

EFFECT OF YOUTUBE VLOGS IN TRAVELLING INSPIRATION OF PAKISTANI TOURISTS

Amir Aslam^{*1}, Dr. Hilal Fatima²

^{*1}Lahore Leads University

²Department of Media and Communication, Minhaj University Lahore

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Corresponding Author: *

Amir Aslam

Abstract

Pakistan's landscape attracts tourists with its natural beauty and adventure opportunities. Displaying this beauty has inspired the public. This study examines the impact of social media on travel inspiration for Pakistani tourists, focusing on how digital platforms shape destination awareness, decision-making, and travel behaviour. Guided by McQuail's Developmental Media Theory, the research finds that YouTube is a major source of travel inspiration. It showcases visually appealing destinations and stories that boost Pakistan's socio-economic growth. Using a qualitative method, the study gathered data through in-depth interviews with vlog viewers to analyse their perceptions. Purposive sampling and thematic analysis were employed to investigate how vlogs influence audience attitudes. Findings show influencer marketing, user-generated content, and visual storytelling strongly shape tourists' perceptions and aspirations. These factors increase tourism among Pakistanis. Social media also promotes digital word of mouth, as reviews and shared experiences boost trust and authenticity in travel decisions. Still, challenges persist, including unrealistic expectations, misinformation, and overtourism stemming from heavy social media influence. In conclusion, social media transforms not only tourism promotion but also the motivations and behaviours of Pakistani travellers. Despite limitations in sample size and platform focus, this study lays a foundation for future research on the role of digital media in tourism.

INTRODUCTION

YouTube travel vlogs now shape how people discover and plan travel, acting as key digital influencers for Pakistani tourism. These digital stories give virtual glimpses into Pakistan's snow-capped peaks, busy bazaars, and hidden valleys. They directly impact viewers' perceptions and travel choices. For Pakistan—with its rich heritage and landscapes—YouTube vlogs offer a chance to

redefine its image and reach new audiences. Although interest in tourism is rising, challenges such as negative perceptions and security issues hinder growth. Recognising the role of media, both local and international news and research highlight how digital platforms, especially YouTube, can support Pakistan's tourism.

Problem Statement

Pakistan's tourism sector has huge potential due to its scenery and cultural legacy. However, it faces obstacles such as poor marketing, negative opinions, and limited visibility. Social media sites like YouTube have global reach and strong storytelling power. They offer a useful tool for tourism promotion. Still, YouTube's potential for promoting tourism in Pakistan is underused. Key stakeholders—government, private companies, and content creators—do not strategically align. YouTube's influence is also limited by uneven content quality and a weak tourism brand. Pakistan's sector boasts natural attractions, a rich history, and a diverse culture. Yet, it suffers from structural issues, including a weak brand, outdated promotional materials, and limited global travel dialogue. Social media, with YouTube at the forefront, has proven to be a disruptor in global travel promotion through the direct and tangible presentation of destinations. Despite this, in Pakistan,

This digital potential remains largely unused. Tourism videos are often made in isolation and without support from tourism agencies. This scattered approach limits YouTube's effect as a steady tourism platform. Travel vloggers do highlight lesser-known places and local experiences. Yet, without a joint strategy between stakeholders, growth opportunities are missed. Inconsistent storytelling, little training, and poor cooperation with tourism authorities weaken these online stories. To reach its full potential, YouTube needs a coordinated, quality-focused strategy that blends local authenticity with top-class storytelling. Past research has looked at Pakistan's tourism sector. With improved internet access, social media usage has increased. This study examines how social media, particularly YouTube, supports Pakistan's tourism sector. The literature reveals a scarcity of studies on YouTube's impact on tourism in Pakistan. Traditional tourism research exists, but studies on the roles of digital platforms in shaping views

and promoting destinations are limited. The study chose YouTube due to its global reach and visual storytelling capabilities. The results may help promote lesser-known destinations, support sustainable tourism, and fight stereotypes. Authentic social media content can help enhance Pakistan's image and support economic growth.

RQs

1. In what ways do YouTube travel vlogs shape your opinions, expectations, and decisions regarding travel to destinations in Pakistan?
1. Which elements of storytelling in YouTube travel vlogs (e.g., personal experiences, cultural insights, historical background, or local interactions) most influence your interest in visiting Pakistani destinations?
1. How do the visual quality, presentation style, and perceived authenticity of YouTube travel vlogs affect your trust in the content and your likelihood of visiting the featured places in Pakistan?

Objectives of the Study

This study examines the impact of YouTube travel vlogs on viewers' opinions, choices, and perceptions in promoting tourism in Pakistan. It examines content authenticity, visual appeal, and storytelling, emphasising how vloggers present Pakistan's hospitality, culture, and landscapes.

