

## TikTok, Instagram and Facebook Impact to the Hotels in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Spain

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of 3 major social media platforms—TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook—on hotel selection among Zennial travelers (Millennials and Gen Z) across the UK, Ireland, and Spain. As tourism in these regions becomes increasingly shaped by digital engagement, social media has evolved into a central driver of travel inspiration, evaluation, and booking behavior.

Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study explores how attitudes (shaped by visual appeal and influencer credibility), subjective norms (driven by peer interactions, likes, shares, and group discussions), and perceived behavioral control (influenced by accessible booking links, price transparency, and informational clarity) contribute to travelers' booking intentions. The findings reveal that TikTok primarily drives initial desire and discovery, Instagram strengthens emotional connection and expectation-setting, and Facebook provides informational security that supports final booking decisions. Collectively, these platforms form an interconnected digital pathway that guides travelers from inspiration to confirmation across the UK, Ireland, and Spain. The research underscores the need for hospitality marketers to adopt cross-platform strategies that integrate authenticity, visual storytelling, and community-based trust to effectively influence the modern travel consumer.

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## INTRODUCTION

The global hospitality industry has undergone significant transformation in recent years, driven by technological advancement, evolving consumer expectations, and profound changes in digital communication. Across Europe, particularly in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Spain, these shifts have reshaped how hotels attract, engage, and retain guests. While traditional advertising once dominated travel marketing, social media platforms have become central to influencing travelers' perceptions and decisions (Ivancsone-Horvath et al., 2025). Today's consumers no longer rely solely on travel agents or corporate websites; instead, they increasingly turn to digital communities, influencers, and peer-generated content to inspire, validate, and finalize hotel bookings (Donnellan, 2024; Zeqiri, 2024).

The post-pandemic recovery intensified these trends as travelers sought reassurance, authenticity, and real-life testimonials before committing to travel plans. Ireland's hotel sector has witnessed a robust rebound, with national occupancy rates returning to pre-pandemic highs (Devane et al., 2025). The UK's hospitality industry has also stabilized, driven by domestic travel, experiential stays, and digital engagement (Dixit, 2025b). Meanwhile, Spain, one of the world's most visited destinations, has experienced record tourism surges, supported by strong digital marketing efforts and high global visibility on social media (Florido-Benitez, 2025). Across all three countries, younger travelers, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, have been influential in driving digital-first travel behaviors, reshaping how hotels communicate and compete (Lowly, 2025).

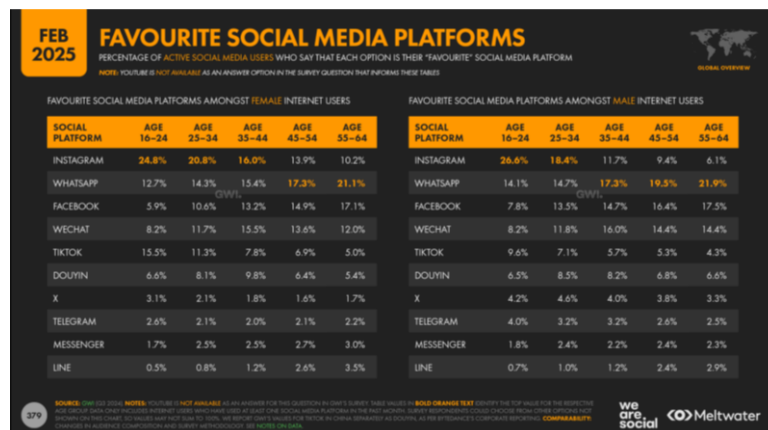


Figure 1. Social Media Platforms

Source: (Kemp, 2025)

Within this digital shift, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook have emerged as powerful platforms guiding hotel selection. TikTok's rapid rise has been fueled by its algorithm-driven, short-form content, which captivates users through storytelling, hotel tours, and influencer-led destination highlights (Sulonen, 2025). Instagram continues to serve as a visual discovery platform, shaping aesthetic expectations and reinforcing brand identity through curated imagery, reels, and user-generated content (Rantala, 2025). Facebook, though less visually immersive, remains a crucial source of practical information, community recommendations, and travel group discussions, especially during the evaluation stage of booking

(Bhinder, 2025). Together, these platforms collectively influence travelers' attitudes, perceptions, and decisions.

## The Role of Digital Media in Modern Travel Behavior

As the digital landscape has expanded, the tourism and hospitality sectors have become deeply intertwined with social media use. Travelers today not only consume content but also actively participate in shaping travel narratives. They share experiences, seek peer advice, and follow influencers whose lifestyles align with their personal aspirations (Mlambo et al., 2025). This

participatory digital environment has redefined the travel decision-making journey, from initial inspiration to final booking, making social media an indispensable touchpoint for hotels.

TikTok has introduced a new era of visual engagement with its immersive short-form videos, often showcasing unique hotel features, destination experiences, local cuisine, and personalized itineraries (Dixit, 2025c). TikTok's algorithm amplifies content based on user behavior, making it a discovery-oriented platform where even small creators (micro-influencers) can reach large audiences (Tavares, 2025). Instagram, on the other hand, has long influenced tourism through aesthetically curated visuals, travel influencers, and branded hotel content (Preisler, 2025). Its emphasis on aspirational imagery plays a significant role in shaping travelers' perceptions of luxury, comfort, and experience. Facebook remains influential despite generational shifts. It continues to serve as a platform where travelers verify information, compare hotels, search for promotional offers, and engage in travel groups, from backpacking communities to family holiday forums (Dixit, 2025a). Facebook reviews, comment threads, and group recommendations play a key role in reducing perceived risks, providing clarity, and reinforcing booking confidence.

Collectively, these platforms create a digital ecosystem where emotional engagement (TikTok), visual aspiration (Instagram), and informational reassurance (Facebook) intersect to shape hotel preferences and intentions (Gurung et al., 2025).

### **Generational Dynamics: The Zennial Traveler**

A significant portion of travel-related social media influence comes from Zennials, a hybrid cohort composed of late Millennials and early Gen Z, who are born between 1993 and 2005 (Yang et al., 2025). Zennials occupy a unique generational space that blends digital nativity with the adaptability of earlier Millennials. Unlike younger Gen Z, who grew up entirely in algorithmic ecosystems, Zennials evolved alongside digital development, from the early rise of Facebook and YouTube to the emergence of TikTok. This makes them highly responsive to cross-platform engagement and capable of navigating multiple

digital environments with ease.

Zennials value authenticity, experiential travel, personalized recommendations, and the emotional resonance of digital storytelling (Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024). They rely heavily on user-generated content, micro-influencer reviews, and peer validation when selecting accommodation (Niu, 2025). For this demographic, a hotel is more than a place to stay, it represents an experience, an aesthetic, and a narrative they can share. Social media shapes these narratives by presenting hotels as lifestyle components rather than functional services. As this demographic segment continues to shape tourism trends in Ireland, the UK, and Spain, understanding their digital behaviors becomes essential for hospitality marketers. Their reliance on visual cues, influencer credibility, and online community interactions aligns closely with the dynamics of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, making these platforms vital in understanding contemporary hotel selection (Kong & Lou, 2026).

### **Hospitality Trends in Ireland, the UK, and Spain**

The hotel industries in Ireland, the UK, and Spain share similarities in their reliance on international tourism, digital marketing strategies, and a growing emphasis on authenticity-driven guest experiences (Mallick, 2023). However, each region also presents unique dynamics:

- **United Kingdom**

The Mordor Intelligence (2025) and Statista Research Department (2025) stated that the UK's hospitality industry is highly competitive, particularly in major cities like London, Manchester, and Edinburgh. Digital marketing is central to hotel visibility, and many UK hotels actively collaborate with influencers to showcase stays, amenities, and local attractions. Facebook groups remain influential in the UK market for travel planning, especially among domestic travelers.

- **Ireland**

Hussey (2025) stated that Ireland has seen a significant resurgence in tourism, supported by strong domestic travel and the growing popularity

of cultural and nature-based experiences. Younger travelers increasingly use TikTok to explore unique stays, boutique hotels, and scenic destinations across the country. Social media plays an essential role in promoting regional tourism, especially in rural and coastal areas.

- Spain

Lopez (2025) stated that as one of the world's leading tourism destinations, Spain's hotel sector benefits from strong international demand, Mediterranean appeal, and a lifestyle-driven brand identity. Social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, has been instrumental in shaping Spain's global image, with regions like Barcelona, Madrid, and Ibiza frequently featured in viral travel content. Influencers play a major role in promoting Spanish hotels, beach resorts, and gastronomic experiences.

Understanding these regional contexts helps position the study within a broader European hospitality landscape shaped by digital media consumption.

### **Social Media Platforms and Their Influence on Hotel Selection**

The influence of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook on hotel selection can be understood across 3 key dimensions:

- Emotional and Aspirational Influence (Hendrikse & Liminiou, 2024; Turvy, 2025) by TikTok & Instagram

Short-form videos showcasing hotel rooms, rooftop pools, breakfast spreads, and spa features create emotional excitement and aspirational desire. Micro-influencers often present honest, relatable content that fosters trust and motivates spontaneous interest (Expert Panel, 2023).

