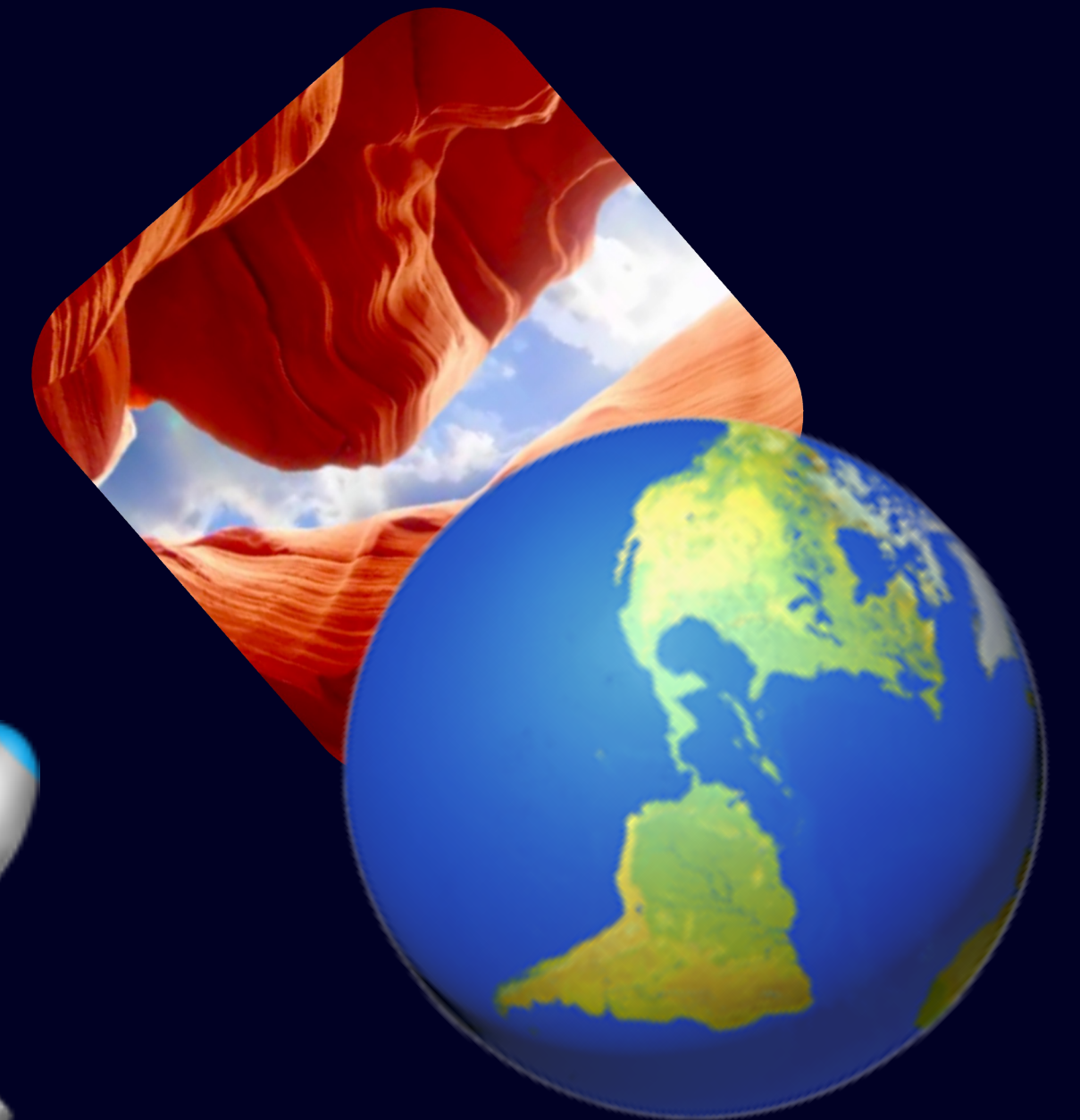
