Role of Social Media Platforms and Social Influence on Trip Planning Behavior of Tourists in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the role of social media platforms and social influence on tourist trip-planning behavior in Pakistan. The researcher used pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip as a construct of trip planning in Pakistan. A quantitative research method was employed, and data were collected by using a structured survey questionnaire from Pakistani youth and millennials. For the sample size, the researcher used the Krejcie-Morgan formula, resulting in a sample size of 386. The population consisted of Pakistani social media users. The researcher applied the social influence theory & uses and gratification theory as a theoretical framework. To analyze relationship between social media and social influence on trip planning behavior, the researcher applied Pearson correlation and an independent t-test through SPSS. The findings highlighted a strong relationship between social media usage and trip planning behavior among Pakistani tourists. Social influence, such as peer and family recommendations, shared experiences, identified a strong, consistent relationship with tourists' trip planning behavior in all stages. In current research, Youth showed higher scores than millennials in utilizing social media and trip planning behavior. The current study can help social media users, including youth and millennial age groups, group owners, and policymakers, to develop new strategies to assist tourists in searching for information about trip planning in Pakistan. Limited studies have been conducted on the usage of social media for trip planning behavior and the social influence of tourists in Pakistan.

Keywords: *Social medias, Trip planning, tourist, social influence, Youth.*

Introduction

Social media is an integral source of communication for people, so they can connect with friends and family and collect and search for information about brands through this platform. Due to its easy accessibility to every individual, marketers utilize this important tool for promoting their products and companies (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Social networking refers to a set of Web 2.0-based instruments that provide global connections, communication, and sharing of ideas, perspectives, information, and personal connections between users of the Internet. The Data report for January 2024 globally identified that social media usage has increased rapidly. Currently, 62.3 percent of people worldwide utilize social media. Social media is currently used by 5.04 billion

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people worldwide, and in the past year, 266 million new people have signed up for accounts. Almost two hours and twentythree minutes are spent on social media every day on average (Chaffey, 2024).

Moreover, social media is an integral platform for personal and professional usage. The tourism industry has gained popularity with the development of social media networking sites. Social media users heavily rely on information shown on different networking platforms related to trip planning and different destinations. The impact of social media on decision-making related to travel has gained significant interest from scholars studying tourism. According to a recent review of the literature, most of these studies have primarily examined how social media affects behavioral intention; very few have looked at actual behavior (Leung et al., 2019).

Social media sites have the power to affect travelers' decisions on where to go. Potential travelers must make decisions before leaving on a vacation, including where to go, what to do, when to go, and how to get there. Their preconceived notions of the place and their expectations of the experiences they will have there may have an impact on these pre-travel planning choices. Social networking sites and recommendations from family and friends with comparable travel experiences typically shape their opinion of a place (Agbi, 2019). Similarly, different people seek information from social media platforms differently, as for some age groups, millennials and younger generations in particular, using social media has become second nature. Information obtained from social media and other users is therefore more crucial than ever (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Younger generation opinions are shaped by social media influencers (SMIs), a new kind of third-party endorser who uses their informative content to sway opinion (Freberg et al., 2011). The SMIs' information is considered reliable and has a big influence on users' opinions, viewpoints, attitudes, and purchasing decisions (Lim et al., 2022). A new era of marketing communication has been brought about by the effect of online content sharing across a variety of industries, including tourism (Han & Chen, 2021). Since the development of well-known social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the impact of digital media on the travel and tourism marketing sector has increased significantly. It has been discovered that these social media sites' community building and information exchange, whether through text, video, or image, have a significant impact on user influence and marketing (Parker, 2023). With its vast audience and large number of users, social media has become one of the most effective platforms for advertising. In addition to disseminating information, it provides a means of livelihood for a large number of people, regardless of their educational background, geographic location, caste, or creed. Facebook Live and other live options have made it the fastest way to obtain first-hand information available (Rawat & Dani, 2022).

Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram provide user-generated and inspired content and social proof, which influence the trip planning behavior that also shapes tourists' destination choices and strengthens trust via peer recommendation (Wibisono & Lale, 2024). Travelers now search, investigate, and choose their locations very differently by using social media (Nur'afifah & Prihantoro, 2021). Social media sites

like YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram serve as windows into the world, displaying an abundance of enthralling information that encourages individuals to travel and explore new locations. Social media offers an abundance of inspiration that encourages tourists to venture beyond their comfort zones, whether through breathtaking scenery, mouthwatering cuisine, or distinctive cultural experiences (Wibisono & Lale, 2024).