- Social Influence and Peer Validation (Ballara, 2023; Wu et al., 2026) by All Platforms

Likes, comments, shares, and group discussions create social pressure and reinforce the desirability of specific hotels. Peer recommendations are extremely influential among

Zennials.

- Perceived Booking Ease and Information Clarity by Facebook & Instagram (Alfarisyi & Ferdian, 2023)

Platforms that provide easy access to links, reviews, comments, and practical information reduce uncertainty and encourage booking confidence.

These three dimensions align closely with the constructs of the TPB, forming the basis for this research.

### **RESEARCH GAP**

Although social media has become a central element of digital tourism marketing, several key gaps remain within academic literature, particularly concerning TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook in hotel selection across Ireland, the UK, and Spain. First, most studies prioritize Instagram and Facebook as the dominant platforms for hospitality marketing, while TikTok, despite its rapid growth and strong influence among Gen Z and Millennials, remains significantly under-researched (Lewis & Sauro, 2024). Existing research commonly generalizes social media platforms rather than analyzing the unique affordances, algorithms, and content formats that differentiate them. TikTok, for example, relies heavily on short-form, algorithm-driven video content that rapidly elevates micro-influencers and niche hotel recommendations (Dodds, 2023); yet very little empirical work investigates its specific role in shaping hotel choice.

Second, a substantial gap exists in cross-country comparisons. Studies often examine a single geographical region, failing to recognize that consumer behavior varies across cultural, economic, and tourism contexts (Li et al., 2024). Ireland, the UK, and Spain each possess distinct hospitality landscapes and digital engagement patterns, yet few studies analyze how social media influences hotel selection across these diverse markets (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020; Khatun, 2024). Third, while generational behavior is an important determinant of digital interaction, the Zennial demographic (those who bridge Millennial

and Gen Z characteristics) remains largely unexplored (Dadic et al., 2022). As a hybrid cohort that engages deeply with visual content, influencers, and peer reviews, Zennials represent a meaningful but under-analyzed group in hospitality research (Ameen et al., 2023).

Lastly, existing literature tends to focus on macro-influencers or celebrity endorsements. Micro-influencers, who often drive higher engagement, trust, and relatability, remain underrepresented in tourism research (van der Harst & Angelopoulos, 2024). Collectively, these gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive, cross-platform, cross-country study that examines how TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook influence hotel selection among Zennials across Ireland, the UK, and Spain (Dvir-Gvirsman et al., 2024; Heath et al., 2024).

The rationale for this study is rooted in the growing importance of digital-first decision-making in travel and hospitality. As travelers increasingly rely on social media for inspiration and reassurance, hotels must understand how different platforms contribute to booking intentions. TikTok has emerged as a powerful discovery tool among young travelers, particularly due to its

algorithmically tailored content and the rise of micro-influencers who provide authentic, experience-based hotel reviews (Q. Zhou et al., 2023). Instagram continues to serve as a cornerstone of travel aesthetics, shaping consumer expectations through curated imagery and lifestyle branding (Hughes, 2025). Meanwhile, Facebook remains an essential platform for travel groups, long-form reviews, peer recommendations, and price comparisons, these are critical elements during the evaluation and decision-making stages (Gratton et al., 2025).

A deeper understanding of these platforms' unique influences is essential for hospitality practitioners seeking to optimize digital strategies, improve brand positioning, and strengthen competitive advantage. For destinations like Ireland and the UK, where experiential travel and domestic tourism are strong; social media can significantly enhance visibility for both independent hotels and large chains (Seeley et al., 2024). Spain, as a global tourism leader, offers another important context where influencer marketing and visual branding play major roles in shaping international travel demand (Smith, 2025).

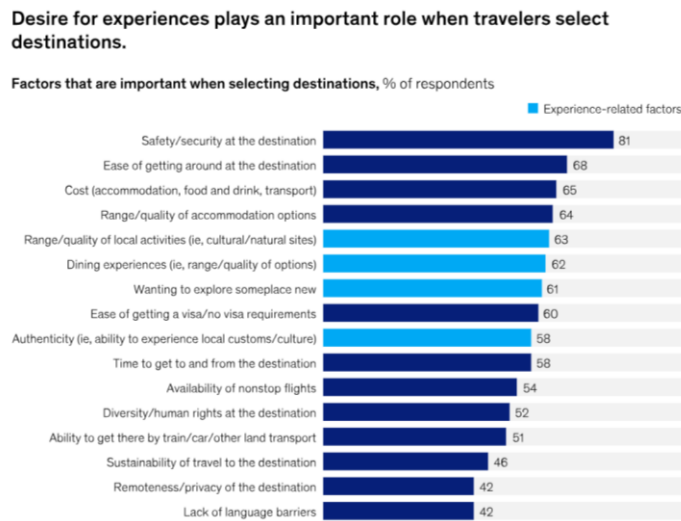


Figure 2. Travel Desire Experiences

Source: (Seeley et al., 2024)

From a theoretical perspective, applying the TPB provides a structured approach to analyze how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control develop through digital

interactions (Ajzen, 1991; Sutisna & Handra, 2022). This framework has been widely used in consumer behavior research but is less explored in relation to emerging platforms such as TikTok. The

study extends TPB into a modern, platform-specific context, contributing new insights to academic literature and offering practical implications for marketers and hotel operators (Naskar & Lindahl, 2025).

### Research Aim, Objectives & Questions

To investigate how TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook influence hotel selection among Zennial travelers in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Spain.

**Table 1.** Research Objectives & Questions

Objectives	Questions
1. <b>To explore how TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook shape Zennials' attitudes toward hotels</b> in Ireland, the UK, and Spain.	1. How do TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook influence Zennials' attitudes toward hotels in the UK, Ireland, and Spain?
2. <b>To examine the role of subjective norms and social validation</b> (likes, shares, comments, travel groups, peer recommendations) on these platforms in influencing hotel selection.	2. What role do subjective norms and social media interactions play in shaping hotel preferences after exposure to content on these platforms?
3. <b>To analyze how perceived behavioral control is affected by platform-specific features</b> , such as booking links, reviews, information clarity, and ease of navigation.	3. How do these social media platforms affect Zennials' perceived ease or difficulty of booking hotels?
4. <b>To evaluate how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively influence booking intentions</b> across the three countries.	4. How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control interact to shape booking intentions?
5. <b>To understand how platform-driven booking intentions translate into actual hotel booking behavior</b> among Zennials.	5. How do social-media-influenced booking intentions translate into actual hotel booking behavior?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing integration of digital media into everyday life has reshaped how consumers engage with tourism and hospitality services. Over the past decade, the rise of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, has transformed the ways travelers discover destinations, evaluate accommodation options, and make hotel bookings. For regions with robust tourism economies such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Spain, understanding these behavioral shifts is essential for both academic study and industry practice. This literature review synthesizes key research on the roles of social media, influencer marketing, user-generated content (UGC), and generational behavior in contemporary hotel selection (Dhingra et al., 2024; Sporl-Wang et al., 2025). It provides a comparative European perspective while situating the study within the broader theoretical framework of the TPB.

### Tourism and Hospitality Markets in the UK, Ireland, and Spain

#### - The United Kingdom

The UK has long established a strong presence in international tourism, with London consistently ranking among the most visited cities in the world. The hotel industry is increasingly driven by digital marketing strategies, with travelers seeking personalized experiences and transparent information online. Research suggests that UK consumers rely heavily on digital reviews and social media platforms to reduce uncertainty and compare accommodation options (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). Younger travelers, especially those in the Zennial cohort, increasingly use TikTok and Instagram to discover unique and experiential stays, while Facebook continues to influence the later stages of decision-making through reviews and community recommendations (Sonido et al., 2024).

- Ireland

Ireland's tourism sector is characterized by a mix of domestic and international travelers attracted by cultural heritage, landscapes, and urban experiences. The recovery of tourism following the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with a rise in digital travel planning behaviors, making social media an essential promotional tool for Irish hotels (Okafor et al., 2022). Irish travelers demonstrate high trust in peer-generated content, with Instagram and TikTok playing significant roles in showcasing scenic locations, boutique hotels, and rural destinations (Mitsopoulou et al., 2023). Facebook remains widely used in Ireland for local travel groups, recommendations, and practical planning (Sabeen et al., 2023).

- Spain

Spain is one of the world's top tourism destinations, attracting millions of visitors annually to coastal resorts, cultural cities, and lifestyle-driven destinations such as Ibiza and Barcelona (Lopez, 2025). Spanish tourism marketing has embraced visual and influencer-led strategies, particularly on Instagram, which has become central to Spain's destination branding (Mariani & Borghi, 2021). TikTok has also gained popularity for showcasing experiential travel content, including beach resorts, hotel tours, and "day in the life" holiday vlogs (TikTok Brand Voice, 2025). Social media plays a major role in shaping international visitors' impressions of Spanish hotels, while Facebook remains relevant for information seeking and travel planning among both domestic and older travelers (Keelson et al., 2024).