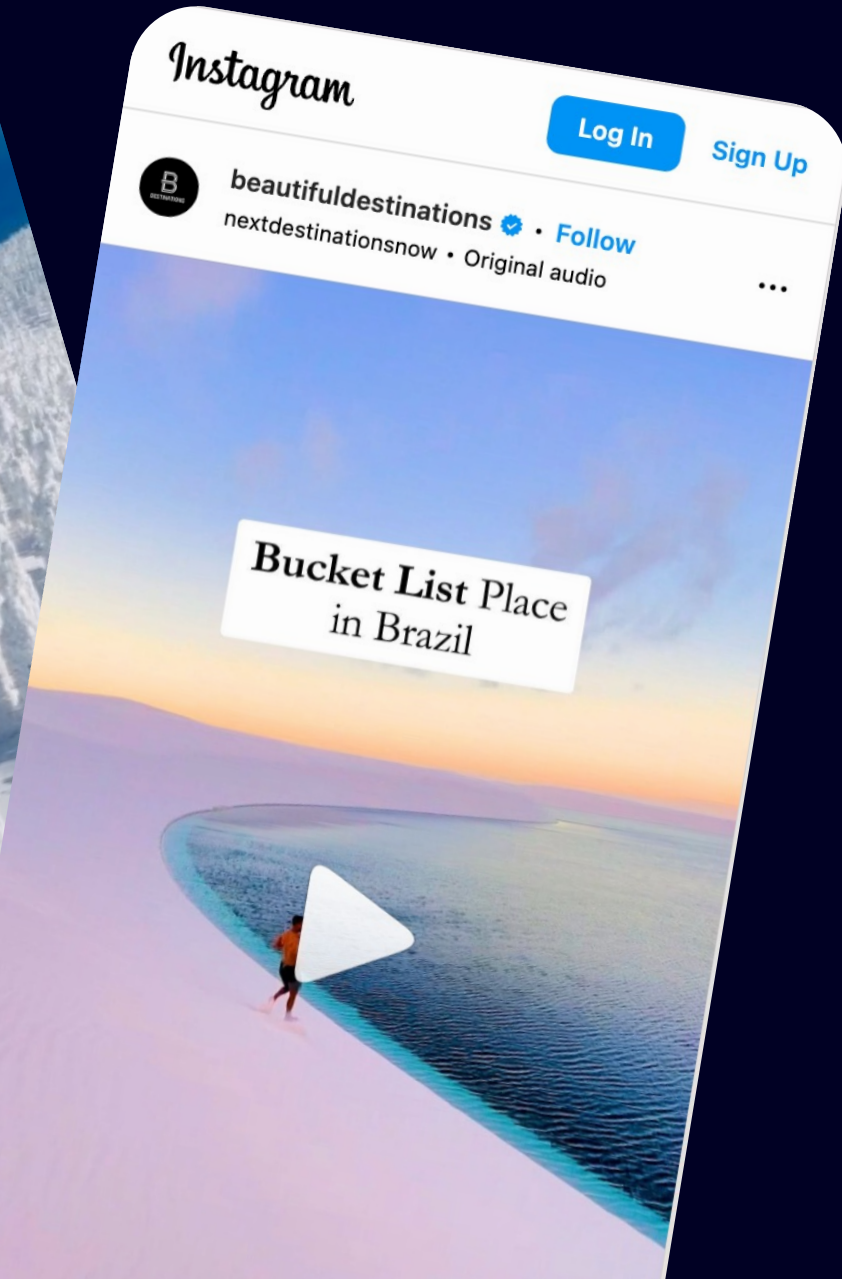
