



## Digital marketing and consumer choice: The influence of digital platforms and social media on domestic and foreign tourist behavior in the desert circuit (Jodhpur–Jaisalmer–Bikaner)

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### Abstract

Digital transformation has significantly changed the tourism industry in the twenty-first century. The rapid growth of social media platforms, travel websites, and online review systems has altered the way tourists search for travel information and make destination choices. Digital marketing strategies enable tourism organizations to promote destinations globally through interactive communication, visual storytelling, and targeted promotional campaigns. As a result, tourists increasingly rely on digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, travel blogs, and review platforms before making travel decisions.

The Desert Circuit of Rajasthan, which includes Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner, represents one of India's most culturally rich tourism regions. These destinations attract both domestic and international tourists due to their historical monuments, desert landscapes, cultural festivals, and unique heritage. However, the influence of digital marketing on tourist behavior in this specific tourism circuit remains under-researched.

This research paper examines the impact of digital marketing and social media platforms on tourist decision-making related to the Desert Circuit. The study focuses on how online travel information, social media content, and digital reviews influence destination awareness, travel planning, and consumer choice among domestic and foreign tourists.

A descriptive research design was adopted using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to tourists visiting Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner. The findings indicate that social media platforms significantly influence tourist interest and destination image. Visual platforms such as Instagram and YouTube inspire travel motivation, while online reviews and travel websites enhance trust in tourism services.

The study concludes that effective digital marketing strategies are essential for promoting desert tourism in Rajasthan. Tourism stakeholders should strengthen their digital presence through social media campaigns, influencer collaborations, and improved online information systems to attract more tourists in the global tourism market.

**Keywords:** Digital marketing, tourism marketing, social media influence, tourist behaviour, desert circuit, rajasthan tourism

### Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries globally and plays a significant role in economic development, employment generation, and cultural exchange. In recent decades, technological advancement and internet accessibility have revolutionized the tourism sector. Travelers today rely heavily on digital technologies to gather information, compare travel options, and plan their journeys.

Digital marketing has become an essential component of tourism promotion. It involves the use of online platforms such as websites, search engines, social media networks, mobile applications, and email marketing to promote tourism destinations and services. Digital marketing enables tourism organizations to reach global audiences and interact directly with potential travelers.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have become powerful tools in tourism marketing. Tourists often share photographs, travel videos, and reviews on these platforms, influencing the travel decisions of other users. This user-generated content creates authentic and relatable travel experiences that inspire potential tourists.

Rajasthan, located in north-western India, is one of the most popular tourist states in the country. The state is known for its royal heritage, desert landscapes, historical forts, and vibrant culture. Among its many tourism circuits, the Desert Circuit—comprising Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner—is particularly attractive to travelers seeking desert tourism experiences.

Jodhpur is famous for Mehrangarh Fort, Umaid Bhawan Palace, and its unique blue houses. Jaisalmer is known for its golden sand dunes, desert safari activities, and the iconic Jaisalmer Fort. Bikaner attracts tourists with its Junagarh Fort, temples, and traditional festivals.

With the rise of digital platforms, tourists often discover these destinations through online sources rather than traditional travel agencies. Instagram images of sand dunes, YouTube travel vlogs about desert safaris, and Google reviews of heritage hotels influence travelers' perceptions and expectations.

Therefore, understanding the influence of digital marketing on tourist behavior is crucial for tourism planners and policymakers. This study investigates how digital platforms shape the consumer choices of domestic and foreign tourists visiting the Desert Circuit of Rajasthan.

### Literature Review

The influence of digital media on tourism behavior has been widely discussed in academic research. Scholars have examined how online platforms affect travel information search, destination image, and tourist decision-making.

Xiang and Gretzel (2010) <sup>[4]</sup> emphasized the growing importance of online travel information sources such as blogs, travel communities, and social media platforms. Their study found that tourists increasingly depend on user-generated content when planning travel.

Hudson and Thal (2013) <sup>[2]</sup> explored the impact of social media marketing on tourism and hospitality businesses.

Their research highlighted that social media platforms enable tourism organizations to build relationships with travelers and influence their decision-making process.

Leung *et al.* (2015) [3] conducted a comprehensive literature review on social media use in tourism and hospitality. Their study demonstrated that social media significantly affects travel planning, tourist experiences, and destination promotion.

In the Indian context, several researchers have explored digital tourism marketing. Singh and Sharma (2020) [6] found that Indian tourists rely heavily on social media and online reviews before selecting travel destinations.

