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Vlogs, Ventures and Virtual Guides: Reshaping Automation and Authenticity in Travel with AI

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Abstract

Travel is the purest form of bonding with nature. It restores the idea of self and our discernment of the world we live in. Today, every human experience including travel is predictably influenced by technology. Artificial Intelligence has seeped into our households, our circadian lives and routine journeys. Travel decision making is now severely manipulated by viral vlogs. Tourists are now looking at personalized, curated experiences that can be diarized with exclusivity on social media. Brands are marketing travel merchandise that is fabricated to offer a homely consolation in difficult terrains. Amateurs and professionals alike are using AI (Artificial Intelligence) powered smartphones, drones, gimbals, 360 cameras to capture travel stories with dynamic visuals. However, the rise in digital cartographies of travel interferes with the core experience of travel itself. The study emphasises that although travel is being seen as rejuvenation, the roadmap to this emotional recovery is a fusion of social media engagements and technology. Key informant interviews were conducted with travel vloggers, travel entrepreneurs and tour operators to understand the contemporary social media induced travel-mindset and the role of AI in serving as a catalyst of a tech-driven nature sojourn. The research further examines the role of AI in the domestic travel industry of India and ascertains whether it hinders the solemn experience of travel itself. AI models are today offering customization of travel planning with increased efficiency and involve a lower cost in comparison to travel operators. However, the tourist acceptance towards a full-fledged AI travel design is uncertain.

1. Introduction

The 19th and 20th century respectively paved the way for modern society to manifest human life with photographic images and mass tourism (Urry, 2002). In the present times it is unimaginable to talk of travel without assimilating it through photographs (Garlick, 2002). Photography and tourism play both parallel and interlaced roles in shaping a travel experience (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003) while giving travellers the opportunity to express themselves with others (Groves & Timothy, 2001). In the present times the ethereal understanding of travel is not confined to a mere outing to a faraway landscape. Every such experience seems incomplete unless it culminates into an Instagram post. Instagram reels and stories are now ritualistic travel mandates to stay upbeat with social media trends. This mediated expression of "travel" is being perceived from the lens of healing, that often acts as a synonym for sight-seeing and leisure, mainly as a repercussion of COVID-19 pandemic, as society pursues physical, mental, and emotional reinstatement (Wulandini, 2025).

With the advent of social media there is an urge to have quick access to information in the form of visuals. Social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook or Instagram have elevated the consumption of the internet to new binaries (Zajadacz, 2017). There are users across social media platforms that are now creating content by stepping out of their daily lives, this can be reviewed within the framework of their disposition of this digitally acquired information and lifestyle (Babecki, 2018). However, it cannot be confirmed whether the two identities and travel experiences (online and off-line) of the average social media user are similar. With the advent of AI there is a rise in a culture of using manipulated images in all aspects of content creation. Numerous researches state that young users of social media are prone to represent a desired image of themselves (Trammell

& Keshelashvili, 2005). This image is of a free spirited individual often seen exploring locations of grandeur aimed to portray wanderlust, adventure and deeper introspection of the self. But in the process of this image making, the destination is often eclipsed by the traveler's narcissistic image.

Right from destination choices to reservations, from purchase intent to content creation, every facet of travel is now judiciously curated in line with up-to-the-minute trends. Social media posts on travel are now in a blossoming relationship with the frequency of travel (Kromka et al., 2024b). The tourism umbrella has surpassed into an automated endeavor owing to constant improvements in AI. Users can now tailor their travel plans via automated itineraries generated by Chat GPT and augment new and exciting routes for personalized and offbeat experiences (Honmane et al., 2025).

2. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. It focuses on the quiet takeover of AI over the travel experience, especially in travel planning, content creation and social media engagement of travel narratives. The author as a filmmaker and academician in video production explored production techniques using a smartphone and an action camera on different aspects of travel and photography. Experiments were made to understand reel production for Instagram while shooting in outdoor locations like parks and open spaces aimed to observe the role of environmental backdrops in narration. Elements like natural lighting, ambient sound, shot taking on the go were employed to emulate scenarios of real-life travel. However, for a deeper overview, specific case studies were placed into consideration with respect to travel content creation. The objective of this study is to examine the ironic confluence of a tech-driven travel infrastructure and its effect on the tranquility of being in a silent atmosphere.