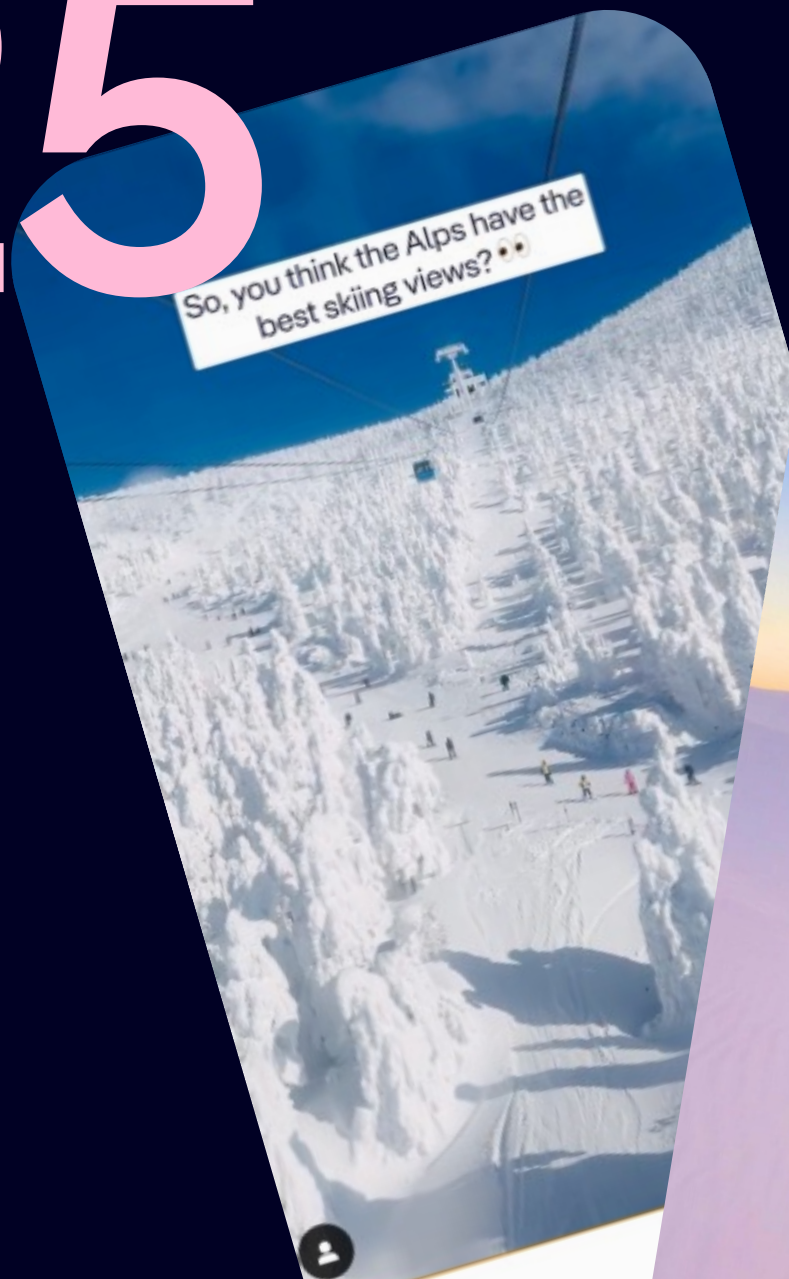