### **Social Media and Travel Decision-Making**

- The Evolution of Social Media in Tourism

Social media has become fundamental to the tourism decision-making process, influencing every stage from inspiration to evaluation to booking. Scholars refer to this as the "social media-enabled travel journey" (Baines & Otermans,

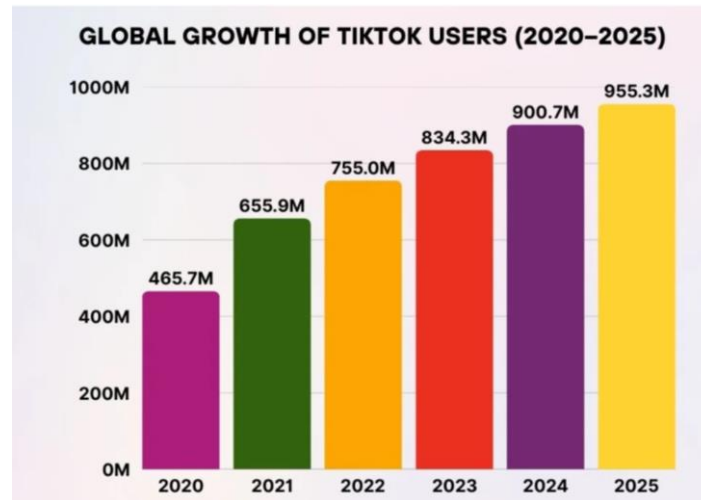
2026). Unlike traditional marketing, which relies on scripted messaging, social media content is interactive, participatory, and highly personalized (Al-Quran, 2022). Consumers encounter travel content not only through direct searches but also through algorithmic recommendations that match their interests and digital behaviors (Chugh et al., 2025).

Visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have significantly transformed destination perception by emphasizing aesthetic appeal, authenticity, and the experiential value of travel (Xian et al., 2025). This shift aligns closely with the preferences of younger demographics who prioritize storytelling, visual branding, and immersive content (Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024). Facebook, while older than the other two platforms, remains influential due to its strong community structure, travel-related groups, and extensive use for sharing long-format reviews and recommendations (Gratton et al., 2025). These features make Facebook a key platform for evaluating options and verifying credibility.

- TikTok: Short-Form Video and Algorithmic Discovery

TikTok is one of the fastest-growing platforms influencing travel behavior, yet it remains under-explored in academic literature due to its relatively recent emergence (Lee, 2025). TikTok's algorithm recommends content based on user behavior rather than follower count, enabling micro-influencers to achieve substantial reach (R. Zhou, 2024). Studies suggest that TikTok plays a powerful role in inspiring travel decisions, particularly through hotel room tours, destination highlights, and highly immersive experiential videos. Short-form videos trigger emotional engagement, which encourages impulsive travel interest. The platform's "For You Page" (FYP) acts as an inspiration engine, exposing users to hotels and destinations they may not have searched for (Perry, 2024). TikTok is also known for viral travel trends, such as showcasing hidden gems, unique stays, or "travel hacks", which can significantly impact hotel visibility (Glass, 2024).

**Table 2.** Global Growth of TikTok Users



Source: (Lee, 2025)

For travelers in the UK, Ireland, and Spain, TikTok influences the early stages of the decision-making process, particularly inspiration and idea generation (Dramicanin et al., 2023; Hughes, 2025). Its content often precedes formal research stages, making it a catalyst for later platform engagement, such as checking Instagram for more visuals or visiting Facebook for reviews.

#### - Instagram: Curated Aesthetics and Visual Identity

Instagram has become a central platform in hospitality marketing due to its emphasis on visually appealing, aspirational content. Hotels leverage Instagram to showcase décor, amenities, food, customer experiences, and location-specific attractions. Research indicates that Instagram significantly shapes travelers' attitudes by influencing perceived quality and aesthetic appeal (Dragin-Jensen et al., 2024). User-generated

content, such as photos and tagged stories, enhances credibility and authenticity—two factors that strongly influence the Zennial cohort (Chugh et al., 2025; Mitsopoulou et al., 2023; Niu, 2025). Instagram is used in both the inspiration and evaluation stages, particularly when travelers compare hotels based on aesthetic consistency, reviews on story highlights, and influencer collaborations.

In Ireland and the UK, Instagram is widely used to promote boutique hotels, wellness retreats, and experiential stays whereas in Spain, it plays a major role in shaping the country's brand identity as an attractive lifestyle and leisure destination (Dragin-Jensen et al., 2024; Hendrikse & Liminiou, 2024; Turvy, 2025). Influencer-led campaigns featuring beaches, resorts, and nightlife hotspots drive strong engagement and influence hotel perceptions.

**Table 3.** Instagram Global User Growth

#### Instagram Global User Growth Compared to Competitors 2025

PLATFORM	USER GROWTH (MILLIONS)	GROWTH RATE (%)
Instagram	90.8	5.5
Facebook	93.3	4.3
TikTok	31.2	2.0

Source: (The Global Statistics, 2025)



- Facebook: Reviews, Social Validation, and Travel Communities

Although younger generations use Instagram and TikTok more frequently, Facebook remains an important platform during the evaluation and decision-making stages. Facebook's strengths lie in: detailed written reviews, travel planning groups, peer recommendations, direct booking links, and hotel pages with practical information

(Gratton et al., 2025; Kumar, 2025). Studies consistently show that Facebook is perceived as trustworthy due to its established review systems and community interactions. Travelers often turn to Facebook groups, such as backpacker pages, family travel forums, or expat networks, to seek unbiased information about hotels, prices, and destinations.

**Table 4.** Facebook Users in the World

Here is a table showing the top reasons people use Facebook:

Reason	Percentage of People
Message friends and family	72.4%
Post or share photos or videos	63.2%
Keep up to date with news and current events	8.2%
Look for funny or entertaining content	54.7%
Follow or research brands and products	53.0%

Source: (Kumar, 2025)

In Ireland, Facebook groups are especially popular among domestic tourists seeking deals or recommendations. In the UK, the platform supports a strong culture of travel-sharing communities and in Spain, Facebook plays a key role in planning long-stay trips, family holidays, and multi-destination itineraries (Gratton et al., 2025; Kumar, 2025; Sabeen et al., 2023). Facebook's role aligns strongly with perceived behavioral control, as travelers use it to confirm logistics, evaluate pricing, and reduce booking uncertainty.

### User-Generated Content (UGC) and Trust Formation

UGC has become a cornerstone of social media influence. It includes content such as reviews, photos, comments, and videos created by everyday users rather than brands. Research confirms that UGC increases transparency, reduces perceived risk, and builds trust, especially in contexts where service quality cannot be evaluated before consumption (Monfort et al., 2025); (a) on TikTok, UGC appears as hotel walkthroughs, day-in-the-life travel vlogs, and recommendation lists, (b) on Instagram, UGC includes tagged posts, stories, and

influencer collaborations, and (c) on Facebook, UGC is heavily present in reviews, group discussions, and recommendations.

In the context of the UK, Ireland, and Spain, UGC is essential for travelers seeking genuine, experience-based insights. Younger travelers rely significantly on peer-generated content over traditional advertising, showing higher trust in "people like me" rather than corporate messaging.

### Influencer Marketing and Micro-Influencers

Influencer marketing has gained traction across tourism markets, but micro-influencers, creators with smaller yet highly engaged audiences, play the most significant role in shaping travel decisions. Micro-influencers are perceived as more authentic, relatable, and trustworthy than large-scale influencers or celebrities (Baycur, 2024). Their content resonates strongly with Zennials, who prioritize genuineness over polished marketing (Javed et al., 2025).

In Spain, micro-influencers are especially prominent in promoting boutique hotels, beach resorts, and gastronomic tourism, in the UK, they

frequently promote city hotels, staycations, and unique accommodation types such as pods and cabins, and in Ireland, micro-influencers often highlight rural hotels, scenic landscapes, and wellness retreats (Chen et al., 2024). Research shows that influencers affect booking intention by shaping attitudes and enhancing perceived credibility.

### **Zennials, Digital Behavior, and Social Media Dependency**

Zennials, positioned between Millennials and Gen Z, exhibit unique digital behaviors. They prefer visual, fast-paced content, value authenticity and relatable influencers, rely heavily on social proof, seek personalized experiences, and use social media to reduce risk and verify information. Zennials often use TikTok for inspiration, Instagram for aesthetic evaluation, and Facebook for practical decision-making (Anantadjaya, 2013; Gudigantala et al., 2023). This cross-platform journey reflects their tendency to consult multiple sources before making final decisions.