- To examine how YouTube travel vlogs affect viewers' thoughts and perceptions about Pakistani travel destinations.
- To assess how storytelling, aesthetic appeal, and content authenticity contribute to the popularity of YouTube travel vlogs about Pakistan.

YOUTUBE PENETRATION AND TOURIST ARRIVALS: A POSITIVE CORRELATION

Asongu & Odhiambo (2019) found a positive link between YouTube use and tourist arrivals

in a country. They analysed 138 countries and found that this link is strongest in countries that already attract tourists. As travel studies evolve, the increase in social sharing, improved customer support, and revamped travel firms have strengthened the link between social media and tourism (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2019). Today, marketing strategies have evolved in response to the growth of social networks. Research shows that social media platforms significantly impact the promotion of products and services online (Gensler et al., 2013).

User-generated content on YouTube and other social media is now more popular and effective (Welbourne & Grant, 2015).

One main theory that explains the effect of social media is Para-social Interaction (PSI). PSI describes the bond between a performer and an audience. This bond feels personal and intimate, akin to a genuine relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956, as cited in Godulla, 2022). Women in parasocial relationships with celebrities often wish to emulate them or join their social circle (Greenwood et al., 2008). The research also shows that YouTube viewers—specifically, those of certain ages, sexes, and genders—are especially likely to feel inspired by YouTubers. This suggests that modern tourists often draw travel inspiration from YouTube and other social media platforms, where user-generated content is widely shared and viewed. Zarezadeh et al. (2018) examined 152 social media posts related to tourism. Their paper argues that, despite extensive research on social media in tourism, further studies are still needed. Current reviews show user-generated content strongly affects tourists' behaviour, but tend to overlook social media beyond review sites. Recent literature reveals strong connections between tourism and the media. With the rise of social media and YouTube, a significant shift has occurred. This study aims to analyse YouTube's role in developing tourism in Pakistan.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Developmental Media Theory, as proposed by Dennis McQuail in 1987, examines media support for established governments and their initiatives to promote socioeconomic development (Oliver & Bryant, 2009). It argues that the media should support governments rather than criticise them, and instead help them implement their policies until a country is well-established and its economic development is well underway. In recent times, social media has emerged as a newer and more advanced form of communication that is widely used among the masses, and YouTube is one of the most prominent social media platforms. It is safe to assume that in recent times, the said media mentioned by McQuail can be safely translated as the social media platform YouTube. This study aligns McQuail's framework with the role of YouTube travel vlogs as modern media tools that promote tourism in Pakistan. Travel vlogs contribute to socio-economic development by portraying positive narratives of Pakistan's hospitality, culture, and landscapes.

The current research project employs the Development Media Theory as its theoretical framework, with the assumption that this theory focuses on the unique media needs of developing countries. This theory emerged from the recognition that traditional Western-centric media theories often overlooked the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of developing nations. It is based on the idea that media in these fields should support national development goals such as political stability, social justice, economic growth, and cultural preservation. The current thesis assumes that Pakistan can realise the theory's goal of using media to promote social progress, cultural preservation, and economic growth by strategically utilising YouTube.

According to McQuail, the media must embrace and execute constructive development initiatives that align with the political leadership's plans, and press freedom should

not conflict with the government's economic priorities or the demands of the populace regarding development. Therefore, the media should prioritise covering topics that have an impact on people's lives (McQuail, D., 1987). Stated differently, content needs to be development-driven and focused on people's political and socioeconomic lives. By focusing on content authenticity, visual appeal, and storytelling, vlogs complement governmental efforts to enhance the country's global image and boost tourism. This suggests that the Vloggers' efforts align with McQuail's call for development-driven content that affects public perceptions and supports national priorities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this research centres on the conceptual notion that YouTube is a primary social media platform that influences tourism promotion and decision-making. The framework emphasises how YouTube content (including travel vlogs, destination promotion, and consumer reviews) and tourists' perceptions and behaviours interact, with particular emphasis on how the platform impacts their travel decisions and participation in Pakistan's tourism sector. The primary themes for discussion in this current study encompass the effect of visual content, information credibility, and user content, all of which have an impact on tourism awareness, destination appeal, and travel behaviours. The paradigm also takes into account the presence of cultural, social, and economic determinants affecting the acceptance and response to YouTube content from potential tourists within Pakistan. This framework will inform the qualitative data analysis gathered from interviews, yielding a deeper insight into the role of YouTube in promoting tourism advertising in Pakistan.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study is conducted within a qualitative paradigm. The sampling used in this

study was purposive sampling. This type of sample selection is guided by a specific "purpose" in mind (Trochim et al., 2016). Data were gathered from viewers of YouTube travel vlogs over a period of two and a half months who actively followed travel vlogs on Pakistan. The interviews were conducted (Shetty, 2018) after the respondents had taken the time to view the content from a distinct set of travel vloggers in Pakistan. The popular travel content producers' vlogs were considered, focusing on their representation of Pakistan's culture, geography, and hospitality. The respondents were interviewed separately in a comfortable yet controlled environment, where their interviews were recorded on a recording device after obtaining their consent. The findings of the current research pave the way for future studies that can increase the pool of participants to enhance the credibility and transferability of the results, thereby further reinforcing the influence of YouTube travel vlogs on tourism attitudes in Pakistan.