The study also aims to understand whether social media induced image making matches the real experience of being in a location. Key informant interviews were conducted with travel vloggers, travel entrepreneurs and tour operators to place into context the confluence of travel with technology and the outcome of this convergence in the light of travel intent. Three professionals from the travel industry were interviewed regarding their travel philosophy, impact of technology on travel intent and their perception of the traveller's persona. The participants were chosen on the basis of their unique contribution and distinguished work profile that serves the travel industry. The below listed participants were also identified on the basis of their personal interaction with the travel community and inclination to preserve natural resources by constant endeavours and awareness towards climate change that reflected on their social media profiles.

1. Rahul Kumar- Travel Entrepreneur and Founder of Experiential Living Projects, Mudhouse Experiential Hostels, The Fika Homes and YouFinder Retreats.
2. Sumit Kumar Yadav- Travel Photographer and Brand Strategist
3. Kshitij Saxena – Moto Vlogger and Adventurer

3. Review of Literature and Discussion

The following studies suggest over tourism leanings of a travel generation that associates offbeat travel with utility vehicles, drone captures and butane cans replacing the experience of being in the forest with the comfort of their living rooms. This further renders a contrast between seeking an inward resolution from an outward maneuver. The tech mediated tourism has given rise to virtual guides that offer efficient solutions to travel as a whole. Contextualised as part of the study as per above methodology the review of literature is presented on various thematic considerations.

The persuasive collaboration between AI and the human element termed as 'Augmented Enterprise' (AI In Tourism: Revolutionizing Travel Experiences, 2024) is helping to create fast booking procedures, smart customer service portals and travel endorsements forecasted by algorithms. It is now possible to explore vast volumes of data through AI optimizing the latest products, services with enhanced features and best pricing for that particular time window. Travel operators and tourists can both make data-driven conclusions that boost income and reduce waste. The travel industry has multiple benefits from AI that can elevate the modern travel experience. Today, users can opt to interact with virtual travel assistants across platforms to guide them through reservation procedures, cancellations and grievances. Popular travel websites are today using AI powered chatbots to facilitate information that is reliable. These chatbots can prove to be contextually trained and can also process verbal challenges. They are constantly improving with an increased amount of trust by users on a platform by providing empathetic answers (Kaur et al., 2024).

Major travel platforms such as Make My Trip are increasingly integrating generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including voice assistants capable of engaging users in regional languages. A central functionality of these AI-powered chatbots lies in their ability to generate content summaries, enabling users to efficiently scan and compare flight and hotel options based on discounts, user experiences, and other personalized criteria. Furthermore, speech-to-text models developed by Google contribute to a more inclusive and regionally adaptive search experience. Rahul Kumar- a travel entrepreneur and founder of travel and wellness experiences in India and abroad mentions that planning a trip to Gadagushaini in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh from any Indian metro city would involve logging on to

multiple aggregators (R. Kumar, personal communication, April 20, 2025) for flights to Delhi, Chandigarh or Himachal Pradesh. Next, one had to work out local travel from the airport to the destination. Once this was fixed, one could move to planning a day-to-day itinerary. In case anything goes amiss – for example unexpected bad weather, replanning would take a toll on precious time and money. Today, the same can be reviewed and managed with a few clicks. Recent AI models can now access larger datasets of flight prices and scan hotel reviews along with environmental metrics while offering substitutes in scenarios of last-minute changing schedules (Mohit et al., 2025).

Airlines such as IndiGo have adopted chatbot systems powered by large language models that use Chat GPT, to enhance user interaction. IndiGo's "6E Skai" multilingual assistant is capable of conversing in ten languages, facilitating tasks such as seat selection, the application of promotional codes, the addition of ancillary services, and addressing frequently asked questions (IndiGo Launches 6ESKAI on WhatsApp: Seamless Solutions, Now at Your Fingertips! 2024, p. 1). These advancements have significantly improved the online booking process by fostering a more seamless, personalized, and user-friendly experience (Tsymbal, 2025). As a result, such technologies are not only increasing conversion rates and operational efficiency but are also becoming essential for the continued evolution of the travel industry.

