and destination selection, possibly for leisure or networking purposes. Those in **service roles represent 21.6%**, reflecting their moderate use of social media for travel-related decisions, driven by limited leisure time but a focus on convenience. **Homemakers** make up **12.7%**, showing an interest in planning family-oriented trips through digital channels, while the **unemployed**, at **7.8%**, reflect a smaller yet notable group, possibly seeking budget-friendly travel options through online reviews and recommendations. This distribution emphasizes the importance of tailoring Kolhapur tourism marketing strategies to the needs and preferences of these varied groups to enhance engagement and travel decisions.

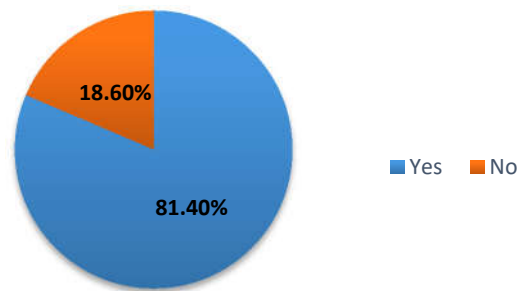
#### 2.4 Monthly Income Bracket.

Monthly Income	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Rs.0 to Rs.25000	44	43.10%
Rs.25000 – Rs.50000	27	26.50%
Rs.50000 – Rs.75000	23	22.50%
Above 75000	8	7.80%

#### Interpretation

The income distribution highlights the financial backgrounds influencing the use of social media for tourist destination search and selection in Kolhapur. A significant portion, **43.1%**, earns from **Rs.0 up to Rs. 25,000 per month**, suggesting that budget-conscious travellers rely heavily on social media to find affordable travel options and reviews. Individuals earning **Rs. 25,000–Rs. 50,000**, comprising **26.5%**, also show active engagement, possibly balancing affordability with quality in their travel decisions. Those in the **Rs. 50,000–Rs. 75,000** income range, accounting for **22.5%**, may seek premium travel experiences, using social media to explore curated options. The smallest group, earning **above Rs. 75,000 (7.8%)**, likely represents high-income travellers looking for exclusive or luxury destinations. This income-based analysis underscores the importance of tailoring social media strategies to cater to diverse financial preferences and priorities among travellers.

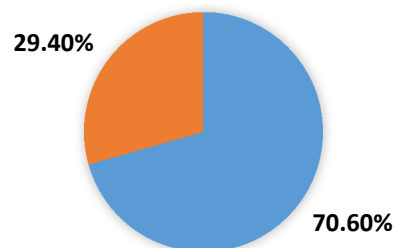
## 2.5 Online Search for travel destinations.



### Interpretation

The data reveals that the majority of individuals, **81.4%**, actively search online for travel destinations, showcasing the growing reliance on digital platforms for travel planning. This trend highlights the significance of online content, including reviews, social media, and travel blogs, in influencing destination selection. The remaining **18.6%** who do not search online might rely on traditional sources like word-of-mouth or travel agencies, indicating a smaller yet noteworthy segment. These insights emphasize the pivotal role of online platforms in shaping modern travel behaviour, particularly in the context of Kolhapur tourism.

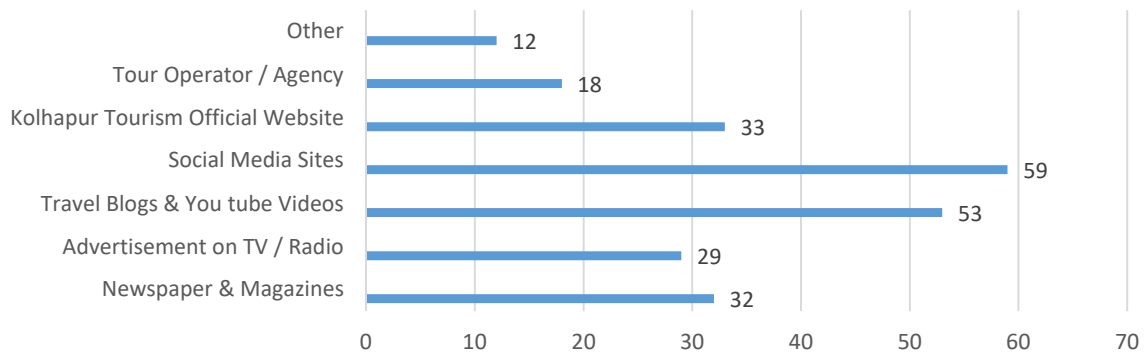
## 2.6 Uses of Social Media for Kolhapur tourism Information.