The most satisfactory method for collecting data in a descriptive qualitative study is conducting individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Neergaard et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2017).

Before transcription and after data collection, a literal translation of the interviews was performed from Urdu to English. The translation was done literally to prevent data manipulation, which may affect the findings.

The recordings were listened to repeatedly to avoid mistakes. Data analysis is conducted through a specialised three-step data analysis method for analysing the data gathered for a qualitative analysis. The steps include data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Berkowitz, 1997).

The data gathered from Pakistani YouTube travel vlog consumers was then reduced to the required dialogues. The highlighted data was then put under the standard categories.

In this step, the data gets a structured visualisation to give an organised look.

Therefore, in this step, the data was displayed in the form of tables alongside examples extracted from the gathered data.

This step presented the findings of the data, followed by a detailed discussion using the compare-and-contrast technique.

The research captures a snapshot of perceptions at a single point in time but does not examine how these perceptions evolve over time with exposure to a series of vlogs. More insight into the long-term impact on travel choice may be obtained using a longitudinal methodology.

THEME 1: IMPACT OF YOUTUBE VLOGS ON TRAVEL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

Theme 1 explores how YouTube travel vlogs influence viewers' attitudes, choices, and perspectives on visiting travel destinations in Pakistan. During the interviews, it was shown that these vlogs significantly contribute to revealing secrets and remodelling local travel behaviour.

SUBTHEME 1.1: DISCOVERY AND CURIOSITY

One of the primary influences of YouTube vlogs is their ability to introduce viewers to lesser-known parts of Pakistan. Participants indicated that vlogs had inspired them to travel to places they were previously unaware of or had never considered visiting.

Exposure to lesser-known destinations: a respondent stated, *"I never thought about visiting places like Skardu or even interior Sindh, but seeing them through someone else's lens makes me want to experience it myself."* This quote emphasises how vlogs help to open viewers' eyes to unexplored locations.

Enabling curiosity towards local treasures: a respondent said, *"Locations I previously believed were beyond my reach or too far away now become more reachable after watching these vlogs."* This observation

highlights how vlogs help dispel stereotypes about inaccessible locations, encouraging viewers to approach more distant or less-travelled places.

Heightened interest in off-the-beaten-path areas: one of the respondents added, *"I'm interested in areas such as Gwadar or Sindh's interior, which I had no idea about earlier."* This indicates that vlogs help fuel interest in locations that the viewers might not have otherwise noticed.

SUBTHEME 1.2: LOCALLY MOTIVATED TRAVEL

The evidence also highlights how vlogs encourage viewers to consider local travel as a viable and appealing option over international destinations.

Inspiration to visit Pakistan: a respondent said, *"These vlogs have made me realise the beauty of our own areas and wish to travel locally more."* This statement suggests that exposure to local travel destinations through vlogs can foster a sense of pride and interest in Pakistan's diverse attractions.

Considering domestic travel options, a respondent also mentioned, *"I previously believed that only international travel could help me 'see' something new," but these vlogs made me reassess that.*" This indicates a change of mind, as the audience comes to understand the merits of discovering one's own nation based on what is shared in the vlogs.

Incentivization to travel in Pakistan: a respondent commented, *"They've put so many destinations on my travel Wish list that I hadn't even thought of before."* This suggests that vlogs not only influence curiosity but also actual travel choices in Pakistan.

Demystifying perceived travel hindrances: one of the respondents also added, *"I never thought travelling across Pakistan was hard, but these vlogs exhibit how feasible and enjoyable it can be."* This observation highlights how vlogs help demystify perceived travel hindrances, such as the difficulty or inconvenience of domestic travel.

TABLE-1

Themes	Initial Codes	Respondents Statements
Discovery and Curiosity	Exposure to lesser-known destinations	“I never thought about visiting places like Skardu or even interior Sindh, but seeing them through someone else’s lens makes me want to experience it myself.”



Discovery and Curiosity	Awakening curiosity about local gems	“Places I thought were out of reach or too remote now feel more accessible after watching these vlogs.”
Discovery and Curiosity	Increased awareness of unexplored regions	“I’m curious about places like Gwadar or interior Sindh, which I didn’t know much about before.”
Motivation to Travel Locally	Inspiration to explore Pakistan	“These vlogs have made me appreciate the beauty of our own regions and want to travel more locally.”
Motivation to Travel Locally	Reconsidering domestic travel possibilities	“I used to think international travel was the only way to explore something ‘new,’ but these vlogs have changed that for me.”
Motivation to Travel Locally	Encouragement to travel within Pakistan	“They’ve added so many places to my travel Wishlist that I hadn’t even considered before.”
Motivation to Travel Locally	Breaking down perceived travel barriers	“I never thought travelling around Pakistan was difficult, but these vlogs show how doable and fun it can be.”