### **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in Digital Hospitality Research**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Sutisna & Handra, 2022) is widely used in tourism research to explain how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions. In digital contexts (a) attitudes are influenced by visual appeal, hotel imagery, and inspirational content on TikTok and Instagram, (b) subjective norms are shaped by likes, comments, shares, and group recommendations and (c) perceived behavioral control is shaped by accessibility of reviews, clarity of information, and ease of navigating booking links, especially on Facebook.

Literature suggests that TPB is an effective model for understanding how social media influences travel behavior, but few studies apply TPB specifically to TikTok or across multiple countries, representing a key research gap (Joo et al., 2020; Sabeen et al., 2023). The literature reveals that social media has fundamentally reshaped the travel decision-making process in Ireland, the UK, and Spain. TikTok influences early inspiration through

immersive short-form videos. Instagram shapes aesthetic expectations and brand perceptions. Facebook supports information verification and final decision-making through reviews, groups, and community insights. Zennials rely heavily on micro-influencers and UGC, making their hotel choices highly responsive to digital platforms. Despite this, cross-country, cross-platform comparative research remains limited, highlighting a gap this study aims to address.

### **Cross-Platform Influence and the Integrated Consumer Journey**

Recent literature highlights the importance of understanding social media platforms not as isolated channels but as components of a multi-stage digital travel journey. Travelers increasingly engage in cross-platform behavior, shifting between TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook depending on their goals at each stage of decision-making (Hudson & Thal, 2012). TikTok generally drives early inspiration due to its algorithmic content surfacing unexpected destinations and hotel types. Instagram then becomes a site of deeper evaluation where users assess aesthetics, room quality, and the lifestyle associated with a hotel brand. Finally, Facebook serves as a verification hub, offering long-form reviews, price comparisons, and peer recommendations.

This cross-platform pathway is particularly relevant in the UK, Ireland, and Spain, where travelers often blend leisure and experiential tourism. Studies suggest that travelers rely on multiple social media platforms to form holistic impressions of hotels because each platform provides unique affordances, such as; emotional, visual, and informational (Gretzel, 2018). The interplay between platforms significantly amplifies the influence of social media on hotel selection.

### **The Role of Algorithmic Curation in Travel Content Exposure**

A growing body of literature explores how algorithms shape consumer exposure to travel content. TikTok's For You Page uses machine learning to present highly personalized hotel and destination videos based on past viewing behavior, location data, and content interactions (Glass,

2024). This means that travelers in Ireland, the UK, and Spain may receive location-specific recommendations, such as; Irish users seeing content about Dingle or Galway, while UK users might be shown London stays or Lake District hotels.

Instagram's Explore page functions similarly, curating content that aligns with the user's aesthetic preferences, hashtags, and saved posts. Scholars argue that algorithmic visibility can significantly impact the popularity and perception of specific hotels; properties frequently appearing in curated feeds develop stronger brand recognition and perceived desirability (Marwick, 2020). While Facebook's algorithm prioritizes posts from friends and groups, its travel groups and community pages increase exposure to niche recommendations not typically found through search engines. Algorithmic curation therefore reinforces the "personalization effect," shaping individual travel pathways differently across geographical markets.

### **Emotional Engagement, Social Proof, and Affective Judgements**

Emotional influences are central to modern travel decision-making. Short-form video platforms such as TikTok create immediate affective responses through music, rapid transitions, humor, and authentic storytelling, which contribute to what scholars call "emotional contagion" (Hatfield et al., 1993). This is especially salient among Zennials, who respond strongly to emotional cues in digital content. Visual storytelling portraying hotel stays, morning views, spa experiences, or local excursions can trigger desire, curiosity, and imagined escapism.

In parallel, social proof reinforces credibility. Social proof includes likes, comments, shares, and tags, and signals that users interpret as validation of a hotel's desirability (Cialdini, 2009). Research shows that travelers from the UK, Ireland, and Spain trust hotels more when exposed to high-engagement posts or influencer content endorsed by many viewers. Facebook's review system further expands social proof by presenting aggregated ratings, long-form experiences, and user photos, which strengthen perceived

trustworthiness. Thus, emotional engagement (through TikTok/Instagram) and social validation (through Facebook/Instagram) jointly influence hotel perceptions (Gurung et al., 2025).

### **Cultural Differences in Social Media Use Across the Three Countries**

Academic literature also points to cultural variations in digital behavior that shape how users in the UK, Ireland, and Spain interact with social media platforms. Research indicates that UK travelers tend to focus on practical aspects of travel such as value for money, location convenience, and comparison of amenities. This leads to stronger engagement with Facebook reviews and price-related discussions (Meng et al., 2024).

Irish travelers value authentic storytelling and cultural uniqueness, making TikTok and Instagram especially influential for showcasing Ireland's landscapes, boutique hotels, and rural retreats. Ireland's strong domestic travel culture means that locals frequently use social media to plan short breaks, discover new destinations, and follow local influencers.

Spanish travelers exhibit high engagement with lifestyle-oriented and leisure-driven content. Tourism in Spain is strongly tied to sun, sea, food, and entertainment, all of which are highly visual and therefore well-suited for Instagram and TikTok marketing (Santos et al., 2021). Younger Spanish travelers in particular follow micro-influencers who specialize in nightlife, beaches, and gastronomic tourism, which directly impacts hotel preferences. These cultural nuances demonstrate why a cross-country study such as yours is both necessary and academically valuable.

### **The Credibility Problem: Sponsored Content vs Authentic Content**

One of the emerging debates in tourism literature concerns the credibility of influencer-generated content, especially sponsored posts. Research finds that travelers increasingly differentiate between authentic recommendations and paid promotions, and may distrust influencers who frequently advertise hotels without transparent disclosures (Evans et al., 2017). Micro-influencers, with

smaller but more loyal audiences, tend to maintain greater authenticity and trust, making them particularly influential in the UK, Ireland, and Spain hospitality markets.

TikTok's informal, spontaneous style often makes sponsored posts appear more genuine, while Instagram's polished aesthetic can sometimes reduce perceived authenticity. Facebook remains the most trusted regarding authenticity due to written reviews and community oversight. This distinction highlights the need for hotels to adopt ethical influencer partnerships and encourage organic UGC to maintain credibility among Zennial travelers.

### **Risk Reduction and Decision Reassurance Through Social Media**

Hotel booking involves substantial perceived risk, particularly financial risk, performance risk, and social risk. Literature shows that social media reduces these risks by providing visual verification (Instagram), experiential validation (TikTok), and informational reassurance (Facebook) (Mitchell, 1999). Travelers use UGC to assess cleanliness, accuracy of photos, real-life experiences, and value for money.

In Spain, for example, travelers often rely on Facebook groups to clarify safety issues, family-friendliness, or suitability for nightlife. In the UK, travelers use Instagram to verify room aesthetics before booking. In Ireland, TikTok videos showing real experiences at countryside hotels reduce risk and increase trust. The cumulative effect of risk reduction across platforms significantly strengthens booking intention.

### **Social Media as a Branding Tool for Hotels**

Hotels increasingly adopt social media not only as a communication tool but as a key component of brand identity. Scholars argue that visual consistency, influencer partnerships, and narrative-driven content build strong emotional connections with travelers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Hotels in Ireland frequently focus on rustic charm and nature-based branding, UK hotels emphasize urban experiences and cultural vibrancy, and Spanish hotels highlight leisure,

luxury, and lifestyle. Strong branding on social media enhances memorability and increases the likelihood of hotel selection, especially among visually oriented Zennials.

### **Theoretical Gaps in Social Media Tourism Research**

While literature on Instagram and Facebook is well-established, academic research on TikTok's role in tourism remains limited. Scholars call for more investigation into platform-specific differences, cross-platform behavioral pathways, the role of TikTok micro-influencers, geographical variation in digital engagement, and the impact of algorithms on destination perception. These gaps justify the need for your research. The expanded literature reinforces the interconnected influence of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook in hotel selection across the UK, Ireland, and Spain. TikTok inspires, Instagram evaluates, and Facebook reassures and emotional engagement, social proof, algorithmic visibility, and cultural differences shape the decision-making journey for Zennials (Gurung et al., 2025). Despite growing literature, gaps remain in understanding cross-country behaviors and TikTok-specific influences, validating the relevance of your findings.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research adopts an interpretivist philosophical stance, which is appropriate because the study aims to explore subjective experiences, meanings, and interpretations held by individuals about social media influence. Interpretivism recognizes that social reality is socially constructed and cannot be measured objectively (Junjie & Yingxinm, 2022). In the context of this study, the attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions shaped by TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are inherently subjective and best understood through lived experiences and personal narratives.

Digital behaviors, particularly those related to social media consumption, are influenced by emotions, social identities, cultural backgrounds, and individual preferences. These complexities cannot be captured adequately through quantitative metrics alone. Interpretivism therefore enables a deeper exploration of how and why Zennials interpret social media content in

specific ways, and how these meanings shape hotel selection.