### Interpretation

The data indicates that a significant majority, **70.6%**, of respondents use social media sites to gather information about Kolhapur tourism. This demonstrates the growing influence of social media as a vital tool for promoting tourism destinations and assisting travellers in planning their trips. The remaining **29.4%** of respondents who do not rely on social media might depend on other sources such as travel agencies, personal recommendations, or traditional media. These findings underscore the importance of leveraging social media platforms to enhance Kolhapur's tourism appeal and reach a broader audience.

**2.7 Sources of Awareness about Kolhapur Tourism.**



**Interpretation**

The data reveals that **social media sites** are the most commonly used source of information for tourists planning a trip to Kolhapur, with **57.8%** of respondents relying on them. Following closely are **travel blogs and YouTube** videos, used by **52%** of respondents, emphasizing the increasing reliance on user-generated content and video-based platforms for travel insights. Traditional media, such as **newspapers and magazines (31.4%)** and **advertisements on TV or radio (28.4%)**, still play a role, though they are less influential compared to digital sources. **The official Kolhapur tourism website** is consulted by **33.4% of respondents**, suggesting moderate engagement with official tourism channels. **Tour operators or agencies** are the least popular source, with only 17.6% turning to them for information, and other sources contribute to **9.9%**. These findings underscore the growing importance of online platforms in shaping tourism decisions for Kolhapur

**2.8 Perceived Reliability of Travel Planning Sources.**

Source of Info	High Extent	Moderate Extent	Little Extent	Not at all	Weighted Average
Travel Blogs & YouTube Videos	62	27	10	3	3.45
Social Media Sites	57	28	14	3	3.36
Kolhapur Tourism Official Website	47	32	17	6	3.18
Newspaper & Magazines	47	23	23	9	3.06
Advertisement on TV / Radio	33	41	19	9	2.96
Tour Operator / Agency	34	31	24	13	2.84
Other	29	23	35	15	2.65

**Interpretation**

The above table highlights the extent to which various sources of information are considered

helpful and reliable for travel planning in Kolhapur tourism, with a sample size of 102 respondents. Among all sources, **Travel Blogs & YouTube Videos** are highly relied upon, with **61%** of respondents indicating a "High Extent" of helpfulness, followed by **Social Media Sites**, where **57%** of respondents also rated it to a "High Extent." This suggests that social media plays a significant role in influencing travel decisions. **Newspapers & Magazines** & the **Kolhapur Tourism Official Website** also hold importance, with **46%** and **47%** respectively rating them at a high extent. However, **advertisements on TV/Radio and tour operators** show moderate reliance, with **32%** and **33%** rating them "High Extent" while **40%** and **30%** rated them "Moderate Extent," respectively. The "**Other**" category shows relatively lower reliability, with only **29%** marking it as "High Extent" and **35%** indicating "Little Extent." This interpretation underscores the growing trust and influence of **social media platforms, blogs, and video content** in tourist destination search and selection over traditional media or intermediaries in Kolhapur.