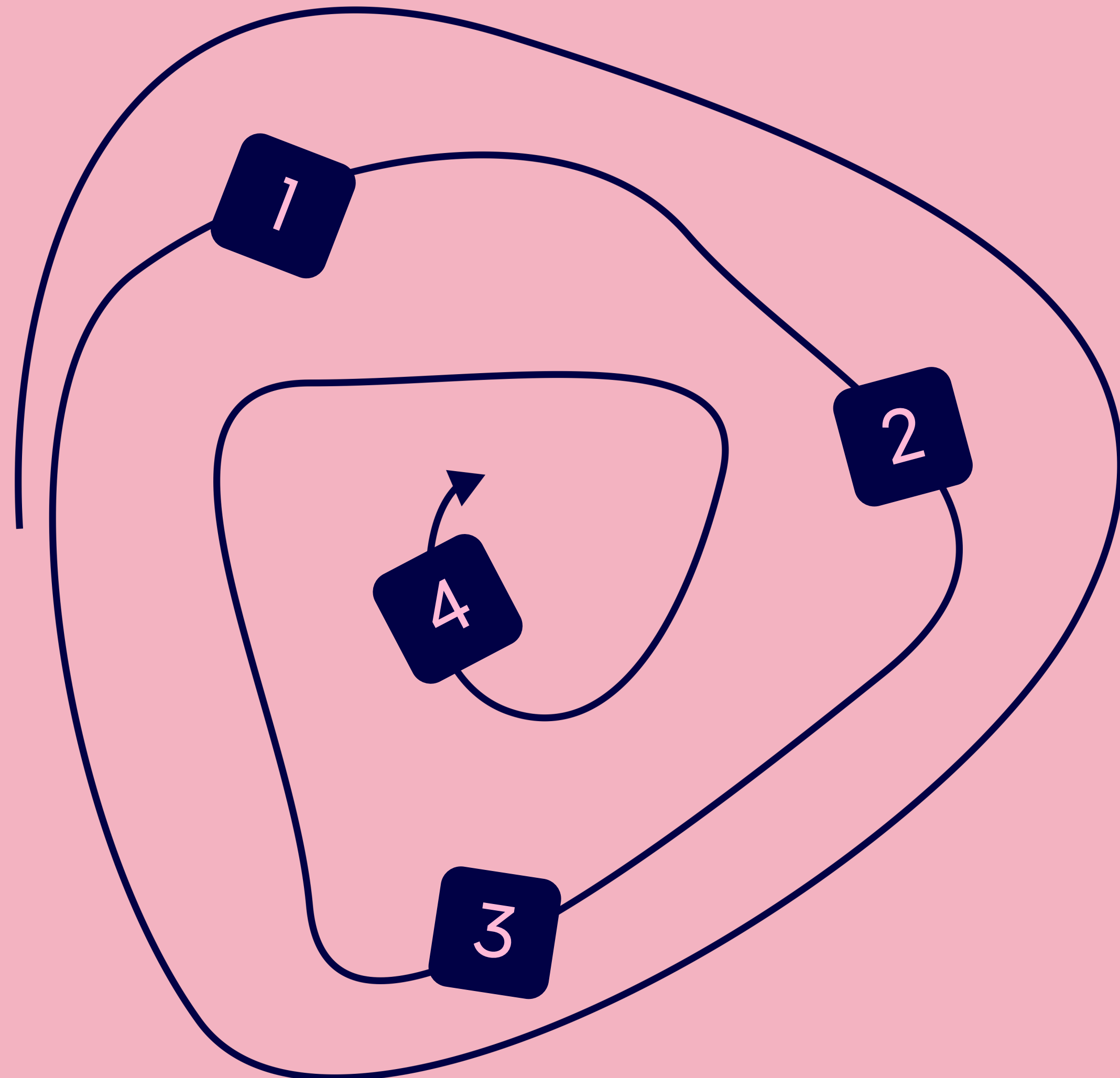