Travelers highly rely on social media to discover destinations for plan their trip. They search sites for reviews and advice. To make wise choices, seek guidance from bloggers and travel influencers (Saini et al., 2023). With the help of user-generated information and well-chosen guides, travelers can delve into the heart of a destination, finding hidden treasures and attractions that are just waiting to be discovered (Cox et al., 2009). Furthermore, the interactive nature of media enables tourists to communicate with locals and other travelers in online travel networks and forums, asking questions, sharing stories, and seeking advice. The present research focused on how social media platforms and social influence, such as peer recommendations, play a significant role in tourist behavior when planning a trip.

Significance of the Study

Social media is a global online platform that has a big impact on travel and tourism decisions because it spreads information, shapes views, and promotes cross-cultural interaction through text, photos, and videos (Khan & Rehman, 2024). According to Acharjee and Ahmed (2023), social media channels help tourists plan their trips and find inspiration. They also give travel businesses a chance to advertise their products, interact with customers, and gauge the opinions of their visitors. Social media significantly helps travelers make better decisions when selecting a trip. In today's world, social media has emerged as a vital resource for both tourists and travel agencies.

However, current research on social media and social influence on trip planning behavior is significant because it's only focused on Pakistan. The Present study is significant because it revolves around the travelers' trip planning behavior and social influence in the context of Pakistan. Due to the rapid usage of social media in daily life, it is important to study how they plan and make decisions for travel. The results of the current study can help businesses and the tourism industry to adopt valuable approaches on social media to meet the changing needs and priorities of tourists. Traveling behavior has been changing in Pakistan. Now, international tourists come and explore different destinations in Pakistan. So by doing this research, international tourists can easily access and approach the travel choice and decision process. This research has raised a great understanding of the implications for the government, stakeholders, policymakers, and the tourism industry on how digital media technology can influence travel behavior.

Objectives of the Study

1. To check the role of social media platforms in shaping the trip planning behavior among tourists in Pakistan.

2. To identify the social influence, like peer recommendations, in shaping trip planning behavior among tourists in Pakistan.
3. To examine how the Youth & Millennials are influenced by the usage of social media and social influence.

Review of the Litrature

Social media is a useful instrument that has grown in significance among marketers and scholars. Through this platform, people may interact with friends and family as well as gather and look up brand information (Butt & Saleem, 2024). Social media has completely changed how people communicate, exchange information, and look for inspiration in recent years. Instagram has become one of the most effective social media channels for people to visually record and share their experiences, including their travels (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of social media on the tourist industry's information-seeking and destination-choosing processes. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor have revolutionized the way tourists obtain suggestions, reviews, and information from fellow travelers. These platforms are excellent resources for travelers, giving them access to a wide range of user-generated content, such as images, videos, and personal accounts, which greatly affects their decisions about where to go (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Social media has a significant impact on how tourists discover and choose their destinations. It highlights how visually appealing content on websites like YouTube and Instagram encourages people to travel. It points out that more and more tourists are using social media to plan their vacations. In order to make well-informed travel decisions, they seek out peer and influencer reviews and advice (Wibisono & Lale, 2024).

According to Dewayani et al. (2023), the study revealed that social media significantly affects travelers' trip planning behavior, emphasizing peer recommendations and user-generated content that affect destination preferences, improve decision-making, and encourage interaction with local communities, all of which ultimately shape travel experiences and marketing tactics.

According to Shahzad et al. (2024), their study emphasized that while influencers have little effect on travelers' trip planning behavior, social media use by government agencies and travel agencies has a big impact. It highlights how social media influences travel choices and efficiently promotes travel. Our surroundings and the important people in our lives, from friends and family to strangers we encounter on social media, influence our travel choices. People we follow are typically perceived as belonging to our inner circle, close friends whose viewpoints we respect. The market for young travelers is expanding in the current travel and tourism industry. Particularly, students are drawn to technological advancements. Travel information is now easy to find because of the abundance of online resources, especially travel blogs and vlogs on vacation spots (Shankar & Hampesh, 2023).

Social media these days has a big impact on our daily lives. The main source of news has shifted from traditional media channels to social media. Consequently, it has

the power to alter how a destination is perceived (Ilyas et al., 2023). Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and personal blogs have a big influence on consumers' willingness to travel to a particular place to spend their free time. The people may now discover more about the destinations and the unique experiences they might have there, as well as have a deeper grasp and knowledge of them, thanks to these platforms. These platforms give hotels and tourist attractions more publicity and the chance to grow their businesses (Tasnim, 2020).