## 2.9 Travel Planning Stage Activities Using Social Media/Internet.

Activities	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Search Information about hotels	51	50%
Search for tourist attraction places & activities	61	59.8%
Search about places of sight seen	47	46.1%
Search about natural environment of destination	58	56.9%
Get information about Mode of travel	30	29.4%
Search about guide for travelling	22	21.6%
Enquiry about packages	28	27.5%

### Interpretation.

The data from above table reveals the key activities performed by travelers at the planning stage through social media and the internet, with a sample size of 102 respondents. A significant **59.8%** of respondents searched for **tourist attractions and activities**, indicating a primary focus on destination exploration. Following closely, **56.9%** sought information about the **natural environment** of destinations, showing travelers' interest in scenic and eco-friendly aspects. **50%** of respondents searched for information about **hotels**, highlighting the importance of accommodation planning. Meanwhile, **46.1%** searched for **places of sightseeing**, reflecting the appeal of cultural and historical exploration. Relatively fewer respondents explored **modes of travel** (29.4%), searched for **travel guides** (21.6%), or enquired about **travel packages** (27.5%), which suggests a preference for self-planned

itineraries. This interpretation underscores the critical role of social media and internet platforms as trusted sources for comprehensive and direct travel planning in Kolhapur tourism.

#### 2.10 Activities Performed During Travel Using Social Media.

Activities	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Photo & Videos sharing	65	63.70%
Search for best local food places	62	60.80%
Search for best shopping markets places	44	43.10%
Posting reviews, comments, ratings	29	28.40%
Location Search (GPS)	43	42.20%

#### Interpretation

The data in above table reveals the activities performed during the travel phase using social media and the internet, with a sample size of **102** respondents. The most common activity is **photo and video sharing**, reported by **63.7%** of respondents, highlighting the popularity of sharing experiences in real-time. This is followed by **searching for the best local food places**, with **60.8%**, indicating travelers' interest in exploring culinary experiences. **43.1%** of respondents search for **best shopping market places**, while **42.2%** use social media for **location searches (GPS)**, showing its utility for navigation. Lastly, **28.4%** engage in **posting reviews, comments, and ratings**, reflecting moderate participation in providing feedback or sharing opinions. This data underscores the essential role of social media and internet tools in enhancing the travel experience, enabling real-time information sharing, exploration, and decision-making in Kolhapur tourism.

#### 2.11 Types of Attractions Recommended by Social Media.

Attraction Type	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Historical landmarks	65	63.7%
Religious sites	55	53.9%
Natural beauty (lakes, hills)	64	62.7%
Local markets (e.g., Jaggery, leather goods)	32	31.4%

#### Interpretation

The table highlights the types of attractions that **social media or the internet** recommend exploring during a trip to **Kolhapur**, based on **102 responses**. The most popular attraction is

**historical landmarks**, with **65 respondents (63.7%)** showing interest, reflecting the rich historical heritage of Kolhapur. Following closely is **natural beauty**, such as **lakes and hills**, chosen by **64 respondents (62.7%)**, indicating a strong appeal for scenic and natural beauty. **Religious sites** are also significant, with **55 respondents (53.9%)** opting to explore temples and sacred places. However, **local markets** (e.g., textiles, leather goods) are the least preferred attraction, with only **32 respondents (31.4%)** showing interest. This data suggests that **historical landmarks** and **natural beauty** are the primary highlights promoted by social media, while local markets are relatively less emphasized. Overall, travelers are inclined to explore a mix of **heritage, natural attractions, and religious sites** during their trips to Kolhapur.

### 2.12 Influence of Social Media Content on Travel Decisions.

Influence Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very influential	46	42%
Somewhat influential	33	32%
Neutral	18	17%
Not influential	12	11%

#### Interpretation

The table highlights that social media posts (photos, reviews, or videos) significantly impact travel decisions to Kolhapur's famous sites. Out of **102 respondents**, **46** find them **very influential**, while **33** consider them **somewhat influential**, showing a combined **78%** influence. Meanwhile, **18** remain **neutral**, and only **5** find social media posts **not influential**.

### 2.13 Frequency of Searching for Kolhapuri Dishes Online.

Frequency of Use	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Always	44	43.1%
Often	12	11.6%
Sometimes	37	36.3%
Rarely	6	5.9%
Never	3	2.9%

#### Interpretation

The data shows that a **majority** of respondents (43.1%) **always** use social media or online

platforms to discover popular Kolhapuri dishes before visiting the city. A **significant number** (36.3%) also use these platforms **often**. This indicates a strong reliance on digital platforms for information about local cuisine.