The State of Social Media in Travel

2025



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This Report

Social media has emerged not just as a backdrop for daily interactions and media consumption but as a cornerstone of the travel industry's digital evolution. Beautiful Destinations' inaugural trend report, "The State of Social Media in Travel," dives deep into this shift, illuminating the profound impact social platforms have on how people discover, plan, and increasingly, book their travel experiences.

Moreover, the travel industry stands at a pivotal crossroads, driven by the expansive influence of social media. This report, the first to offer such a granular examination within the industry, explores how platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and others have transcended

their roles as mere channels for content sharing, becoming integral to the travel decision-making process. From inspiration to the final booking, social media is reshaping the landscape in ways previously unimagined.

Jeremy Jauncey, Founder and CEO of Beautiful Destinations, encapsulates this shift, stating:

"The travel industry is moving into its third evolutionary stage—social commerce. This new era promises to redefine the very mechanisms through which destinations, hotels, airlines, activity providers, and cruise lines connect with their audiences."

Structured in four chapters, the report delves into the multifaceted role of social media across the travel sector:

Chapter 1: Examines social media's impact on travel inspiration, detailing how platforms have become the primary source for discovering where to travel.

Chapter 2: Explores how social media influences travel planning and booking, shifting the traditional pathways travelers take from interest to action.

Chapter 3: Introduces the emerging era of social commerce in travel, discussing how this new phase is set to revolutionize the industry.

Chapter 4: Outlines specific strategies that travel marketers should adopt to thrive in the unfolding social commerce and AI landscape.

Prepare to navigate through these transformative insights, designed to equip travel marketers and their brands with the knowledge and tools necessary for success in this dynamic digital frontier.

For further guidance, reach out to us at Beautiful Destinations.

The Transformative Power of Social Media in Travel



Three trends define the state of travel discovery

WHERE?

Travelers prefer social media over Google search & OTAs

Social Media

WHO?

Creators replace brands in inspiring travelers

Content Creators

HOW?

Short-form video dominates travel media consumption

Short-Form Video



The digital transformation of the travel industry has been a fascinating journey since the dawn of the internet. It all began with the rise of Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) like Expedia and Booking.com, which transitioned the industry from physical travel offices, analog guidebooks and catalogs to digital screens.

In recent years, another transformation has reshaped how we find and plan our travels: social media. Now, travelers aren't just consulting destination websites and OTAs for vacation ideas and booking. Instead, they're turning to social media—and they are doing so en masse.

Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, (and many more), propelled by a new generation of content creators building vibrant online communities, now dictate the ebb and flow of travel trends.

Our own Beautiful Destinations social media channels, with over 50 million

followers across platforms, are a driving force for this change, influencing where and how people travel.

This shift to social media isn't just changing where people look for travel inspiration; it's fundamentally altering the travel industry's foundation. We are witnessing a fundamentally different way to discover, plan, compare, and soon, book travel.

To describe the current transformation in travel discovery merely as the rise of social media oversimplifies a complex evolution. In reality, there are three closely intertwined forces reshaping how people plan and research their vacations and trips. These can be distinguished by shifts in WHERE travel inspiration occurs; WHO has become the trusted authority in guiding travel decisions; and HOW travel inspiration is conveyed to travelers online.

Let's delve into these "Three Qs" of online travel discovery in 2025 to fully understand the current transformation.



The landscape of how people search for and discover travel opportunities has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade. Since the early 2000s, aspiring travelers would usually start their journey with search engines like Google, travel blogs or OTA websites, seeking out interesting destination ideas.

However, the paradigm has shifted dramatically, with the majority of travel inspiration now occurring directly on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and Weibo.

In essence, social media has established itself as the leading resource for travel inspiration, a reality underscored by consistent findings across multiple reputable studies.