The pre-departure phase of vacation planning includes gathering information, choosing where to go, where to stay, and what trips and activities to arrange. In this way, the Internet has fundamentally altered the way that customers get information by providing them with greater options, better visibility for sales, and greater bargaining power (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Typical information search behaviors include browsing through the website of a travel agency or hotel, going to TripAdvisor to read reviews about particular items or locations, or liking a particular destination's Facebook page. Tourists review and operate tourism products such as hotels, restaurants, and attractions by visiting social media platforms and tour agency pages, where tourists can post and read opinions determined by rating and suggestions from other people who have already visited a particular destination (Ružić & Biloš, 2010).

People's pre-trip research practices are one way that social media is influencing tourism. People are now urged to talk about their travel adventures. Consequently, social media has changed how people make decisions. Based on other people's evaluations, consumers increase their faith in travel agencies. Consumption patterns have changed along with every other facet of our lives due to social media. Businesses have been greatly impacted by these advancements, primarily because they have made new marketing methods possible. Undoubtedly, all of these include tourism, one of the most dynamic industries in the world economy (Mohamad et al., 2022).
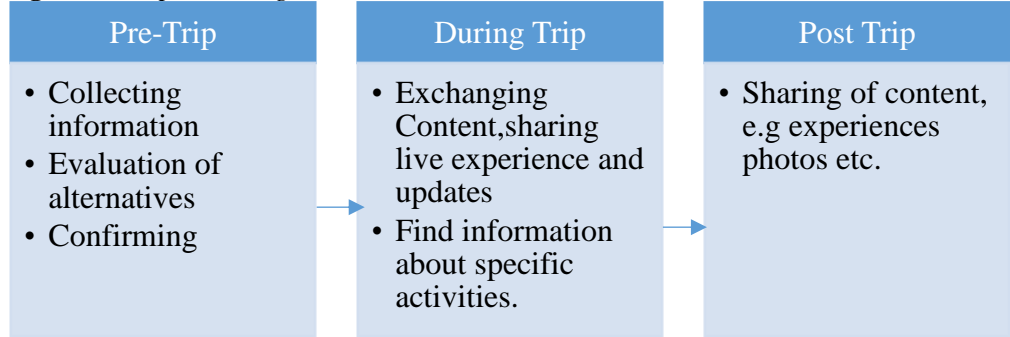
Travelers and tourism organizations use social media platforms to communicate, share information, and market different vacation spots and activities (Deb et al., 2022). Since social media tools became available, the travel industry has experienced a tremendous amount of change. These platforms have completely changed how travelers plan and share their trip experiences, as well as how they obtain information and recommendations (Zhiqi & Rasoolimanesh, 2023).

Worldwide, tourism has become the sector with the fastest rate of growth and the largest source of foreign exchange. A significant portion of the annual income and riches of many nations is derived from tourism. For many people nowadays, travel is becoming essential for a variety of reasons. Traveling for work, pleasure, or relaxation, as well as for food, religion, adventure, nature, health, or to see friends and family, are some of the reasons people undertake travel (Ramos et al., 2019). Nowadays, most people's lives revolve around their travels. People typically utilize the Internet to research destinations and book reservations in advance of their trips (Yan et al., 2018). In this research, the researcher adapted the trip planning model into three stages: pre-trip, during-trip, and

post-trip. These represent the steps involved in making travel decisions via social media sites (Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019).

The pre-stage of the trip indicates that the user looks for information to limit their selections, validate their decision, and get ideas for places to go on vacation or for a holiday. After selecting destination next step is to get information about accommodation and leisure activities, and then confirm the selected destination. In the second stage of trip planning, tourists share live content and activities, experiences, and updates related to the selected destination. Post-trip stage tourists post images and give reviews, etc.

Figure 1: *Trip Planning Model*

Pre-Trip	During Trip	Post Trip
• Collecting information • Evaluation of alternatives • Confirming	• Exchanging Content,sharing live experience and updates • Find information about specific activities.	• Sharing of content, e.g experiences photos etc.