#### 2.14 Most Trusted Online Sources for Kolhapuri Food Experiences.

Source	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Social media	47	46.9%
Food Blogs/Vlogs	12	12%
Restaurant Reviews	39	38.0%
Other	4	4%

##### Interpretation

The table shows that a **majority** of respondents (46.9%) **always** use social media to discover popular Kolhapuri dishes before visiting the city. A **significant number** (38%) also rely on restaurant reviews. This indicates a strong reliance on digital platforms for information about local cuisine.

#### 2.15 Restaurant Visits Influenced by Social Media Recommendations.

Interest	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	83	81.4%
No	19	18.6%

##### Interpretation

The data shows that a **majority** of respondents (81.4%) have visited a restaurant in Kolhapur based on recommendations or reviews found on social media. This highlights the significant influence of social media in shaping dining choices. The provided data reveals that a **significant majority** of respondents (81.4%) have made dining decisions in Kolhapur based on recommendations or reviews sourced from social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. This compelling statistic underscores the **substantial influence** of social media in shaping culinary preferences and driving dining choices. It highlights the growing trend of individuals relying on online platforms to discover and explore local dining experiences.

#### 2.16 Influence of Social Media on Buying Kolhapuri Chappals.

Interest	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	71	69.9%
No	31	30.9%

### Interpretation

The provided data reveals that a **significant majority** of respondents (69.9%) have been **directly influenced** by social media influencers or online posts when making decisions about purchasing authentic Kolhapuri chappals. This underscores the **substantial impact** of social media in shaping consumer preferences and driving purchasing decisions, particularly for traditional and cultural products like Kolhapuri chappals. This highlights the growing role of social media in shaping consumer preferences and driving purchasing decisions, particularly in the realm of traditional and cultural products.

#### 2.17 Preferred Social Media Platforms for Sharing Travel Experiences.

Social Media Sites	High Extent	Moderate Extent	Little Extent	Not at all
Facebook	52	24	22	4
Instagram	64	34	2	2
You Tube	50	35	9	8
WhatsApp	43	38	19	2
Google +	16	42	33	11
Kolhapur Tourism Website	32	40	17	13
Travel Web Sites	31	42	13	16
Travel blog / Video Blog (Vlog)	42	36	17	7

### Interpretation

The table reveals a strong preference for social media platforms among respondents when sharing travel experiences and photographs about Kolhapur tourism. **Instagram** emerges as the most popular platform, with **64 out of 102 respondents** using it to a **high extent**. **Facebook** and **YouTube** also rank high, with **52 and 50 respondents** respectively using them to a high extent. This indicates a strong reliance on visual platforms for sharing travel experiences and highlights the influence of social media in promoting tourism to Kolhapur. Additionally, the popularity of **travel blogs and vlogs** suggests a growing trend of personalized and in-depth travel content sharing, with **42 respondents** using them to a high extent.

### 3 Findings

**Online Travel Search:** An overwhelming 81.4% search online for destinations, highlighting digital platforms' importance in travel planning. A small group (18.6%) relies on traditional methods. Digital engagement is pivotal for Kolhapur tourism's success.

**Social Media Usage for Tourism:** Around 70.6% use social media for Kolhapur tourism information. It emphasizes the role of social platforms in trip planning. Non-users (29.4%) prefer alternatives like agencies or personal recommendations.

**Frequency of Social Media Use for Travel Planning:** Nearly all respondents (93.2%) use social media or the internet for planning, with 46.1% doing so always. Traditional methods are becoming obsolete, stressing digital presence.

**Sources for Information:** social media (57.8%) and travel blogs/YouTube videos (52%) are the most relied-upon sources. Official websites (33.4%) and traditional media (28.4%) play supporting roles, while tour operators (17.6%) lag.

**Reliability of Information Sources:** Travel blogs (61%) and social media (57%) are highly trusted. Official websites and newspapers hold moderate reliability, while tour operators are less impactful. User-generated content surpasses traditional channels.