THEME 2: STORYTELLING AND VIEWER CONNECTION

The second theme examines how the narrative approach in YouTube travel vlogs promotes emotional engagement and strengthens the viewer's connection to the content. Viewers appreciate narrative strategies that make the

vlogs more relatable and grounded in real-life experiences.

SUBTHEME 2.1: RELATABLE AND ENGAGING NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Vloggers who utilise effective storytelling techniques can establish a stronger emotional rapport with their audience, making their content more engaging and relatable.

Conversational tone fostering relatability: a respondent emphasised, *"I prefer vloggers who take a casual, conversational tone; it feels like a friend is guiding you."* This comment suggests that viewers are drawn to vloggers who present the content in a natural, friendly manner, which enhances the feeling of a personal connection.

Humanising destination storytelling: one respondent clarified, *"When vloggers deal with local people, their tradition, craft, or cuisine, it humanises the destination."* In this quote, the emphasis on local people and cultures helps make the destination experience more believable and tangible to the viewer, thereby enhancing the audience's experience.

Personal and direct reflection: a respondent added, *"I identify more with vloggers who speak directly and tell everyday life experiences."* This suggests that viewers prefer vlogs that delve deeper than general travel tips and offer personal anecdotes or reflections, thereby making the content more authentic and credible.

SUBTHEME 2.2: UNFILTERED, HONEST CONTENT

Viewers also appreciate real and uncensored content that gives an accurate depiction of the

realities of travel experiences. Authenticity generates credibility and establishes a more intimate connection with viewers.

Highlighting challenges as a part of the process: a respondent said, *"When the vlogger displays both the high points and low points, such as missed turns or tough roads, it makes me believe in the content more."* This implies that displaying challenges, rather than only the high points, provides a more realistic experience than people believe.

Spontaneity-enhancing connection: a respondent expressed, *"If they show spontaneous moments and unplanned experiences, it feels like I'm actually on the trip with them."* This reflects how viewers appreciate moments of spontaneity, as they make the vlogs feel more like an immersive experience rather than a scripted performance.

Personal narrative increases engagement: one of the respondents said, *"I love it when vloggers post personal experiences, not touristy ones. It makes the experience seem more real."* This illustrates how personal narrative contributes to a sense of intimacy and authenticity, which in turn engenders greater engagement.

TABLE-2

Themes	Initial Codes	Respondents Statements
Relatable and Engaging Narrative Techniques	Conversational tone fostering relatability	"I prefer vloggers who take a casual, conversational tone it feels like a friend is guiding you."
Relatable and Engaging Narrative Techniques	Storytelling that humanizes destinations	"When vloggers focus on local communities their traditions, crafts, or food it adds a human touch to the destination."
Relatable and Engaging Narrative Techniques	Direct and personal reflection	"I connect more with vloggers who talk in a straightforward way and share real- life experiences."

Unfiltered, Honest Content	Showcasing challenges as part of the journey	"When the vlogger shows both the highs and lows like missed turns or difficult roads it makes me trust the content more."
Unfiltered, Honest Content	Spontaneity enhancing connection	"If they show spontaneous moments and unplanned experiences, it feels like I'm actually on the trip with them."
Unfiltered, Honest Content	Personal storytelling enhances engagement	"I love when vloggers share personal moments, not just touristy stuff. It makes the experience feel more real."

THEME 3: AUTHENTICITY AND AESTHETIC APPEAL

The third theme focuses on the aesthetic appeal and authenticity of YouTube travel vlogs. Good visuals and open content play a crucial role in the credibility and success of a vlog in engaging its audience.

SUBTHEME 3.1: CONTENT ENGAGEMENT AND AESTHETIC APPEAL

The aesthetic appeal of a vlog is crucial in attracting an audience initially and keeping them engaged.

Compelling, high-quality visuals fueling first interest: a respondent underscored, "Good visuals are important; they capture my attention, but it's the content that holds me." This indicates that visuals are crucial to

attract viewers, but it is the content and the genuineness of the same that hold their interest.

Lack of interest in content that is solely visual: a respondent stated, "If the entire vlog consists of just nice shots with no actual story, I lose interest soon." This demonstrates that even though good visuals are crucial, they must be complemented by significant content to sustain the viewer's interest.

Visuals enriching the storytelling process: a respondent said, "It's not about nice shots, it's how the visuals support the story that makes it interesting." It suggests that the strength of visuals lies not just in their appearance, but also in how they contribute to and enhance the narrative.