Source: (Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019)

Social Influence & Trip Planning

Social influence is referred to as an individual's beliefs influenced by some reference group, culture, and agreement that depend on their particular situation (Venkatesh et al., 2003). According to Xu et al. (2024), social influence is referred to as a powerful predictor of the technology acceptance model in tourism, particularly in social media usage. An increasing amount of research shows that travelers' choices are influenced by the actions and decisions of their peers. According to Cicognani et al. (2022), customers' evaluations of a hotel are positively impacted when they have access to information about previous ratings that are higher than average. According to Abd Mutalib et al. (2017), one of the most important motivators for medical tourism is positive experiences from friends and family. In a discrete choice experiment, Pan et al. (2021) ask participants to select a location both before and after learning about other people's perceptions of the same location. They discover that, regardless of whether they had a previous image of themselves or not, people change their preferences after getting feedback. Moreover, Sweet & Adhikari (2022) defined social influence as how a person's network connections can alter their behavior, thoughts, or beliefs. Social media gives people access to information about other people's travel habits. Decision-making is also impacted by the bandwagon effect, in which individuals follow the example of others regardless of their convictions (Kelly & Perez, 2025).

According to Sharaievska and Mirehie (2023), one of the most important and beneficial family activities that can benefit a family's members on many levels is a family

vacation. The purpose of this study was to investigate how social media use by family members influences the experience of family trips and how it occurs before, during, and after such trips. The data revealed a number of major themes, such as family social media use, social media use before, during, and following family travel, and the impact of social media use on travel experiences. According to Cunha et al (2020), satisfaction is one of the elements that influences travelers' choice of destination. The satisfaction level of tourists affects their possibility of returning or suggesting the destination to friends and family (Jeong & Kim, 2019). Social influence plays a crucial role in a traveler's decision-making process for selecting any destination. Tourists take opinions and seek information and recommendations from family, friends, online reviews on social media platforms, as well as influencers, for trip planning and destination decision-making behavior (Jebraoui & Nemiche, 2024). According to Liu et al. (2019), when their friends post about a place, millennials are more inclined to go.

According to Sanders and Geerts (2019), Social influence, especially from family and friends, has a big impact on how visitors organize their trips. According to their research, organizing a trip is frequently a group activity in which social settings affect choices about tours, departure schedules, and activities. The impact of social media is also significant, as peer recommendations and user-generated material are important factors in the decision-making and destination selection processes. Similarly, Gabor and Varga (2021) explained that Information and communication technologies have become essential in the tourism sector due to the growth of the internet and social media, impacting marketing initiatives, revenue expansion, and customer relations. Their findings revealed that travelers primarily rely on social media reviews and friends for information about tourism destinations.

According to the study, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have a big influence on BSTM students' travel choices. Social media is a potent instrument in shaping travel choices, as evidenced by the fact that many students rely on travel-related content from these platforms for knowledge and inspiration. The study concludes that one of the most important factors in travel decisions is the bandwagon effect. This effect happens when students are influenced by the popularity of particular locations and frequently choose to visit locations that are popular or highly recommended by their peers. This implies that rather than choosing a location based on personal desire, students can do so to gain social recognition. It's interesting to note that the study did not discover any significant variations in the effects of the bandwagon effect and social influence among academic years. This suggests that these social factors comparably influence travel choices for all BSTM students, irrespective of their academic year (Abad et al., 2024).

Youth and Millennial & Social Media Trip Planning Behavior

According to experts and the media, millennials, also known as Generation Y, are those who born between 1980 and 1994, though this exact range varies. Due to the abundance of interactive technology applications that have been available since its

inception, this generational cohort, which comes after Generation X and before Generation Z, has been dubbed the first genuinely digital one (Duffett, 2015). Dolot (2018) summarized the findings of most scholars, who suggest that the Gen Z era is largely represented by the early 1990s to early 2000s, which also roughly corresponds to the 1992–2009 timeframe established by McCrindle and Fell (2019).

When researching destinations, millennials and Gen Z mainly rely on social media, with Instagram and TikTok having a significant impact. Their opinions and reasons for traveling to particular places are greatly influenced by user-generated content and influencer partnerships. Social media sites like Instagram and TikTok have a big impact on how Millennials and Gen Z plan their trips since they shape their opinions about the places they visit. Peer recommendations have a greater influence on Gen Z, whereas Millennials favor authentic and informative content. (Setiawan & Azizah, 2024). Social media gives them a way to share their experiences in real time while traveling, which improves their interaction with other tourists and locations. Millennials and Gen Z mostly use social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok, to study travel destinations. User-generated content and influencer collaborations have a significant impact on their beliefs and motivations for visiting specific locations (Maria-Irina & Istudor, 2019). According to Constantoglou and Trihas (2020), when arranging a trip, Greek Millennials make extensive use of social media, especially Facebook and Instagram. They are influenced by Trip Advisor reviews, images published online, and posts from friends, suggesting that social media plays a significant role in shaping their trip choices.