### **Research Approach**

An inductive approach was adopted, allowing patterns, themes, and theoretical insights to emerge from the qualitative data. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses, this research seeks to build understanding from participant perspectives and behaviors. Social media influence is dynamic and context-dependent, meaning that rigid hypotheses may restrict the richness of the data. Inductive reasoning provides flexibility and supports the exploratory nature of the study by enabling concepts to surface organically through participant narratives.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was selected to explore complex, meaning-driven phenomena related to digital inspiration, social validation, and perceived behavioral control within social media environments. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of emotions, motivations, and thought processes that shape hotel selection across different countries.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection. This method provides a balance between structure and flexibility, enabling the researcher to maintain consistency while allowing participants to elaborate on experiences and insights. Semi-structured interviews are widely regarded as effective for extracting rich, contextualized data in tourism and digital behavior studies.

### **Sampling Strategy**

The study focuses on Zennials, a micro-generation blending late Millennials and early Gen Z, who are highly active on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. This demographic is central to social media-driven travel behaviors and thus critical for understanding digital influence on hotel selection.

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants who meet the inclusion criteria aged between 18–35, active users of TikTok,

Instagram, and/or Facebook, have stayed in a hotel within the last 12 months, reside in or have recently travelled within the UK, Ireland, or Spain. This method ensures participants possess the experience necessary to contribute meaningful insights.

Between 10–15 participants were recruited. This sample size aligns with qualitative research standards, providing sufficient data for thematic saturation while maintaining depth of insight.

### **Data Collection Method**

Interviews were conducted online via Zoom or Google Meet. This format was chosen for convenience and accessibility, considering the cross-country nature of the study. Questions were open-ended and aligned with the TPB, focusing on attitudes shaped by visual and influencer content, subjective norms influenced by social validation, perceived behavioral control relating to information availability and booking ease, and cross-platform behaviors involving TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Examples include; “how does social media inspire you when choosing hotels?”, “how do reviews, likes, or comments impact your confidence in choosing a hotel?” and “do you trust content created by influencers? Why or why not?”

Each interview lasted between 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Transcripts were generated manually and checked for accuracy.

### **Data Analysis**

The study employed thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework; familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Thematic analysis is ideal for identifying patterns within qualitative data and is widely used in digital and tourism research. It allows the researcher to explore platform-specific influences, cross-country differences, and emotional responses.

Data were coded manually to preserve contextual

nuance. Codes were initially descriptive (for instance; “visual appeal”, “trust”, “deals”, “reviews”) before becoming more interpretive (for example; “aesthetic-driven decision”, “algorithmic influence”, “peer reassurance”). Themes eventually emerged around; inspiration through TikTok, aesthetic expectations shaped by Instagram, practical reassurance from Facebook, trust in micro-influencers, cross-platform consumer journeys, and cultural travel behaviors across the three countries

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants received an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written consent was obtained prior to the interviews.

Pseudonyms were used to protect identities. No personal identifying information was included in transcripts or reporting. All recordings and transcripts were stored securely on password-protected devices. The research adheres to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines relevant in the UK, Ireland, and Spain. Data were stored securely and will be destroyed after the retention period specified by the institution.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Credibility was enhanced through member checking, whereby participants reviewed their transcript to ensure accuracy. Rich, contextualized descriptions allow findings to be applicable to similar digital tourism contexts. A clear audit trail, including interview guides, coding notes, and thematic development, ensures consistency of research procedure. Reflexive journaling helped reduce researcher bias by encouraging reflection on personal assumptions and interpretations.

### **Limitations**

The study acknowledges several limitations; the sample size, while appropriate for qualitative research, limits generalizability, self-reported

experiences may be influenced by recall bias, cross-country cultural differences may not be fully captured, and rapid changes in social media trends may influence platform usage over time. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a robust foundation for understanding social media’s influence on hotel selection.

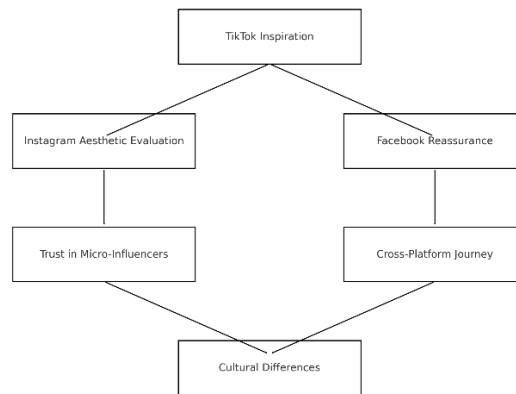
This is outlined the qualitative methodology used to explore how TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook influence Zennial travelers’ hotel selection across the UK, Ireland, and Spain. Guided by interpretivism and an inductive approach, the study employs semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to capture rich insights into evolving digital tourism behaviors.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with Zennial travelers from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Spain. The analysis follows Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic framework, exploring participants’ experiences, perceptions, and behavioral responses to social media content related to hotel selection. The themes emerging from the interviews are organized around the functions of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, as well as the constructs of the TPB. The chapter includes direct insights from participants to illustrate and contextualize the findings.

### **Overview of Emerging Themes**

The thematic analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in 6 core themes; (a) theme 1: TikTok as a source of spontaneous travel inspiration, (b) theme 2: Instagram as a platform for aesthetic validation and detailed comparison, (c) theme 3: Facebook as a tool for reassurance, information verification, and decision-making, (d) theme 4: trust in micro-influencers and preference for authenticity, (e) theme 5: cross-platform travel journey and interplay between platforms, and (f) theme 6: cultural and country-specific differences in digital travel behavior



**Figure 3.** Thematic Map

The following table provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the 15 Zennial participants included in this qualitative study. Ages ranged from 20 to 34 years, representing the Zennial cohort across the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Spain. All participants reported recent or

planned hotel stays within one or more of the 3 countries and were active users of TikTok, Instagram, and/or Facebook. This demographic distribution supports the relevance of the sample to the research aim of examining cross-platform social media influence on hotel selection.

**Table 5.** The Participants

Participant	Age	Origin	City	Hotel Destinations	Hotel Interest	Dominant Platforms
P1	24	UK	London	UK, Ireland, Spain	Frequently books hotels in Ireland and Spain for weekend trips. Occasional UK stays	Heavy TikTok user; follows travel micro-influencers
P2	30	UK	Manchester	UK, Spain	Prefers UK coastal hotels; planning future trips to Spain	Uses Instagram for hotel comparison and aesthetics
P3	28	UK	Bristol	Ireland, Spain	Has stayed in Spain multiple times, and also interested in Irish spa hotel	Active on Facebook travel groups for advice
P4	22	UK	Glasgow	UK, Ireland, Spain	Booked hotels in Ireland recently; Spanish summer destinations appeal	TikTok-driven spontaneous travel ideas
P5	33	UK	Birmingham	UK, Spain	Enjoys UK boutique hotels; occasional Spain weekend trips	Uses Instagram reels + Facebook reviews before booking
P6	27	Ireland	Dublin	Ireland, Spain	Stays regularly in Irish countryside hotels and Spanish resorts	Trusts micro-influencers and UGC on Instagram
P7	25	Ireland	Cork	UK, Spain	Planning a UK city break; has stayed in Spain multiple times	Uses Facebook groups to compare prices
P8	23	Ireland	Galway	Ireland, Spain	Interested in	Follows eco-travel

Participant	Age	Origin	City	Hotel Destinations	Hotel Interest	Dominant Platforms
					sustainable hotels in Ireland; Spain for summer holidays	content creators on Instagram
P9	31	Ireland	Limerick	UK, Ireland, Spain	Previously stayed in UK and Spain hotels; willing to book future Irish stays	Relies on TikTok for inspiration, Facebook for reassurance
P10	29	Ireland	Belfast	UK, Spain	Enjoys UK city hotels and Spanish beach resorts	Checks Instagram tagged photos before booking
P11	20	Spain	Barcelona	UK, Ireland, Spain	Interested in UK and Ireland hotels for cultural trips; stays locally for weekends	Heavy TikTok usage; follows travel trends
P12	26	Spain	Madrid	Ireland, Spain	Regularly books Spanish coastal hotels; wants to explore Ireland next	Uses Instagram stories to assess hotel quality
P13	34	Spain	Seville	UK, Ireland	Loves UK historic hotels and Irish retreats	Facebook reviews influence final decisions
P14	21	Spain	Valencia	UK, Ireland, Spain	Holiday stays in Spain; future trips planned for UK and Ireland	Uses TikTok for discovery and Instagram for comparison
P15	32	Spain	Málaga	UK, Spain	Stays in Spanish resorts; interested in UK boutique hotels	All platforms  Values authenticity in reviews

### Theme 1: TikTok as a Source of Spontaneous Travel Inspiration

Participants consistently described TikTok as an “unexpected inspiration hub” where hotel and travel content appears without prior searching. The algorithm-driven For You Page (FYP) exposed users to unique stays, boutique hotels, and hidden destinations. Many emphasized that TikTok often triggers initial desire to travel or explore new accommodation options.