SUBTHEME 3.2: CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Authenticity helps viewers feel that vlogs are trustworthy and credible sources of information. Authentic representation of both good and bad: a respondent commented, "If the road is bad or the area is congested, they should also depict that, which makes the vlog look more credible." This shows that audiences like

an honest view, where both the strengths and weaknesses of a destination are presented.

Steering clear of too polished material: one of the respondents explained, *"If everything seems too perfect or staged, it feels artificial. I like vlogs where they show both the good and the bad."* This is an indication of a preference for raw, unpolished material that comes across as more authentic and relatable.

Practicality in real life through vlogs: one respondent pointed out, *"Vloggers who provide practical advice, such as how to get around or the real cost, make the content feel practical and useful."* This suggests that

the audience appreciates practical information that makes the travel experience more realistic and grounded.

TABLE-3

Themes	Initial codes	Respondents Statements
Aesthetic Appeal and Content Engagement	High-quality visuals driving initial interest	"Good visuals are important—they grab my attention, but it's the content that keeps me watching."
Aesthetic Appeal and Content Engagement	Disinterest in purely visual content	"If the whole vlog is just pretty shots with no real story, I lose interest quickly."
Aesthetic Appeal and Content Engagement	Visuals enhancing the storytelling experience	"It's not just about pretty shots it's how the visuals complement the story that makes it engaging."
Authenticity and Trustworthiness	Honest portrayal of both positives and negatives	"If a road is rough or a place is overcrowded, they should show that too makes the vlog feel more trustworthy."
Authenticity and Trustworthiness	Avoiding overly polished content	"If everything looks too perfect or curated, it feels fake. I prefer vlogs where they show both the good and the bad."
Authenticity and Trustworthiness	Real-life practicality in vlogs	"Vloggers who share practical tips like how to get around or the actual cost make the content feel real and useful."

In summary, the findings from the interview data indicate that YouTube travel vlogs have a

significant impact on viewers' perceptions and behaviours, particularly regarding local tourism

in Pakistan. The identified themes in this analysis, 'Influence of YouTube Vlogs on Travel Perceptions and Behaviour', 'Storytelling and Viewer Connection', and 'Authenticity and Aesthetic Appeal', show that vlogs are not so much about presenting destinations, but about establishing emotional connections, representing authenticity, and introducing travel as an attainable and worthwhile experience. The results of the respondents highlight the significance of relatable content, authentic portrayals of travel experiences, and high-quality images that promote engagement and trust. These elements, taken together, play a crucial role in the increased popularity of YouTube travel vlogs as an effective means of promoting domestic tourism in Pakistan.

DISCUSSION

The power of digital media, and YouTube specifically, is profoundly redefining how individuals experience and interact with tourism. For example, over the past decade, the world has witnessed travel vlogs become extremely influential resources, not just for entertainment purposes but also for marketing travel destinations by influencing perceptions among viewers and shaping their decisions. If we analyse it in the context of Pakistan, YouTube travel vlogs have become significantly instrumental in reshaping or redefining the narrative of domestic tourism, drawing positive attention to off-the-beaten-path areas and instilling a fresh wave of curiosity and pride in local audiences. Thus, this research highlights how visual storytelling on YouTube has been influencing travel perceptions and behaviours among viewers from Pakistan. This analysis draws on Development Media Theory (McQuail, 1987), which emphasises the media's capacity to facilitate national development aspirations, to examine how vlogs contribute to social and economic progress through tourism promotion. Building on its exploration of qualitative findings derived from interviews, supported by background literature, this discussion highlights how curiosity is stimulated, local discovery is encouraged, and the mystification of barriers surrounding domestic tourism is alleviated through

YouTube. Furthermore, this research aims to demonstrate how digital platforms can serve as catalysts for change, facilitating cultural understanding and economic prosperity in Pakistan's tourism industry.

One of the most prominent findings revealed in the interviews regarding the effects of YouTube travel vlogs was the power of this platform in creating curiosity by exposing its audiences to unknown areas of Pakistan. Thus, the theme of discovery and Curiosity highlighted how this new media is reshaping the travel imagination of viewers by offering new landscapes and cultural encounters through easily accessible visual storytelling. Interview respondents consistently reported a similar experience of travel vlogs exposing them to places they were either unaware of or had never considered before. One of the interviewees stated, "I never thought about visiting places like Skardu or even interior Sindh, but seeing them through someone else's lens makes me want to experience it myself." This finding aligns with the work of Nezakati et al. (2015), who emphasised how, by offering rich, pictorial depictions of destinations, these digital media platforms attract tourists. Similarly, YouTube also has the ability to emphasise such enticing images that can play an important role in reforming cognitive maps of desirability and accessibility. Responders also noted that areas previously deemed too far away are now considered much more accessible. As another participant shared, "Places I felt out of reach or too far away now feel more accessible after watching these vlogs." This finding reestablishes the work of Arshad et al. (2017), highlighting how Pakistani travel vloggers, by exploring previously unknown areas of the country, are providing their audience with a "sneak peek" into those areas, thus spontaneously reconstructing them as potential tourist sites.