Social networking has been a significant factor in determining travel choices in the present digital era, particularly for young tourists. Young travelers' choices are influenced by social media platforms; the more they trust the information and content published on these sites, the more likely they are to base their decisions on it (Ismail et al., 2025). Social media use has a significant impact on the travel habits of Malaysian youths. Social media has an impact on how young people travel because they use it to plan trips, find places to visit, and share their experiences, which improves their travel preferences and level of participation in travel-related activities. Traveler preferences and social media use are favorably and strongly connected with travel behavior (Ahmad & Idris, 2024). The impact of social media on trip planning and decision-making, showing 92% of youth vacationers modify their plans in response to social media notifications, suggesting a strong correlation between social media use and trip planning practices (Chilembwe & Gondwe, 2020).

According to Karatsoli and Nathanail (2020), their study examines how men and women use social media differently while making travel and activity plans. It finds that both sexes use social media more before than during activities, and that women are more impacted by images and videos than men. Social networking has significantly altered how travelers choose their destinations and make travel arrangements (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Gretzel, 2018). Women are more likely than men to use social media, and the more educated a person is, the more often they use it. (Yuan et al., 2022)

Social media's peer reviews and shared experiences have a big impact on young travelers' trip planning. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are essential resources for information sharing, influencing this group's travel choices and preferences (Tan & Halim, 2021). Social media, particularly Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, is a major tool used by Generation Y while organizing trips. They frequently try to record and share their travel experiences online because they trust shared content, which affects their trip choices (Werenowska & Rzepka, 2020). Social media's easily accessible content, such as images, videos, and reviews, has a big impact on how young people, especially members of Generation Z, arrange their travels. Because peer recommendations based on personal experiences effectively shape travel decisions, these formats improve decision-making and build trust (Sudarević et al., 2024).

Research Design and Methodology

The present research aims to identify social media in tourist trip planning behavior. For this study, a quantitative approach and survey method have been used. The population for this study is the youth and millennial age group of social media users in Pakistan. These were the main sources of data and information for the present study. The researcher applied the uses and gratification theory & Social Influence Theory to test the hypothesis. This is descriptive research. The sample size has been determined (N=386) by using the Kerjice Morgan formula for analysis. The sample size of the population of about 10 million will be determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. The table shows that a sample size of 384 cases is adequate to reflect the population if it is one million or more. The reason for selecting such a population is the easy availability of sample units to the researcher because they can be easily available and have good exposure. The Non-Probability Purposive sampling technique has been used in this research. The reason for selecting this sampling technique is that the target population is users of social media and was purposively selected. The scale has been developed from the Fotis et al. (2012), Ngubelanga and Duffett (2021), and Davis (1989). The Pearson correlation and independent t-test have been applied to analyze the relationship between social media usage, social influence, and trip planning behavior.

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on investigating the social media role and social influence on trip planning behavior. In this present research, the researcher applied the uses and gratification motivation theory and social influence theory. Social influence theory explains that efforts by one or more individuals to change the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, or behavior of one or more others. Social influence primarily focuses on altering the behavior of others, as it falls within the domain of psychology (Baron & Branscombe, 2009). Herbert Kelman created the Social Influence Theory, which provides a framework for comprehending how people are impacted by those in their immediate environment. Three primary forms of social influence are suggested by the theory: Compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance is a type of social influence

that shows a direct request made by one person to another to change in behavior (Baron & Branscombe, 2009). It is the process by which an individual yields to the influence of another person or group to obtain a favorable response from the other, either in the form of acceptance or disapproval from the other, or to obtain a specific reward or avoid a specific punishment controlled by the other (Kelman, 2006). When people pretend to agree with others while keeping their differing views to themselves, this is known as compliance (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Identification is defined as the process by which an individual accepts to be influenced by another person or group to create or preserve a fulfilling, self-defining relationship with that other.