4. AI in Action: Decoding the autonomy of Digital Ecosystems

Trip planning now comprises machine learning (ML) to address customer wish lists along with natural language processing (NLP) and an analysis of real time figures. This contributes in developing services and experiences near search related destinations that can be endorsed. These AI savvy platforms are operational to offer a multiplicity of budget options and can also modify the search in case of varying travel situations. The above has a direct impact on travel efficiency as AI can cartel real time updates from different sources and services like flights, stays and local experiences for a combined output. However, this real time compliance comes with questions of data accuracy and the credibility of integrated information through multiple channels. Kshitij Saxena is a former software engineer passionate for adventure riding and runs a popular social media handle called Motorbike Tales on Instagram and YouTube. Kshitij in his personal interview with the researcher mentions that "the traveler's persona is now becoming more sophisticated" (K. Saxena, personal communication, April 25, 2025) with a more sensitive outlook towards travel needs and demands. Travel forums must now create more designated alternatives and permutations for a changing travel mindset. He further reiterates that emerging travel destinations create new travel functionalities and exposure to local cultures. As in the case of Ladakh the traveler cannot fully rely on AI systems as there can be issues of mobile network coverage or power outages that may result in spontaneous changes to the itinerary.

As international travel trends seep into domestic domains through social media trends, a certain reform in the domestic travel industry is evident with users wanting to adopt a digital advance to travel planning. Static repositories like websites or blogs are now turning into active, smart systems like apps that cater to navigation and weather-related information. With ML and AI both converging into an efficient system, travellers can today minimize health risks by opting for services that offer prospects for custom-made healthcare in travel (Dadhirao et al., 2025). Personalized suggestions are popular with Chat GPT searches. Rahul recommends using Chat GPT to suggest nearby attractions, cafes and restaurants, tourist spots that are either most visited in recent times or isolated, based on the location and preferences of the user. He mentions there are GPTs that can scan your google map pins and history to suggest new locations that match your past choices.

Rahul mentions that when travelling in a group, AI based tools enable any member to suggest or alter travel decisions like seats or rooms. Expenses can be tracked transparently and payments can be made on a real time basis while travelling. He further suggests using trending apps like Splitwise to map group expenses on trips. The app helps in settling expenses while tracking cash payments as well as digital payments made by users. It helps in streamlining the expenses and splitting the bills by managing shared expenses through a free subscription. Rahul elaborates that such apps have been fairly useful to collect expenses incurred as events, travel costs, or shared meals. The systems and applications available today learn to perform more accurate tasks and adapt to personalized needs of individual travellers. Most importantly with the use of apps like Trip It, real time updates like flight delays or cab details along with alternatives can be discussed while maintaining sensitive individual data privacy.

5. Front Camera Forest Bathing: Re-examining the therapy of stillness

Vloggers today can influence destination choices or push market trends with coercive posts on travel that go viral (Pande & Bonnett, 2024). With the advent of micro-vlogs on Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, travellers are today coerced into travelling to trending destinations or events that are trending. A FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) not only influences travel destination choices but also travel content creation. This shift towards impulsive travelling and travel content creation is consequent to a compelling social media. Travellers today want to avoid the anxiety of missing events or living

the adventure of travel. Social media posts are often held accountable for the arousal of neo-emotional anxieties like FOMO. The urge to travel and also record it is omnipresent. Travelers are now looking to travel to offbeat locations popularized by Instagram trends shunning the typical touristy locations of yesteryears. Short videos have become the order of the day to seek information on destinations in less time. Reels have given travel information a make-over when compared to traditional blogs, websites or travelogues.

Action cameras like Insta 360, GoPro and DJI Pocket Osmo series have simplified the way users hold and record action while travelling. Features like horizon steady, pure video for night recording, subject tracking enable the creators to film solo travel with ease. Most travel filming gear is now powered by applications that have drag and drop interface for a faster and seamless edit. There are templates that are regularly updated with innovative transitions and effects to add creativity for an amateur in video making. Drones have changed the way locations are established. With AI enabled features drones can today capture shots that are extremely difficult to create with traditional equipment (Bonatti et al., 2020). Nano drones like DJI Mini and DJI Neo that fall under the 250 grams category can autonomously create stunning visuals that once needed professional expertise (Kusuma and Azad, 2025). The evolution of gimbals has changed how users capture movement by stabilizing shots for a cinematic experience.

Living in the cities calls for a digital detox with an increasing use of electronic devices that are often linked to physical and mental health issues (Afif & M, 2023b). This is becoming a strong reason to go back to nature in the form of forest bathing or "shinrin-yoku"- a popular Japanese concept. The activity of immersing yourself in a forest environment has proven to enhance physical and mental well-being. Overshadowed by the idea of ecotourism, this nature excursion is now also prone to narcissistic content creation. There is a rising amount of stress and illness that is being connected to endless screen time thanks to social media addiction (Adili, 2011). The act of content creation becomes a roadblock to the therapeutic approach of spending time in nature to restore mental and physical clarity (Afif & M, 2023c).