The development-focused characteristics of these findings can be directly attributed to McQuail's (1987) Development Media Theory, as mentioned above. That envisions media as one of the most promising tools to advance national economic and societal objectives. Therefore, through presenting a favourable portrayal of Pakistan's cultural and geographical diversity,

YouTube travel videos can be regarded as fulfilling these economic and societal missions. We can see this narrative building through the statements of participants, such as one responder stated, "I'm interested in somewhere like Gwadar or Sindh interior, which I didn't know much about beforehand." This increase in interest in tourism is driven by the user-generated content that is relatable and visually engaging, leading to the creation of a dynamic consumer practice (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The viewer's online experience inspires them to explore the real world through the experiential nature of these vlogs, which are transforming unknown locations into tourist attractions.

Overall, YouTube's visual culture fosters a sense of discovery by deconstructing previous stereotypes and replacing them with authentic narratives of accessibility and inclusivity. For example, in the case of Pakistan, it is reimagining the country through these vlogs not only to expand travelling but also to change the country's image as a vibrant and inclusive tourist destination. Another major outcome of these interviews was a noticeable shift in the travel interests of the audience, with a growing appreciation for domestic destinations rather than foreign tours. The major reason for this shift can be traced back to YouTube travel vlogs, which not only brought the attractiveness of home country landscapes into focus but also changed the very definition of what a satisfying travel experience should be. Many participants revealed that viewing these travel vlogs compelled them to further rethink their expectations when it comes to international versus national travelling expectations. One subject quoted, "I thought international was the only way to discover something 'new,' but these vlogs have altered my thinking." This further aligns with Brenner's (2018) contention that YouTube videos serve as both informative and motivational, enabling their viewers to experience various environments and consequently change their travel desires.

This emerging trend of local discovery is complemented by the authenticity and recognizability of these vloggers as well. Most vloggers on YouTube are found creating content that is budget-friendly, interacting with locals,

and offering an unbiased perspective on Pakistan's cultural and natural diversity. Making this user-generated content an even more compelling advertisement than conventional marketing (Saleem et al., 2022). One of the respondents also vindicated this by stating, "These vlogs have made me appreciate the beauty of our own regions and want to travel more locally." This domestic shift also refers to the place of para-social interaction (PSI), where the audiences of these vlogs form emotional and aspirational relations with the vloggers (Godulla, 2022). Through PSI, these vloggers are not just entertainers, but they are also travel guides and cultural envoys. Their lived experiences resonate with viewers, especially among the Gen Z audience, who are more likely to find interest in these digital natives and depend on peer-created content (Tamara et al., 2021). McQuail's Media Development Theory further adds to these findings. When media platforms such as YouTube encourage local travel, they facilitate national socioeconomic growth by enabling the retention of income in the local economy, empowering small and medium-sized enterprises, and reducing the foreign exchange burden. These vlogs are therefore consistent with the developmental objective of economic growth through cultural promotion and local participation (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). YouTube travel vlogs have proven themselves capable of dismantling apparent obstacles to travelling in Pakistan. Travelling is usually perceived by a significant number of audiences as expensive, inconvenient, or unsafe. However, these vlogs have managed to make travelling within the country both possible and enjoyable. This change of attitude has become a key factor towards encouraging local tourism in the country. Some interviewees shared how these vlogs transformed their perceptions of travelling within the country. For example, one of the subjects stated, "I believed travelling around Pakistan was hard, but these vlogs reveal how achievable and enjoyable it is." These vloggers manage to achieve this change in perspective by recording their own personal travel experiences. This eliminates the uncertainty that tends to discourage individuals from organising trips. This is in direct agreement

with Rao's (2014) definition of "E- Tourism," which emphasises the way social media facilitates tourism planning and personalisation, allowing tourists to make well-informed choices. YouTube is utilised as an accessible content delivery platform, enhancing its status in tourism promotion. According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), media-sharing sites such as YouTube provide users with visual information, enabling them to form an idea of what to expect in a destination. Such consumer-generated content reduces psychological and logistical barriers by promoting trust and helping tourists envision themselves in the location. This once again re-establishes McQuail's (1987) Developmental Media Theory, as media are proven to support national development through the provision of constructive and pragmatic content. Essentially, YouTube travel vlogs transform what was once considered aspirational into something tangible, making a larger audience more likely to visit and interact with their destination.