Typical insight: “I wasn’t looking for hotels, but TikTok showed me a video of this rooftop pool in Barcelona and suddenly I wanted to go there.” (Participant, Spain)

Participants highlighted that TikTok’s quick, dynamic videos, often accompanied by music and trends, create strong emotional resonance, making hotels appear more exciting, modern, and

experience-oriented.

Observed effects: positive emotional response, curiosity and impulse to research further, and hotel discovery that users “would never have searched for”. TikTok served as the first touchpoint in the hotel decision-making process for many Zennials.

### Theme 2: Instagram as a Platform for Aesthetic Validation

Participants from all three countries described Instagram as essential in evaluating whether a hotel fits their desired “vibe,” style, and aesthetic appeal.” Common comparisons included; hotel décor, pool and spa aesthetics, room layout and cleanliness, and scenic views and surrounding attractions

Typical participant comment: “Instagram shows me if the hotel actually looks good, not just in



promotional photos. I trust real customer pictures a lot more.” (Participant, UK). Participants showed high trust in tagged photos, reels, and story highlights created by real travelers. Instagram allowed them to verify consistency between professional photos and real experiences.

Many participants followed influencers with similar travel styles. Micro-influencers were especially influential due to their perceived honesty. Instagram therefore acted as the evaluation phase of the decision-making journey.

### **Theme 3: Facebook as a Tool for Reassurance and Practical Decision-Making**

Facebook was described as “the place to check the real truth” about hotels. Participants used Facebook groups—such as budget travel groups, backpacker forums, or local travel pages—to ask questions, seek tips, and verify experiences. Examples of reassurance sought; actual hotel quality, safety concerns, family or group suitability, pricing and promotional deals, and customer service feedback.

Participant insight: “If I see good Facebook reviews and people in groups recommending it, I feel confident to book.” (Participant, Ireland). Participants often mentioned using Facebook to access; booking links, FAQs, guest experiences, and long-form posts about pros and cons. Facebook supported the final stage of decision-making, offering practical reassurance before booking.

### **Theme 4: Trust in Micro-Influencers and the Importance of Authenticity**

Participants from the UK, Ireland, and Spain expressed scepticism toward large influencers with overly polished content. Authenticity, relatability, and honesty were highly valued.

Typical feedback: “When it’s a big influencer doing a paid promo, I don’t trust it. Micro-influencers feel more real.” (Participant, UK). Participants reported heightened awareness of sponsored content, noting that they trust organic posts more than #ad promotions. This theme demonstrates the growing critical media literacy of Zennial travellers.

### **Theme 5: Cross-Platform Journey in Hotel Selection**

Most participants described a 3-step digital journey; TikTok → inspiration, Instagram → visual evaluation, and Facebook → information verification

Typical summary statement: “TikTok gives me ideas, Instagram helps me compare, and Facebook confirms if it’s worth the money.” (Participant, Spain). Interview findings aligned strongly with TPB; (a) attitudes – shaped by visual and emotional content, (b) subjective norms – shaped by likes, comments, shares, group interactions, and (c) perceived behavioral control – influenced by ease of accessing reviews and booking information. The interplay of these factors positively influenced booking intentions.

### **Theme 6: Cultural Differences Across the Three Countries**

UK participants emphasized convenience, pricing, and value for money. They used Facebook reviews extensively and appreciated Instagram’s comparison features. Irish participants valued storytelling, authenticity, and scenic destinations. They were highly influenced by TikTok and Instagram reels showcasing nature retreats, spas, and rural hotels. Spanish participants responded strongly to lifestyle-driven content, especially relating to beach resorts, summer holidays, nightlife, and food. TikTok influencers specializing in summer travel were highly influential. These variations highlight that digital behavior is shaped by cultural and national contexts.

The analysis reveals that:

- TikTok is the strongest platform for initial hotel inspiration, often leading to spontaneous interest.
- Instagram is the main platform for aesthetic evaluation, brand perception, and visual comparison.
- Facebook is essential for practical reassurance, long-form reviews, and confirmation before booking.
- Micro-influencers carry more credibility than large influencers for hotel recommendations.

- Zennials engage in cross-platform behavior, relying on each platform for a different stage of the travel decision journey.
- Cultural differences influence how each platform is used across the UK, Ireland, and Spain.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that social media significantly influences hotel selection, with each platform serving a distinct role in shaping attitudes, norms, and perceived control.

### **Subthemes Emerging Across TikTok, Instagram & Facebook**

Beyond the 6 major themes previously identified, several subthemes emerged across platforms and countries. These subthemes enrich the understanding of how Zennials navigate social media when selecting hotels across the UK, Ireland, and Spain.

- Subtheme A: Emotional Storytelling and Experiential Imagination (TikTok & Instagram)

Participants frequently described how short-form video content helped them visualize themselves in the hotel, initiating a form of “experiential imagination.” TikTok trends (for example, “day in the life,” morning routines, room tours) triggered emotional connectedness. Participant (Ireland) stated “When I see someone waking up with a sea view or having breakfast on the balcony, I imagine myself there. TikTok makes it feel reachable.” Across countries, Irish participants were the most responsive to emotional and scenic storytelling, especially for nature retreats and spa hotels. Spanish participants responded strongly to lifestyle-driven content, beach clubs, rooftop pools, nightlife, and TikTok videos showcasing “summer vibes.” UK participants, while emotionally engaged, also looked for practical cues such as hotel layout, cleanliness, and breakfast quality.

- Subtheme B: The Search for “Realness” vs. “Aesthetic Perfection” (Instagram)

Participants outlined a key tension; Instagram for the aspirational, curated, aesthetic, and TikTok means real, spontaneous, authentic. This distinction heavily shaped trust. Participant (UK)

stated “Instagram looks perfect... sometimes too perfect. TikTok shows the messy bits, the queues, the tiny rooms, kind like stuff Instagram hides.” Many used Instagram to evaluate stylistic fit (“Is this hotel my vibe?”), but relied on TikTok and Facebook to validate authenticity. Irish participants emphasized that Instagram is “too polished,” while Spanish participants viewed Instagram aesthetics as “part of the holiday planning excitement.”

- Subtheme C: Risk Reduction Through Detailed Peer Evaluation (Facebook)

Participants turned to Facebook for long-form reviews, hotel pros/cons lists, safety and cleanliness information, pricing transparency, and real visitor photos. Participant (Spain) stated “If someone from my city stayed there and says it’s good, I trust it more.” Facebook played a critical role in reducing perceived risk, particularly for international travel.

Facebook differences observed in UK, Ireland, and Spain; (a) people look into pricing, facilities, and customer service (for UK), (b) people put emphasis on safety, comfort and scenic location (for Ireland) and (c) people put emphasis on nightlife, amenities, and food (for Spain)

- Subtheme D: Hotel Reputation as a Social Currency

For Zennials, choosing the “right” hotel was connected to self-presentation on social media. Spanish participants often referenced whether a hotel was “Instagrammable,” especially for group trips. Irish participants valued cozy interiors, scenic landscapes, and hotels with “a story.” UK participants valued modern design, city access, and clean minimalist aesthetics. Participant (Spain) stated “If my hotel looks good on Instagram, I’m happier with my booking.” This demonstrates that hotels serve as a form of digital identity expression.

- Subtheme E: Trust Hierarchy Across Platforms

A clear hierarchy emerged; (a) most trusted: Facebook groups & real guest reviews, (b) moderately trusted: TikTok UGC, micro-influencers, and (c) least trusted: Instagram macro-

influencers. Participants perceived macro-influencers as “paid actors,” while micro-influencers were viewed as “travelers like me.” Participant (Ireland) stated “Micro-influencers are more believable and they’re not trying to sell luxury all the time.” This hierarchy influenced final decisions.

- Subtheme F: Cross-Platform Travel Journey — Extended Insights

The previously identified pattern; TikTok → Instagram → Facebook—was confirmed, but interviews revealed additional loops;

- Loop 1: TikTok → Google → Instagram (some first verify hotel name on Google before checking visuals on Instagram)
- Loop 2: Instagram → Booking.com → Facebook (participants compare deals on booking sites but go to Facebook for reassurance)
- Loop 3: TikTok → Airbnb → Hotels (TikTok often inspires a stay type (cabin, spa hotel) before brand/hotel selection)

### **Country-Specific Findings: UK, Ireland, Spain**

A deeper comparative perspective reveals how cultural preferences shape platform usage and hotel expectations.

- United Kingdom — Value, Convenience & Practicality

UK participants showed high emphasis on value for money, frequent checking of Facebook reviews, preference for city hotels and staycations, moderate trust in TikTok, and heavy use of Instagram comparisons. Participant (UK) stated “I want the hotel to be worth the price. Facebook helps me decide if it’s actually good.”

- Ireland — Authenticity, Nature, and Emotional Appeal

Irish participants emphasized scenic hotels (rural escapes, coastal retreats), strong emotional connection to travel content, high trust in micro-influencers, and use of TikTok for discovering

hidden gems. Participant (Ireland) stated “I love finding those quiet hotels on TikTok places you wouldn’t find on booking sites.”