Sumit through his YouTube channel Ek Kadam (One Step) describes that the experience of sight, sound and texture cannot be replaced by smartphones as of now. He mentions that a repeated and deliberate act of putting away devices can uncover an unfiltered experience in nature. Although AI is capable of creating surreal images, it is still far from creating an experience that is real and produces a calming effect for the human mind. Instagram is trending with Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) videos, a term that originated in 2010. ASMR as a reflex response to a trigger like a visual or a sound is very close to what one experiences in a natural environment. One can experience the same in the rustling of tree leaves or events as simple as rain with water droplets falling on a surface leaving a meditative state of mind for the seeker. Sumit rejects the idea of equating AI simulation with breathing the scent of the natural world or soaking your feet in the running water of a mountain stream while travelling. He asserts the need to investigate whether AI can produce psychological healing experiences to travel. Research shows that cognitive experience of physical travel has a positive effect on the quality of life (Hong, 2023b).

6. Been there, Brought that: Technology Induced Travel Commodification

Kshitij Saxena states that AI will not only augment safety measures of motorcyclists but also drastically change the wholesome riding experience. He mentions the importance of riding gear and the inclusion of AI enabled smart clothing as a boon for riders. Smart clothing can help monitor the rider's body temperature especially in extreme conditions like Ladakh and Spiti. "While in the Himalayas, the rider is exposed to extreme temperatures apart from dirt and grime", says Kshitij. He mentions that online forums highlight future additions to these smart suits that can track heart rates and hydration levels, triggering alerts in situations where the above move beyond set parameters as per outdoor environment. Action cameras mounted on helmets can help document the surroundings in real time using AI to update road conditions for other travellers. Dynamic route optimizations using Google Maps is a rampant practice as travellers plan their trajectories considering potential delays, diversions or traffic congestion. Traffic flow maps can be generated by leveraging data and algorithms from diverse sources like smartphone GPS and traffic sensors. Sunil Gupta in his post on the IBM Community talks about the adrenaline rush of riding, placing AI as a game changer for the commercial riding industry (How AI Is Transforming Riding Experience and Safety? 2023). He stresses upon the substantial improvements in AI powered systems that will cater to minimizing human errors while riding. He further explains minimizing rider fatigue with the use of Adaptive Cruise Control, that can help regulate the vehicle speed maintaining a safe distance amid other vehicles.

This change has an additional cost to it. Sumit Kumar Yadav observes that "it also induces an obsessive-compulsive buying behavior among tourists" (S. Yadav, personal communication, April 14, 2025). With added gear come additional components. As a travel photographer Sumit asserts that cameras need cables, chargers and cards along with mounts and storage necessities. The same applies to other travel infrastructure. He also refers to Vlog making as identity construction that requires the creator to look good, which in turn promotes fast fashion,

supplementary baggage and influences buying behavior. Internet users follow social media handles of travel influencers due to their style of story-telling and overall appearance, not purely due to a single vlog on a location of interest.

Rahul Kumar adds by saying that the experience of being in the mountains is changing because of the manner in which travellers treat them. Covid has a role to play in this jeopardy of mountain travel up to an extent, social media plays a significant role in snowballing travel as an act of public display. Due to the growing frequency of travel, remote trails are now congested with tourists who showcase more demands than responsibility. Travellers aided with technology anticipate an environment of instant gratification while being on a trail. Over years, offbeat travel experiences have evolved in many ways. Temperature control clothing merchandise and compact travel furniture like camping utilities makes mobility in the mountains more accessible. But parallel to these tech-aids are anticipations of comfort, convenience and even entertainment in the wilderness. With smart technology at their hands, tourists often reach destinations without preparation assuming technology to offer last minute adjustments in itineraries with facilities that can seem impractical in the real world. Self-sufficiency here takes a backseat, which was once a core aspect of travelling.

Urban tourists are now traversing remote areas with expectations of an established infrastructure. Rahul points out that modern travelers want these faraway hinterlands to offer comforts that are not a way of life for these locations. Travelers leave behind trash trails that can degrade the essence of these locations. The frequency of modern travel brings along reactive risks to traditional and slow travel (Yadav et al., 2025). It is important to notice how human behavior translates into action while travelling. The environments of being at home or driving in a car can seldom match the connection felt on a motorbike or a hike. It is the cold air and how it makes you feel while riding through the countryside that shapes the experience, says Kshitij. AI cannot match these experiences. A certain imbalance is created that keeps one getting back to the real.