Based on the qualitative findings gathered from interviews and complemented by associated literature, it is evident that travel vlogs are more than a form of entertainment; they are potent visual communication devices and persuaders that enhance audiences' engagement with their home nation. As discussed above, YouTube travel vlogs influence tourism perceptions and practices in Pakistan, specifically by promoting exploration, shifting the focus towards domestic travel, and overcoming access barriers. It further underscored the way vlogs create interest in off-the-beaten-path places, prompt local discovery more than foreign travel, and make travel in Pakistan appealing and accessible. Advancing the country's socio- economic development while fostering cultural appreciation, it supports state efforts towards national development through tourism. The research findings further enhance our understanding of YouTube's role in Pakistan's tourism sector, particularly in the context of digital globalisation. As a new form of digital platform emerged through YouTube, this study indicates how it changed from being merely an

entertainment website to a powerful force behind creating impressions and shaping

narratives. Their significance lies in aligning with prevailing academic and business opinions on the influence of online content on global tourism and a nation's reputation.

The YouTube effect on travel images, reported by the majority of survey participants, supports theories of media effects on destination image construction. Employing Gartner's 1993 construct, destination image construction is a combined process of induced and organic origins. Within and through YouTube's collection of individually customised travel vlogs, spectacles, and user stories, a middle ground exists between the two categories. For instance, travel bloggers typically present organically created content, but their sponsorships and brand collaborations sometimes influence certain aspects of the videos. This combination of authenticity and commercialism enhances Pakistan's reputation as a viable destination. Focus group respondents were amazed at how their impression of Pakistan was enhanced through YouTube materials, particularly in light of the way terror and instability overwhelm Western views of Pakistan. Through their videos, local and international YouTube producers promote Pakistan's image by highlighting its hospitality culture and natural beauty, thus contributing towards national branding. This reinforces Anholt's (2007) 'nation brand' theory that countries ought to market a positive image in order to strategically draw in tourism, investments, and goodwill. This review would not be complete without Eva Zu Beck, Rosie Gabrielle, and Alex Reynolds. Their material alone brings Pakistan to life in the eyes of foreign travellers. The number of international viewers who had never considered Pakistan as a vacation spot prior to watching their material is overwhelming. It is exactly this point of view that sets these creators apart. They represent Pakistan with a questioning and investigative eye, so it is accessible, not overwhelming, for other outsiders. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of Western accounts, which are largely based on negative feelings, these foreigners thoroughly experience and connect with the people of the land, a stark difference from the simplistic mainstream media coverage. Besides,

the study confirms that YouTube videos are informative not only but also motivational. The majority of respondents indicated that they watched travel-related videos not solely for entertainment, but also to gather information for their intended travels. This suggests the platform's potential as an immersive experience simulator. According to cognitive theory, the media enables people to mentally simulate and also helps dispel doubts while enhancing confidence in their decisions. The simulation is also boosted through the visual and auditory richness of YouTube. In some areas, such as Pakistan, where there is uncertainty regarding safety, infrastructure, and cultural compatibility, YouTube serves as a risk mitigation tool. The potential of YouTube video makers to make comments on their productions, for users to like a favourite clip, and for makers to post community content helps to further reinvigorate the experience of would-be tourists. (Jenkins 2006) termed this new active culture of communities as participatory in nature, one that transforms viewers into engaged stakeholders in the destination marketing system. This enables the creation of online communities whose members share a common interest in travelling and visiting cultural heritage sites, providing an additional layer of authenticity to the information. One more level of the results is associated with economic aspects. As interviewees attested, YouTube has the potential to generate local tourism, which means it can provide, at least to some extent, geographically dispersed economic opportunities. Small enterprises, local businesses, and off-the-beaten-path regions receive greater visibility than they would with traditional ads. For example, the vlogging industry has significantly fueled the boom in tourism to regions such as Hunza, Skardu, and Swat. Even lesser-known areas, such as Cholistan or Hingol National Park, appear to be gaining new recognition. These remarks suggest a more equitable distribution of tourism's richness, which was once limited to only big cities or resorts. Secondly, the research mentions the significance of influencer credibility in digital marketing. The reality is

that the majority of participants believe in travel vloggers because this community has emerged as opinion leaders during the era of digitisation. Their influence is especially deep-seated among the youth who prefer genuine and honest material to glossy ads. This becomes challenging for tourism boards and marketing agencies operating in Pakistan, as they will be compelled to reassess their strategies and partner with trustworthy influencers rather than relying on conventional advertisements. But it is also essential to highlight the limitations and dangers of tourism being marketed through heavy use of YouTube. The sharing of content that the YouTube algorithm considers sensational receives top priority.

Some of them may even resort to exoticising or stereotyping Pakistan in the bid to attract views, belittling some aspects of its culture. This kind of selective representation may paint a skewed or distorted picture of

Pakistan because only opposing stories or areas are brought into the limelight for viewership gain. For the others, influencer content is not regulated; therefore, any misinformation can easily create unfulfilled tourist expectations or risky travel choices about the region.