- Spain — Lifestyle, Aesthetics & Social Travel

Spanish participants demonstrated strong preference for beach resorts, nightlife hotels, and group travel, heavy TikTok use for inspiration, Instagram for “vibe aesthetics”, and Facebook for reassurance from people in their region. Participant (Spain) stated “If it looks fun and social, I’m interested.”

### **Extended TPB Analysis: Attitudes, Norms & Control**

Your analysis can now integrate deeper TPB interpretation.

- Attitudes were shaped by TikTok’s emotional storytelling, Instagram’s aesthetic validation, and Facebook’s credibility and detail. Participants developed positive attitudes toward hotels that appeared visually appealing, authentic, well-reviewed, and value-oriented
- Subjective Norms and social influence emerged through likes, comments, shares, influencer endorsements, group recommendations, and social media trends. Participants described “trending hotels” that gained popularity on TikTok and Instagram.
- Perceived Behavioral Control when real guest reviews were available, booking links were accessible, hotel experiences were transparently documented, and safety, pricing, and location concerns were clarified. Zennials booked hotels when they felt informed, reassured, and emotionally engaged.

### **Hotel Types Preferred by Each Country**

In UK, the hotels are modern city hotels, boutique urban stays, and value-driven chains (e.g., Premier Inn-type). In Ireland, the hotels are nature retreats, spa hotels, scenic boutique hotels. In Spain, the hotels are beach resorts, nightlife-oriented hotels, and group-friendly hotels

**Table 6.** Influence vs Country

Country	TikTok Influence	Instagram Influence	Facebook Influence
UK	Medium	Medium-High	High
Ireland	High	High	Medium
Spain	Very High	High	Medium-High

This extended analysis demonstrates that (a) platform roles differ substantially across the three countries, (b) TikTok drives inspiration, especially in Ireland and Spain, (c) Instagram drives evaluation, especially in Spain and Ireland, (d) Facebook drives reassurance, especially in the UK,

(e) micro-influencers significantly shape hotel trust, more than macro-influencers, (f) Zennials follow a multi-step, cross-platform hotel selection journey, and (g) cultural preferences strongly shape digital travel behavior.

**Table 7.** Comparison between Hotel & TikTok, Facebook and Instagram

Category	United Kingdom	Ireland	Spain
<b>Primary Social Media Influence</b>	Strong influence from <b>Facebook</b> reviews;  moderate influence from Instagram;  TikTok inspires but less dominant than Ireland and Spain.	High influence from <b>TikTok</b> (hidden gems, scenic stays);  strong Instagram influence;  Facebook used for reassurance.	Very strong influence from <b>TikTok</b> (lifestyle, beach resorts);  Instagram highly influential;  Facebook used for practical confirmations.
<b>Types of Hotels Preferred</b>	- Modern city hotels - Boutique urban hotels - Value-for-money chains - Convenient & centrally located stays	- Nature-based retreats - Spa & wellness hotels - Scenic coastal hotels - Rural boutique hotels	- Beach resorts - Nightlife & social hotels - Group-friendly hotels - Rooftop/pool hotels
<b>Attitudes (TPB)</b>	- Value-conscious - Focus on practicality, cleanliness, and amenities  - Trust built through detailed Facebook reviews	- Emotional connection to scenic visuals - Positive attitudes toward authentic, story-driven hotels  - Eco-friendly & culturally grounded hotels appreciated	- Positive attitude toward lifestyle-oriented, fun, social hotel experiences  - High value placed on aesthetics, atmosphere, and group suitability
<b>Subjective Norms (TPB)</b>	- Strong influence from Facebook groups & peers  - Friends' recommendations matter  - Less reliant on influencers	- Influenced by micro-influencers and real travelers  - Scenic & cozy stays endorsed by peers highly influential	- Influenced by TikTok trends, group travel culture, and popular influencers  - Social approval strong driver
<b>Perceived Behavioral Control (TPB)</b>	- High control when Facebook reviews confirm pricing and service quality  - Prefers hotels with clear online information &	- Feels more control when TikTok and Instagram show real experiences  - Ease of visual	- High control when hotels show amenities clearly (pools, restaurants, nightlife)  - Booking perceived as

Category	United Kingdom	Ireland	Spain
	transparent policies	verification helps decision-making	easier when deals/travel packages appear online
<b>Most Trusted Platform</b>	<b>Facebook</b> – due to long reviews, transparency, and peer groups	<b>TikTok + Instagram</b> – for authentic experiences and visuals	<b>TikTok</b> – for real-time, visual, lifestyle-oriented content
<b>Strongest Emotional Trigger</b>	Clean rooms, modern comfort, strong value	Scenic landscapes, cozy atmospheres, rural beauty	Social energy, beaches, pools, nightlife atmosphere
<b>Cross Country Differences</b>	Practically dominates  Facebook is the most trusted  Hotel choice driven by value, convenience and reliability	Emotional, scenic and authentic experience drive attitudes  TikTok & Instagram are powerful motivators  Micro-influencers have high credibility	Lifestyle, social energy and aesthetics drive decisions  TikTok is the strongest platform  Hotel are chosen for vibe, fun and visuals

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

This study set out to explore how TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook influence hotel selection among Zennial travelers (ages 20–34) across the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Spain. Using an interpretivist, qualitative approach, the research revealed that social media plays a decisive and multi-layered role in shaping hotel attitudes, norms, and booking behaviors. The analysis demonstrated that each platform influences a different stage of the digital travel decision-making journey, underscoring the need to conceptualize social media not as isolated channels but as interlinked components of a cross-platform ecosystem.

TikTok emerged as the strongest driver of early travel inspiration, especially in Ireland and Spain, where algorithmic discovery, micro-influencer videos, and immersive storytelling triggered curiosity, emotional engagement, and spontaneous interest in hotels. The visual immediacy and personalized content flow of TikTok fostered strong affective responses, allowing participants to imagine themselves within hotel settings. These emotional cues shaped positive attitudes—one of the core constructs of TPB—toward hotels and destinations that felt authentic, exciting, and “reachable.”

Instagram played a central role in aesthetic evaluation and expectation-building. Across all three countries, Zennials used Instagram to verify the visual quality of hotels, assess atmosphere, décor, amenities, and lifestyle alignment. Tagged photos, reels, and real guest stories added credibility by reducing uncertainty around what hotels “really look like.” Instagram reinforced pre-existing attitudes shaped on TikTok while guiding more considered comparison behaviour, creating a bridge between inspiration and evaluation. For many participants, Instagram aesthetics influenced not only perceptions of hotel quality but also the extent to which a hotel fit their self-image and personal brand.

Facebook served as the primary platform for reassurance, validation, and practical decision-making. Participants relied on Facebook for detailed reviews, long-form guest accounts, and group-based recommendations. Facebook significantly reduced perceived risks by addressing safety, pricing, cleanliness, and service quality. In the UK particularly, Facebook was the most trusted platform, reflecting a cultural emphasis on practicality and value for money. Facebook’s influence was tied closely to perceived behavioral control, enabling Zennials to make informed, confident, and secure decisions before booking hotels.

Across all three countries, micro-influencers were viewed as more credible and authentic than macro-

influencers. Participants were skeptical of overtly sponsored content and expressed stronger trust toward everyday travelers who presented hotels more honestly and realistically. Authenticity was central to shaping both attitudes and subjective norms, highlighting a significant generational shift toward critical media literacy.

The study also found clear cross-country differences in social media usage and hotel preferences; (a) UK participants prioritized convenience, transparency, and value-for-money, relying heavily on Facebook reviews, (b) Irish participants were influenced most by emotional storytelling and scenic imagery, preferring rural retreats and nature-based hotels, and (c) Spanish participants responded strongly to lifestyle-driven, “fun and social” hotel content, with TikTok playing the largest role in shaping their preferences for resorts, pools, nightlife, and group travel.

Overall, the research demonstrates that Zennials engage in a multi-stage, cross-platform travel journey TikTok → Inspiration → Instagram → Evaluation → Facebook → Reassurance → Booking. Attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control were all shaped by platform-specific influences, confirming the suitability of TPB for interpreting digital travel behavior. The findings contribute valuable insights into how social media ecosystems shape modern hotel selection processes in Europe.

### **Managerial Implications**

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for hotel managers, digital marketing teams, and hospitality practitioners operating in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Spain. As social media continues to shape the travel decision-making journey, understanding platform-specific behaviours and generational expectations is crucial for hotels seeking to maximise visibility, trust, and booking conversions. The following managerial implications provide strategic guidance to optimise hotel marketing through TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook for Zennial consumers.

1. Adopt a Multi-Platform, Multi-Stage Marketing Strategy

Hotel managers should recognize that Zennial travellers use different platforms for different stages of the decision process. Thus, marketing campaigns should be designed to align with the cross-platform journey (a) TikTok: inspire curiosity and initial interest, (b) Instagram: showcase aesthetic quality and experiential value, and (c) Facebook: provide detailed, practical, and trust-building information. Hotels should ensure their messaging is consistent across platforms while leveraging the unique strengths of each. A linear or single-platform approach is no longer sufficient in influencing traveler behavior.