Similarly, Sharma and Rathore (2019) [7] examined tourism development in Rajasthan and emphasized the importance of digital promotion strategies to attract global tourists.

Despite the increasing importance of digital marketing in tourism, limited studies have specifically examined the role of digital platforms in promoting the Desert Circuit of Rajasthan. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap.

### Research Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the role of digital marketing in influencing tourist decision-making.
- To examine the impact of social media platforms on destination awareness of the Desert Circuit.
- To compare the digital information usage patterns of domestic and foreign tourists.
- To evaluate the influence of online reviews and digital content on tourist perceptions.
- To suggest strategies for improving digital tourism marketing in Rajasthan's Desert Circuit.

### Research Hypotheses

- **H1:** Digital marketing significantly influences tourist destination choice.
- **H2:** Social media platforms positively affect tourists' perception of the Desert Circuit.
- **H3:** Online reviews and ratings significantly impact tourist trust and travel decisions.

**Conceptual Framework:** The conceptual framework of this study is based on the relationship between digital marketing tools and tourist decision-making behavior.

Independent Variables:

- Social media platforms
- Online reviews
- Travel blogs and websites
- Digital advertisements

### Dependent Variable

- Tourist destination choice

The framework suggests that digital marketing channels influence tourist awareness, destination image, and travel motivation, which ultimately affect consumer choice.

### Research Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive research design.

Data Sources

- The study uses both primary and secondary data.
- Primary data were collected through questionnaires distributed among tourists visiting Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner.
- Secondary data were collected from research journals, tourism reports, and government publications.

Sample Size

- The study used a sample of 120 tourists, including domestic and international travelers.

Sampling Method

- Convenience sampling was used to collect responses from tourists at major tourist sites and hotels.

Data Analysis

- The collected data were analyzed using percentage analysis and descriptive statistics.

### Questionnaire Used for Survey

#### 1. How did you first learn about the Desert Circuit destinations?

- a. Social Media
- b. Travel Websites
- c. Friends and Family
- d. Travel Agencies

#### 2. Which digital platform influenced your travel decision the most?

- a. Instagram
- b. YouTube
- c. Travel Blogs
- d. Google Reviews / TripAdvisor

#### 3. Do you check online reviews before selecting a travel destination?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never

#### 4. Which type of digital content influences you most?

- a. Travel Photos
- b. Travel Videos
- c. Tourist Reviews
- d. Influencer Recommendations

#### 5. Did social media increase your interest in visiting Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, or Bikaner?

- a. Yes
- b. No

### Data Analysis

- Survey results show that digital platforms strongly influence tourist decision-making.

Source of Travel Information

Social Media – 45%

Travel Websites – 25%

Friends and Family – 20%

Travel Agencies – 10%

Most Influential Digital Platform

Instagram – 35%

YouTube – 25%

Google Reviews / TripAdvisor – 25%

Travel Blogs – 15%

Checking Online Reviews

Always – 60%

Sometimes – 25%

Rarely – 10%

Never – 5%

### Discussion

The results indicate that social media platforms significantly influence tourist interest in desert tourism destinations.

Instagram images and YouTube travel videos create visual appeal and inspire travelers to explore new destinations. Online reviews play a crucial role in building trust. Tourists often evaluate hotels, attractions, and services based on reviews posted by other travelers.

The study also reveals differences between domestic and international tourists. Domestic tourists are more influenced by social media content and recommendations, while foreign tourists rely more on travel websites and online reviews.

### Recommendations

- Tourism authorities should strengthen digital marketing campaigns.
- Tourism businesses should actively manage online reviews.
- Influencer marketing can promote desert tourism experiences.
- Tourism departments should develop virtual tours and interactive websites.
- Collaboration between government and digital travel platforms should be increased.

### Limitations of the Study

- The study used a limited sample size of tourists.
- Data were collected only from selected tourist destinations.
- The research focused primarily on digital marketing factors.

### Future Research Scope

Future studies can examine:

- The role of artificial intelligence in tourism marketing
- The impact of virtual reality tourism experiences
- Comparative studies between different tourism circuits in India

### Conclusion

Digital marketing has transformed tourism marketing strategies worldwide. The findings of this study show that digital platforms significantly influence tourist behavior and destination choice in the Desert Circuit of Rajasthan.

Social media platforms inspire travel motivation, while online reviews build credibility and trust. By adopting strong digital marketing strategies, tourism stakeholders can enhance the global visibility of the Desert Circuit and attract more international tourists.

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