**Travel Planning Activities:** Searching attractions (59.8%) and natural environments (56.9%) dominate. Accommodation searches (50%) follow closely. Guides and packages are less sought, indicating a preference for self-planned trips.

**Social Media Usage During Travel:** Most respondents use social media frequently (46.1%) or sometimes (46.1%) during trips for updates and decisions. Few (7.8%) avoid it, confirming its role as an essential travel companion.

**Activities during Travel:** Sharing photos/videos (63.7%) and finding local food (60.8%) are popular. Reviews and GPS usage are moderately common. Social media enhances real-time exploration and sharing.

**Attractions Promoted by social media:** Historical landmarks (63.7%) and natural beauty (62.7%) are most highlighted. Religious sites (53.9%) follow, while local markets are less emphasized (31.4%).

**Social media for Food Discovery:** Kolhapuri cuisine is often explored online, with 43.1% always and 36.3% sometimes doing so. Social media strongly influences food choices.

**Trusted Online Sources for Food:** social media (46.9%) and reviews (38%) are trusted sources for authentic food experiences. Blogs/vlogs have moderate trust.

**Social Media Impact on Restaurant Visits:** A significant 81.4% visited restaurants based on social media recommendations. It shows strong influence over dining choices.

**Influence on Buying Kolhapuri Chappals:** Influencers affect 69.9% of respondents' decisions, emphasizing their power in promoting cultural products.

**Platforms for Sharing Travel Experiences:** Instagram (64%) and YouTube (50%) are top platforms for sharing. Blogs and Facebook are also popular, highlighting visual content's

impact.

## 4 Conclusion

The research study underscores the significant role of social media and internet platforms in influencing tourist behaviour and promoting Kolhapur tourism. A key insight is that the 18–35 age group, which constitutes the largest proportion of respondents, actively uses social media for planning and decision-making, demonstrating a clear generational shift towards digital engagement. This demographic, comprising students and young professionals, forms the primary audience for tourism marketing strategies. Additionally, while males slightly outnumber females in social media usage for travel planning, the balanced gender participation highlights the need for inclusive marketing approaches catering to both adventure and family-friendly experiences.

The findings reveal a growing reliance on digital content such as travel blogs, social media posts, and YouTube videos for destination selection. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are not only popular for sharing travel experiences but also serve as critical sources for discovering new attractions, authentic culinary experiences, and cultural products like Kolhapuri chappals. A significant majority of respondents trust user-generated content over traditional promotional methods, reinforcing the importance of peer recommendations, reviews, and visual storytelling in shaping travel decisions. This trend underlines the power of digital word-of-mouth marketing and the decreasing dependence on traditional channels such as newspapers, radio, and tour operators.

Kolhapur's unique offerings, including its historical landmarks, natural beauty, and authentic cuisine, emerge as the most appealing attractions. Social media has proven to be instrumental in uncovering lesser-known destinations, thereby enriching the overall travel experience. Moreover, travellers actively engage with digital platforms during and after their trips, sharing experiences, posting reviews, and influencing others to visit the region. This behaviour highlights the cyclical nature of digital engagement, where travellers not only consume content but also contribute to the promotion of tourism. Another notable finding is the pivotal role of online reviews in the travel decision-making process. Reviews help travellers identify desirable experiences, avoid potential disappointments, and enhance the likelihood of satisfaction. However, while online platforms are widely trusted, a minority of respondents expressed concerns about their reliability, indicating a need for transparency and authenticity in digital content.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the transformative impact of social media and the

internet on Kolhapur tourism. Travel agencies and stakeholders must adopt digital-first strategies, leveraging influencer partnerships, user-generated content, and targeted advertising to reach and engage their audiences effectively. By highlighting Kolhapur's rich cultural heritage, culinary delights, and scenic attractions through innovative online campaigns, tourism promoters can tap into the preferences of the modern traveller. The seamless integration of technology, personalization, and storytelling will be crucial in positioning Kolhapur as a sought-after destination in the digital era.

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