

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON DESTINATION CHOICE OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of social media in influencing destination choices among the younger generation in Sri Lanka. With the rapid growth of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, social media has become a powerful tool for shaping travel decisions. This research focuses on understanding how usage habits, perceived usefulness, and attitudes toward social media impact destination selection among young Sri Lankan travellers aged 15 to 29. The population for this study was young Sri Lankan travellers who actively use social media, and a sample size of 384 was scientifically determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. A quantitative research approach was employed, using data collected through an online survey. The data were analyzed using reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analyses, to examine the relationships between social media usage and destination choice. The results revealed that Facebook is the most commonly used platform for making travel decisions, followed by WhatsApp and YouTube. Furthermore, the study highlights how peer-generated content, online reviews, and promotional materials heavily influence young individuals' travel choices. While social media has a positive influence on decision making, the research also identifies a gap between online destination portrayals and real-life experiences, which affects satisfaction. These findings provide practical insights for tourism marketers aiming to engage better with younger demographics through targeted social media strategies. Key recommendations include leveraging social media platforms more effectively, improving the accuracy of destination portrayals, and using user-generated content to enhance destination credibility. This study is significant as it offers valuable insights into shaping tourism marketing strategies to better cater to young travellers, ensuring that social media is used as an effective tool to influence positive destination choices and enhance tourist satisfaction.

Keywords: Destination choice, social media influence, Sri Lanka, tourism marketing, younger generation