Lastly, internalization is the process by which a person allows influence from another to keep their ideas and behaviors consistent with their own set of values. Value congruence can manifest as affective appropriateness, in which the induced behavior is seen as consistent with the person's self-concept, or as cognitive consistency, in which the induced behavior is seen as helpful to the maximization of the person's values (Kelman, 2006). However, in the context of social media and tourism context tourists rely on peer recommendations and their reviews shared on social media platforms. Their preferences for travel destinations, accommodations, and activities are influenced by these contacts. Consequently, social influence, which is fueled by internalization, identification, and compliance, is crucial to comprehending how Pakistani tourists organize their travels in the digital age.

Uses and Gratification Theory

In order to discover the social and psychological elements that influence people's use of social media, U&G theory provides a framework for research (Ga & Li, 2018). The U&G theory (Katz et al., 1974) states that a person actively uses a certain medium to satisfy their wants. U&G has been used extensively in social media research. Prior studies have used U&G theory to examine why people actively utilize specific social media platforms, like Facebook (Malik et al., 2016), Twitter, and WeChat (Ga & Li, 2018) to fulfill personal needs. Social media-related gratifications are divided into various categories by prior studies. The application of U&G theory to the study of social media use in travel is appropriate. First, it is helpful to explain how people use social media on a personal basis. Second, it seems sensible to investigate the reasons inside the social media setting (Li et al., 2015).

The researcher has taken four motivation needs of UGT, which are Social Interaction, Information, Entertainment, and Convenience. These UGT motivation needs are identified for social media use, and users actively seek satisfaction to fulfill social psychological needs, which enhances the overall experiences on social media platforms (Muhammad, 2018). These are relevant to the current study and are defined as: Social interaction refers to the level at which people may use websites to share their thoughts, communicate with others, and form associations with others can be characterized as a social interaction (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

Ha et al. (2015) explained social interaction as the degree to which individuals feel at ease and connected during interpersonal communication activities. Prior studies have indicated that mobile technologies have expanded interactive platforms for users. As far as information is concerned, the research on information seeking and internet usage conducted by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) is the source of this theme's term. Similar concepts were also developed by Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999), who termed information motivation, which they defined as how users use the internet for information and self-education. The information construct measures how much media, through the Internet and mobile technologies, provides users with useful and innovative information that is not limited by space or time (Chen & Wells, 1999; Luo, 2002). The entertainment variable was existing in the measurement of Papacharissian and Rubin (2000) and Ko et al (2005). Another associated factor for internet use identified by Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) was escapism.

The term "convenience" describes the simplicity of utilizing media and the point that it is always accessible to people. In addition, media is freely available to people, which increases its convenience and accessibility (Ahlse et al., 2020). Convenience is the concept defined according to literature as the facilitation and ease of their use of smartphones without time and space limitations (Ha et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2013). In the context of social media and tourism, these four motivational needs are most appropriate to apply as a theoretical framework.

Hypotheses

H_1: Social media usage is significantly related to tourist Trip planning behavior for travel.

H_2: Social influence/peer recommendations are significantly related to tourist trip planning behavior.

H_3: Youth and Millennials are significantly influenced by social media in their trip planning behavior.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: *Theoretical Framework*
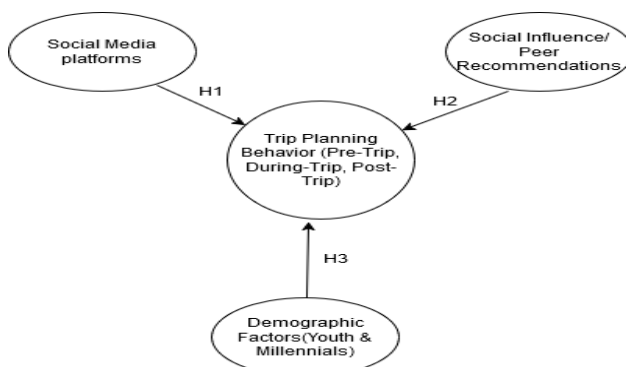
Result and Analysis

After allocating scores to the response, the data were quantified. The researcher then presented and analyzed the data. Data was analyzed by using SPSS. By default, the probability level (i.e. Alpha or *p*) for approving or disapproving a research hypothesis was taken as .05, which means the researcher is 95% sure that the relationship or difference between variables, if any, exists is real, or there only 5% chances that such relationship or difference is by chance. The sample for this study comprised 386 participants from social media platforms who utilize it for travel purposes from all over Pakistan to explore the relationship between social media & social influence on trip planning behavior. The demographic distribution of the sample (n = 386) reflects a fairly balanced representation of youth and millennials, and male and female participants. The respondents were highly educated, with over 88% holding at least a bachelor's degree. Regionally, the sample was dominated by respondents from Punjab (51%), followed by KPK (28.5%) & Sindh (20.5%). The sample was evenly divided between Youth (ages 18–25) and Millennials (ages 26–40). Youth formed the majority of the respondents.