7. Technological Intrusion: Investigations and Results

Experiments with smart phones and action cameras by the author to create short videos in outdoor environments concluded that contemporary technology is an asset in content creation. However, the act of content creation, its distribution and consumption are algorithmic to more content creation. This can deviate the traveler towards creating an interpretation of the location that favours a response from social media rather than the plain and unique character of the place. A continuous image making through the lens of instilled wanderlust may not be an honest interaction with the destination. Numerous researches indicate how reels are promoting new destinations that often might not align with the taste and interest of the traveler. False narratives or viral hooks are created for captioning the videos. This may interfere with the matching of a location with individual personalities.

Tour operators quote that the wilderness is often unpredictable in terms of events and schedules apart from weather. Travellers are often stuck with no internet connectivity and a realization that travel cannot be equated with the comfort of the living room or city life. This shift can be seen at campsites where travelling can be defined as adjusting to the external environment. However, an expectation of charging ports for multiple devices, electric blankets, foldable camping furniture is a gift of impulsive buying behavior triggered by social media. Localized data for secluded locations like Gadagushaini is yet to be mapped in detail, the same can be widely seen for commercial locations like Shimla and Manali that exist in the same state of Himachal Pradesh. AI tools also need more data from travellers to develop relevant cross-cultural information. The use of progressive Large Language Models (LLM) can facilitate sentiment analysis and user profiling sourced from social media user-generated content and geolocation data (Lin, 2024). Online searches-for example “nightlife hotspots” or “quiet beaches” and similar prompts can be collated into refined trip recommendations.

Travel profiles generated through smart search engines can address budget constraints. Real time information processing reduces the need for manual research. Over tourism can be addressed with collaborative travel insights and cost-sharing modules (Neshat et al., 2021b). Campaigns for responsible tourism can be integrated in planning networks through a digital travel community model building. But there is always a chance of user data breach, in terms of identity theft and financial frauds. Most AI based apps require high-speed internet connectivity that is difficult in remote areas therefore restricting access to a larger audience. Today, tourists from an urban setting want to escape the rush and also dwell in spontaneity while enjoying the fresh air. Itineraries with lower carbon footprints and higher interaction with local communities are preferred. An insensitive environmental stress can be met with balanced tourism. Underreported locations need careful partnerships of locals and tourists to help in maintaining ecological balance.

8. Conclusion

AI is on the verge of revolutionizing travel; however vast data sets and algorithms are required especially for remote locations. This will certainly empower travelers with no local familiarity to approach curated routes and destinations. A holistic experience in travel is when the

location bears no remorse of the travelers visit. The very essence of travel today is to explore cultures, cuisines and local intricacies along with monument and landscape beauty. But the increasing use of technology is surpassing the line of access to entirely change the travel experience. The spirit of travel, the purity of being in a location's aura and the essence of being a guest, a visitor must not be hindered by a consuming technology. Inclusive design and continued innovation in the travel sector must enhance travel rather than overshadowing the essence of travel itself. The findings of the study suggest that AI has empowered content creators in capturing immersive narratives. However, the findings also indicate a notable reluctance by travel curators citing an imbalance of digital footprint on the spirit of travel. There is no comparison between a surreal natural experience and the same being watched on a smartphone screen or in the present case, created by AI generative fill.

The real challenge is to go beyond green rhetoric. Sustainable practices have to go to the last mile into camping etiquette, mindful local travel and tracing real carbon footprint. Google Street View Images can be integrated with AI driven analytics to overlay virtual tours that tourists can access before planning a trip. Innovative ideas like use of Virtual Reality headsets to explore locations with difficulty in access by specially abled, senior citizens or in the case of a large gathering can be utilised. Thus, by pre-exploring such neighbourhoods, feedback loops can be implemented across a community of travellers. This online community forming and exchange can help address issues of waste management, parking issues in narrow lanes especially in remote mountain neighbourhoods like Gadagushaini or more recently in the case of Maha Kumbh. Today users can like or dislike suggestions, prompting chat bots to gather substantial data on user preferences of local cuisine, lodging options. There are concerns of introducing such an interface with a need to validate its contextual awareness. By addressing niche, user-specific queries and facilitating a smooth end-to-end interaction, the growing role of AI in enhancing travel planning and customer engagement is exemplified. It must be used to answer the challenges of a booming travel culture which is orchestrated for economy, only after it satiates a deeper connection with the world we live in.

Conflict of Interest

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