2. Prioritize Authentic, Relatable Content Over Highly Polished Advertising

Zennials value authenticity and are increasingly sceptical of overly curated, commercialized content. This study shows that (a) micro-influencers are more effective than macro-influencers, (b) authentic guest experiences (UGC) carry more weight than brand-produced visuals and (c) behind-the-scenes content increases trust and emotional connection. Hotels should collaborate strategically with micro-influencers who genuinely align with the brand’s identity. Additionally, encouraging guests to share photos, videos, and honest reviews can significantly enhance credibility and perceived authenticity.

3. Tailor Social Media Content to Each Country’s Cultural Preferences

Cultural differences among travelers in the UK, Ireland, and Spain influence their platform usage and hotel preferences. Hotels should localize content accordingly (a) UK: emphasize practicality, clarity, customer service, and value for money, (b) Ireland: highlight scenic views, nature-based experiences, storytelling, and authenticity and (c) Spain: focus on lifestyle, social energy, nightlife, beach attractions, and group-friendly amenities. Adapting content to reflect cultural expectations increases engagement and improves brand resonance.

4. Use TikTok Strategically to Drive Emotional Engagement and Early Interest

TikTok’s algorithm and short-video format make

it a powerful platform for capturing attention. Hotels should (a) create immersive, story-driven short videos (room tours, "day in the hotel," scenic views), (b) use trending sounds and hashtags to increase visibility, (c) engage with TikTok creators who specialize in travel and lifestyle. Since Zennials often begin their journey on TikTok, success at this stage can significantly influence subsequent research on Instagram and Facebook.

#### 5. Strengthen Instagram as a Visual Comparison and Brand Identity Platform

Instagram remains essential for aesthetic validation. Hotels should (a) maintain a cohesive visual identity, (b) use high-quality photography while blending real guest content, (c) create reels that highlight unique selling points (architecture, design, pools, spa, food, views) and (d) use story highlights for quick access to FAQs, amenities, and local attractions. Instagram should function as a digital "showroom" that helps guests evaluate the hotel's atmosphere and offerings.

#### 6. Reinforce Trust and Transparency on Facebook

Facebook plays a crucial role in perceived behavioral control, especially for UK travelers. Hotels should use Facebook to (a) provide detailed, up-to-date information about services, policies, and pricing, (b) manage online reviews actively and respond professionally, (c) engage with travel groups by offering advice rather than direct promotions and (d) share long-form testimonials, case studies, or guest experiences. Transparent communication reduces perceived risk and improves booking confidence.

#### 7. Incentivize User-Generated Content (UGC)

Since UGC is highly trusted, hotels should encourage guests to produce real content by (a) creating "Instagrammable" or "TikTok-worthy" locations within the hotel, (b) offering incentives such as discounts, rewards, or features on the hotel's official pages, and (c) running hashtag campaigns to increase organic visibility. Authentic guest content amplifies brand reach and reinforces credibility.

#### 8. Enhance Digital Touchpoints to Improve Perceived Behavioural Control

Perceived behavioural control increases when travellers feel informed and secure in their decisions. Hotels should:

- Provide virtual tours via reels or TikTok videos.
- Include clear, accessible booking links on all platforms.
- Offer transparent cancellation policies.
- Highlight transportation options, local attractions, and safety measures.

These steps lower the psychological barriers to booking and strengthen decision-making confidence.

#### 9. Integrate Social Media Insights Into Revenue Management and Branding

Social media analytics can reveal patterns in traveller preferences, peak interest periods, and content performance. Hotels should:

- Monitor engagement data to identify effective campaigns.
- Tailor promotions based on trending topics or seasonal travel behaviours.
- Use sentiment analysis to understand guest satisfaction and address concerns proactively.

Integrating analytics supports better strategic planning and strengthens long-term brand equity.

#### 8. Train Staff in Digital Customer Engagement

Hotels should ensure that marketing and front-facing staff are trained in (a) responding professionally to online reviews, (b) managing social media inquiries in a timely way, (c) creating quick, authentic content when needed, and (d) understanding Zennial communication styles. A digitally competent team enhances overall brand reputation.

This study clearly demonstrates that effective social media strategy is no longer optional; it is foundational to hotel competitiveness in today's market. Hotels that strategically integrate TikTok,

Instagram, and Facebook, while respecting cultural differences and authenticity expectations, are better positioned to attract, engage, and convert Zennial travelers across the UK, Ireland, and Spain.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Develop a Cross-Platform Marketing Strategy**

Hotels should not treat TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook as independent marketing channels. Instead, they should design a coordinated strategy where (a) TikTok creates discovery and emotional impact, (b) Instagram reinforces visual identity and hotel aesthetics and (c) Facebook provides detailed, practical information and reassurance. This alignment mirrors the consumer journey revealed by this study and increases the likelihood of converting interest into bookings.

### **2. Prioritize Authentic, Relatable, and Unpolished Content**

Zennial travelers demonstrate a strong preference for authenticity. Hotels should (a) collaborate with micro-influencers over macro-influencers, (b) encourage genuine user-generated content, (c) reduce reliance on overly polished or heavily scripted promotional posts, and (d) show “real-life” aspects of the hotel, such as room walkthroughs, staff interactions, and behind-the-scenes content. Authentic representations increase trust and positively influence attitudes and normative beliefs.

### **3. Leverage TikTok for Early-Stage Inspiration**

Given TikTok’s strong emotional influence, hotels in Spain and Ireland, and increasingly the UK, should (a) produce short-form videos highlighting unique hotel features, scenic views, food experiences, and staff personality, (b) engage with TikTok trends, transitions, and travel-related hashtags, and (c) encourage guest participation through challenges or branded sounds. TikTok content should focus on storytelling rather than selling, as emotional engagement is key to early travel interest.

### **4. Strengthen Visual Branding on Instagram**

Instagram is where travelers compare and validate hotels visually. Hotels should (a) maintain consistent aesthetic branding across posts and reels, (b) use professional photography mixed with real guest images, (c) highlight unique design details, scenic areas, and “Instagrammable” spaces, and (d) encourage guests to tag the hotel and share stories. This reinforces positive attitudes formed on TikTok and influences aesthetic expectations.

### **5. Use Facebook as a Reassurance and Information Hub**

Facebook remains essential in the UK and still influential in Ireland and Spain.

Hotels should strengthen their presence by (a) maintaining active Facebook pages with FAQs, live chats, and prompt responses, (b) sharing long-form testimonials and guest stories, (c) participating in travel groups through community management, (d) ensuring transparency in pricing, policies, and services. Clear and reliable information enhances perceived behavioral control and booking confidence.

### **6. Tailor Content by Country**

Based on cultural and regional differences (a) UK: Emphasize value, clarity, convenience, and honest reviews, (b) Ireland: Highlight nature, storytelling, authenticity, and wellness experiences and (c) Spain: Focus on lifestyle, fun, beach experiences, nightlife, and social travel. Country-specific marketing ensures cultural relevance and strengthens platform influence.

### **7. Encourage User-Generated Content (UGC) Across Platforms**

UGC is more trusted than brand-created content. Hotels should (a) provide incentives for guests to share content, (b) create photo-worthy areas in hotels, (c) feature guest posts on official pages, and (d) encourage tagging and hashtag usage. UGC boosts credibility and functions as independent social proof.

### **8. Implement Digital Touchpoints That Enhance Control and Convenience**



To strengthen perceived behavioral control (a) include direct booking links on all social platforms, (b) maintain updated information about amenities, transportation, pricing, and COVID/health policies, (c) offer virtual room tours via TikTok or Instagram Reels, and (d) provide transparent comparison visuals (rooms, views, meal options). Convenience and clarity increase the likelihood of conversion to booking.

#### 9. Monitor and Respond to Platform-Specific Trends

Hotels should allocate resources to (a) track viral trends relevant to travel and lifestyle, (b) use social listening tools to understand guest sentiment, and (c) update content strategies regularly based on platform analytics. Staying aligned with evolving digital behavior is essential for maintaining relevance among Zennials.

#### 10. Future Research Directions

Future research may (a) conduct cross-generational comparisons, (b) examine the role of AI-generated social media content, (c) explore variations across additional European countries, and (d) use mixed-methods incorporating quantitative data to strengthen generalizability.

This research demonstrates that TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook collectively shape the hotel selection process for Zennial travelers across the UK, Ireland, and Spain. The platforms function in complementary ways, influencing attitudes, social norms, and perceived control at different stages of the decision journey. For hotels, understanding this cross-platform dynamic is essential for designing effective digital marketing strategies. By embracing authenticity, visual storytelling, country-specific targeting, and trust-building practices, the hospitality sector can significantly enhance its ability to attract and convert Zennial travelers in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

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