Table 1: *Social Media Usage Frequency*

Social media usage frequency	Frequency	Percent	
1. Less than 1 hour	15	3.9%	3.9%
2. 1–5 hours	93	24.1%	28.0%
3. More than 6 hours	278	72.0%	100.0%

According to Table 1, the majority of respondents (72%) use social media for more than 6 hours daily, showing a high level of digital involvement. Only 3.9% use it for less than 1 hour, indicating that most participants are heavily reliant on social platforms, making them the ideal subjects for studying e-tourism and digital influence.

Hypothesis₁: Social media usage is significantly related to tourist Trip planning behavior for travel.

Table 2: *Pearson Correlation Matrix for Social Media Usage for Tourist Trip Planning (N = 386)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. SM trip beginning	1.000											
2. Narrow destinations	.013	1.000										
3. Confirm destination	.076	.107*	1.000									
4. Ideas/info (before trip)	.137**	.020	.168**	1.000								

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
5. Explore ideas/info (before trip)	.045	-.072	.047	-.027	1.000							
6. Ideas/info (during trip)	.007	.078	.051	-.022	.128*	1.000						
7. Info find (during trip)	.189**	.024	.002	.140**	.038	.066	1.000					
8.Comments/ analyze (during trip)	.180**	.033	.065	.208**	.010	.156*	.204**	1.000				
9. Contact with friends (during trip)	.117*	.010	.007	.211**	.061	.079	.249**	.173*	1.000			
10. Share experiences (after trip)	.028	-.060	-.025	.033	.050	.072	.222**	.001	.353**	1.000		
11. Analyse/ Comments (after trip)	.062	-.039	.051	.086	.095	.197**	.201**	.104*	.066	.082	1.000	
12. Visit travel pages (after trip)	.018	-.005	.075	.136**	.012	.123*	.130**	.103*	.030	.049	.519**	1.000

According to Table 2 results support hypothesis 1 and show statistically positive strong correlations between social media usage and tourist trip planning behavior particularly at the 0.01 level (p<.01). Results identified that the strong correlations, such as before the trip, tourists use social media to look for ideas/information (r=.208, p<.01). During the trip, tourists use social media and find information as according to above table showing strong evidence i.e. (r=.189, p<.01.). After the trip sharing and commenting indicated the (r=.222, p<.01) which also strong correlations. This shows that tourists are actively involved with social media usage at different trip planning stages. Tourists search for ideas, seek information, narrow down destinations, and confirm plans during the trip.

Hypothesis₂: Social influence/peer recommendations are significantly related to tourist trip planning behavior.

Table 3: *Correlation amid Social Influence and Trip Planning Behaviors (N = 386)*

Social Influence Variable	Related Variable	r	p
Recommendations from friends/classmates	Consider suggestions from peers	.217**	< .01
	Rely on experiences shared by friends/classmates	.288**	< .01
	Trust recommendations from peers compared to other sources	.033	.522
Consider suggestions from peers	Rely on friends' shared experiences	.335**	< .01
	Trust peer recommendations	.600**	< .01
Rely on shared experiences	Trust peer recommendations	.322**	< .01

The hypothesis that social influence is significantly related to tourist trip planning behavior is supported by the data. The study found that peer recommendations have a positive correlation with considering peer suggestions ($r = .217$, $p < .001$) and relying on shared experiences ($r = .288$, $p < .001$). However, tourists do **not necessarily trust** peer recommendations more than other sources, suggesting **selective influence.** These results emphasize the importance of social connections and peer **experiences** in e-tourist decision-making.

Hypothesis$_3$: Youth and Millennials are significantly influenced by social media in their trip planning behavior.