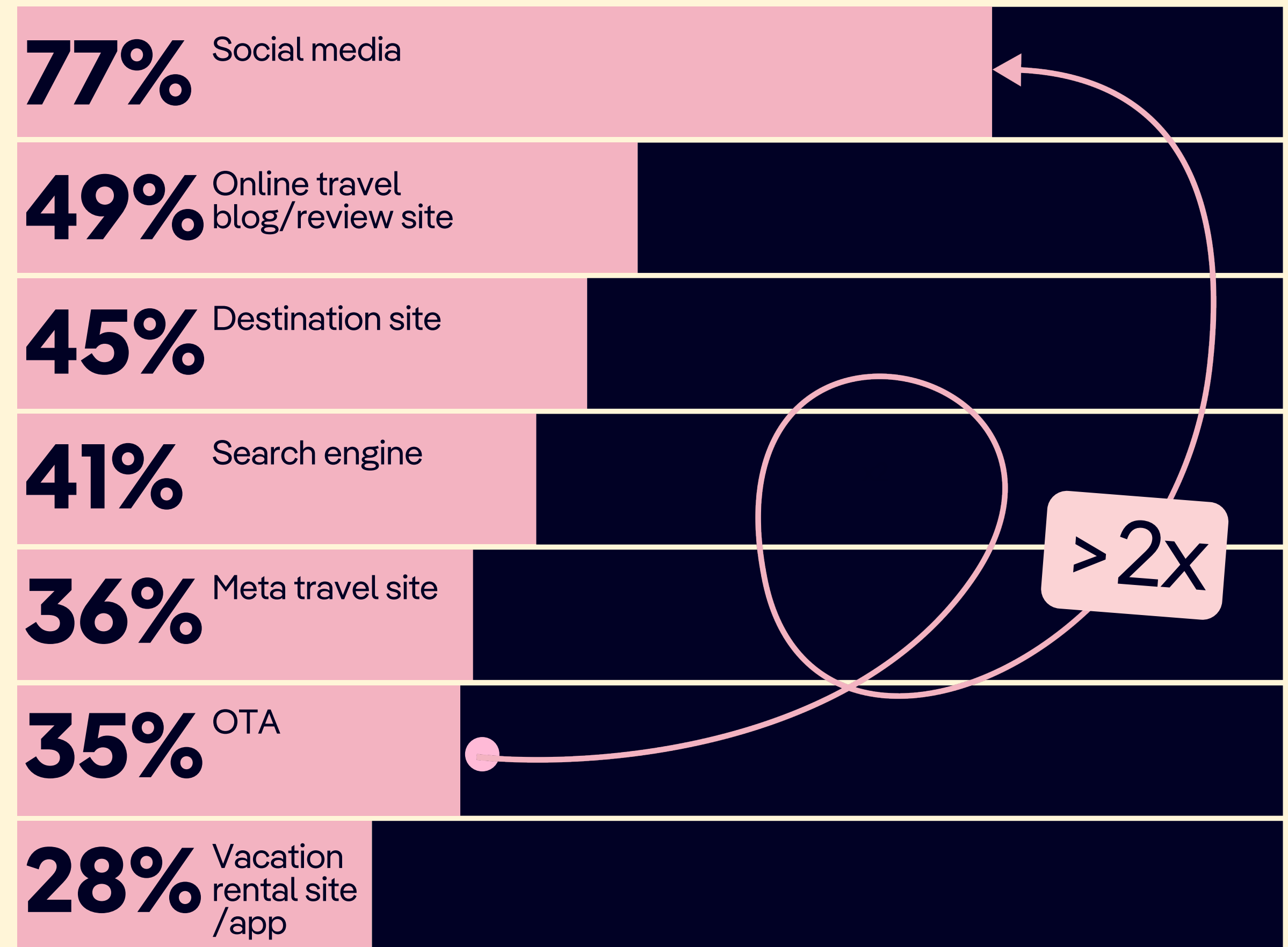
For instance, a travel study by Expedia Group, which gathered feedback from thousands of travelers across seven geographic markets, revealed that 77% of travelers consult at least one major social media platform when pondering travel plans.

This finding is echoed by the American Express Global Travel Trend Report, which highlights that 75% of respondents have been inspired to visit a specific destination through initial social media exposure.

Moreover, a detailed 2024 report from the travel-activity booking provider Klook disclosed that up to 80% of travelers make booking decisions based on the inspiration and recommendations they discover on various social media platforms.