This climate of content creation is plagued by some very severe ethical dilemmas in sensitive cultural areas. Respect for norms and the understanding that there is a need to learn about different cultures are emphasised by some vloggers. Others, though, might inadvertently violate them for entertainment. This looks over disrespect for what these filmed communities' cultural practices are and can even cause the destruction of cultural integrity. This raises questions about inclusivity. Today's body of YouTube material - much of which is produced and consumed by young, healthy, powerful individuals - revolves around adventurous or active travel. There is not much available for families and older travellers, and hardly anything for those with disabilities. For Pakistan to market itself as an inclusive destination, it will need to provide opportunities for other storytellers who can tell diverse stories and effectively communicate diversity. The policy implications are immense. Under PTDC, the government must consider

official partnerships with top national and international YouTubers to co-create content related to and aligned with the nation's tourism development goals. This approach can also be complemented by grants, easier visa procedures for travel bloggers, and ensuring safety and a warm welcome at prime tourist spots.

Furthermore, PTDC can establish digital platforms that educate and guide local aspiring creators on ethical storytelling, content creation, and audience engagement. An international context is provided for Pakistan's YouTube strategy by examining case studies of countries such as Indonesia, Georgia, and Morocco, which have effectively leveraged digital creators in rebranding their tourism industries. Indonesia, for instance, has launched influencer tourism campaigns about Bali and has engaged the services of hundreds of vloggers in collective promotional campaigns. These models might be considered as instances of Pakistan with greater potential to become part of an organised framework of digital diplomacy. The study suggests another potential outreach opportunity for the diaspora. Various vloggers operating from overseas have already established considerable bases of popularity; some notable examples include Shahveer Jafry and Irfan Junejo. If they are utilised constructively, they could act as digital ambassadors, allowing diaspora youth to showcase their heritage in their content while putting tourism in the spotlight. Traditional media, from television to newspapers, remains influential with much older audiences, but the proof is there, and while traditional sources remain solid for others, they are being supplemented by new media (digital platforms, notably YouTube) with younger audiences. With increasing access to Wi-Fi and smartphone ownership, young people in Pakistan are increasingly turning to digital content as their primary source of information and entertainment. It is not just a matter of how information is shared; this change represents a significant transformation in the way public narratives are framed and communicated. Content producers (mostly individuals or small groups) are now making an impact on the scale of national debate, unprecedented by legacy

media corporations, and are making an impact in creating fresh perceptions of identity, culture, and values. The implications of such decentralisation are profound. It enables individuals and groups to claim their own voices and respond to dominant narratives, producing a richer, more diverse discourse. Such democratisation of content creation has the potential to foster greater comprehension, bridge cultural divides, and inspire engaged civic engagement. But this shift also requires caution. The ungoverned state of digital content can lead to the dissemination of disinformation and hate narratives that erode social cohesion. As more power shifts toward these content creators, there is an urgent need for media literacy programs to enable young audiences to critically consume the information they encounter.

CONCLUSIONS

In summation, this research has analysed the importance of YouTube travel vlogs in creating tourism perception, specifically in the case of Pakistan. Based on McQuail's Developmental Media Theory, which focuses on media utilisation as a means of social advancement and national development, this study examines how independent vloggers' digital content can contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. The qualitative aspect of this research, based on in-depth interviews with frequent viewers of travel vlogs on YouTube, has enabled a detailed analysis of how these videos are consumed, read, and absorbed by viewers, particularly those with an interest in tourism and travel culture.

YouTube travel vlogs have been found to be imperative in changing the global perception of Pakistan, frequently dispelling its stereotypes and offering a genuine, people-oriented storyline. By highlighting the nation's cultural diversity, natural attractions, and hospitality, these vlogs become soft power ambassadors that shape viewer attitudes positively. This study also verifies that digital storytelling supports the tenets of Development Media Theory, as these vlogs are not only informative and entertaining but also stimulate economic activity by encouraging potential tourists and

investors. Additionally, the application of purposive sampling and thematic analysis enabled an in-depth investigation of viewer beliefs, revealing that numerous respondents perceived travel vlogs as credible and powerful sources of information. In other instances, the content of vlogs was said to directly influence the travel choices of viewers, reflecting a concrete connection between media use and tourist behaviour. However, the study also acknowledges its own limitations, specifically the sample size and its sole focus on YouTube, which may not accurately represent the broader digital media landscape. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study leaves room for future research to travel in several directions. Larger sample sizes, comparative studies between platforms, or mixed-method studies might be able to further reveal the extent to which digital media contributes to tourism. Longitudinal studies may also shed light on the impact of prolonged exposure to such content on long-term attitudes and economic outcomes.

Ultimately, this thesis contributes to the growing body of literature on digital media and tourism by exploring the potential of YouTube as a development-focused communication channel. It also emphasises the importance of stakeholders in Pakistan's tourism industry recognising and tapping into the change-making potential of travel vlogs in creating a more inclusive, authentic, and attractive image of the nation in the global arena.

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