Table 4: *T-test for Youth and Millennials are significantly influenced by social media in their trip planning behavior.*

Trip Phase	Variable Description	Youth (M)	Millennial (M)	t	df	p-value
Pre-Trip	Frequency of social media use daily	2.75	2.60	2.704	384	.007
	Start trip planning using social media	1.89	1.74	2.713	364	.007
	Confirm selected destination via social media	1.94	1.74	3.444	350	.001
During Trip	Use SM to look for ideas/information	1.83	1.75	1.440	383	.151
	Use SM to find local attractions	1.79	1.78	0.242	384	.809

Trip Phase	Variable Description	Youth (M)	Millennial (M)	t	df	p-value
Post-Trip	Use SM to keep in touch with friends/family	1.83	1.73	1.856	381	.064
	Share experiences on social media	1.83	1.75	1.485	382	.138
	Analyze and comment about trip experiences	1.78	1.74	0.903	383	.367
	Visit SM pages related to the trip	1.78	1.74	0.913	382	.362
Peer Influence	Rely on experiences shared by friends/classmates	1.90	1.75	2.508	370	.013

The hypothesis that youth and millennials are significantly related to social media and trip planning behavior is supported in the pre-trip phase and peer recommendation reliance. However, during-trip and post-trip behaviors are mostly similar across both groups. This suggests that targeted marketing and travel content on social media may be more effective when aimed at youth, particularly in the planning and decision-making stages. The independent samples t-test compared the responses of youth and millennials regarding their use of social media in trip planning behavior. According to Table 4, youth constantly showed higher scores than millennials in utilizing social media and trip planning behavior. Compared to millennials (M = 2.60), with a p-value of **0.007,** Youth reported a significantly higher mean score (M = 2.75), indicating they use social media more frequently. Youth (M = 1.89) are significantly more likely to initiate their travel planning process on social media than millennials (M = 1.74), with a p-value of **0.007**. A significant difference (p = 0.001) shows that youth rely more on social media to confirm their selected travel destinations during the trip (M = 1.94) compared to millennials (M = 1.74). Youth also showed significantly greater dependence on experiences shared by friends or classmates on social media (M = 1.90) than millennials (M = 1.75), with a p-value of 0.013.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current research aim was to identify social media usage and trip planning behavior among Pakistani youth and millennial tourists. The current research is grounded theoretically on uses and gratification theory, which contributed to a broader understanding of e-tourist behavior and supports that tourists rely on social media to satisfy & fulfill their needs as theorized in UGT. The findings highlight that there is strong support in the Pearson correlation analysis for hypothesis 1: social media usage is significantly related to tourist trip planning behavior for travel, particularly at the 0.01 level (p<.01). Similarly, According to Dewayani et al. (2023), social media significantly

affects travelers' trip planning behavior. Butt & Saleem, (2024) also emphasized that social media is a useful instrument through this platform, people may interact with friends and family as well as gather and look up information. As far as hypothesis 2, findings also supported strong correlations among variables. The social influence, specifically peer recommendations, plays a crucial role in shaping tourist trip planning behavior.

Recommendations from friends and reliance on personal experiences shared by peers were statistically significant ($p < .01$) and moderately strong (r values ranging from .232 to .335), confirming that social influence is a meaningful variable in trip planning behavior. This supports the existing literature, also previous research indicated that Social influence, especially from family and friends, has a big impact on how visitors organize their trips (Liu et al., 2019; Sanders & Geerts, 2019). Hypothesis 3 results showed that youth and millennials are significantly related to social media and trip planning behavior, supported in the pre-trip phase and peer recommendations reliance. In this study, youth showed higher scores than millennials in utilizing social media and trip planning behavior.

Similarly, Ismail et al. (2025) also identified in their research that social networking has been a significant factor in determining travel choices in the present digital era, particularly for young tourists. Young travelers' choices are influenced by social media platforms; the more they trust the information and content published on these sites, the more likely they are to base their decisions on it. Also, as Tan & Halim (2021),social media peer reviews and shared experiences have an impact on young travelers' trip planning. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are essential resources for information sharing, influencing this group's travel choices and preferences. Following the social influence theory, this hypothesis supports the theoretical framework as effective trip planning behaviors are more influenced by peer recommendations and authenticity than by sheer time spent on social platforms.

The results of this study may not be generally applicable as the social media role in trip planning changes may vary depending on cultural background, socio-economic factors, and regions. Future researchers can explore other factors, like word-of-mouth recommendations other demographic factors can be consider such as educational background, socioeconomic status. Research focused on social influence, i.e., peer recommendations, which may not be effective in different cultural contexts or regions. The peer recommendations' influence might be related to specific traits and society. There is a chance that tourists may have limited access to social media platforms to seek trip-planning information, which may influence this result. The age group of study is focused only on Pakistani social media users, based on the youth and millennial age groups, while ignoring other age groups and regions.

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