Social media has become the #1 resource for travel inspiration

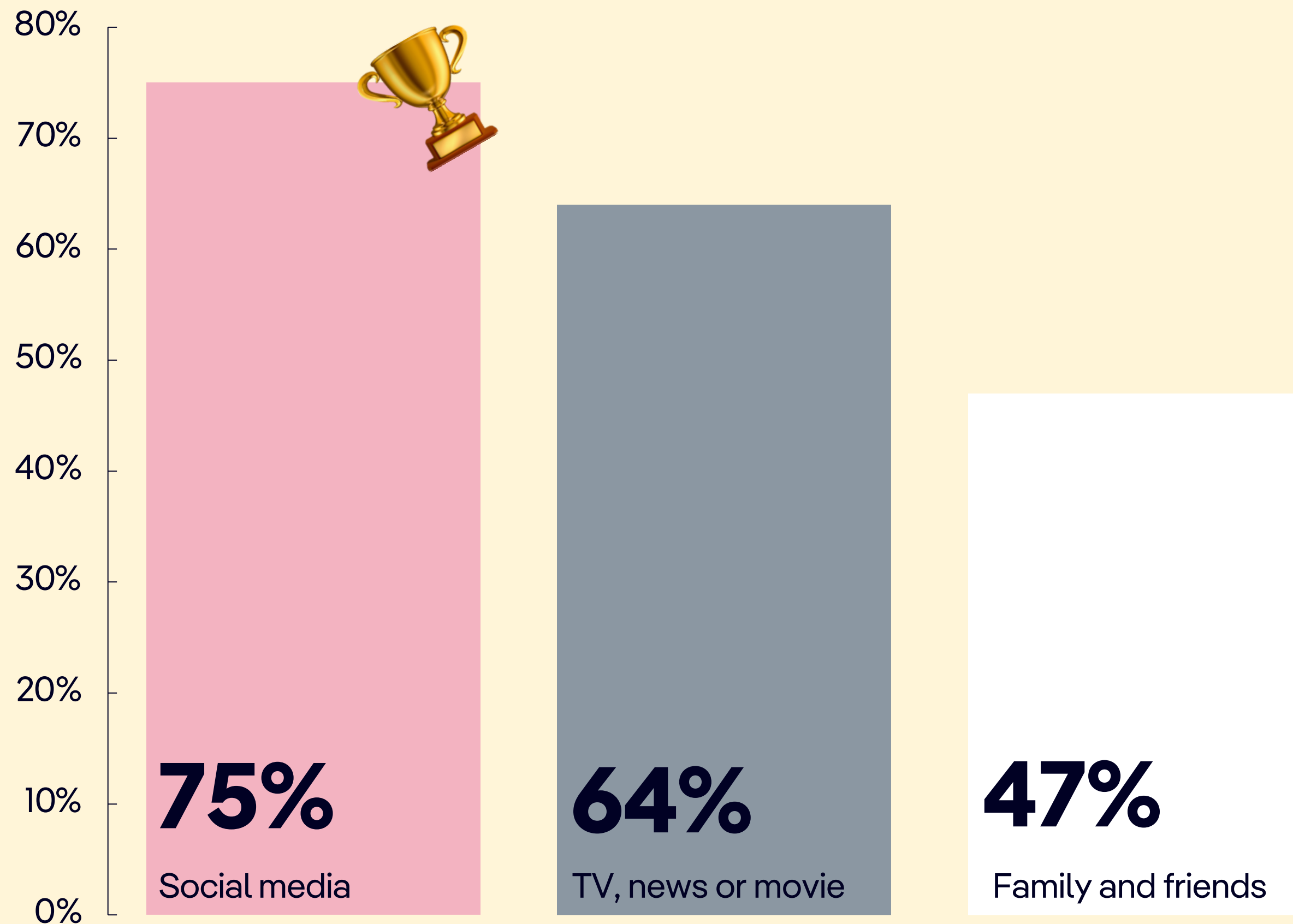
Share of travelers (in %) and their choices of channels for initial travel inspiration



Source: Expedia

Social media inspiration even trumps family & friends

Share of travelers (in %) who were influenced to travel to a destination by source



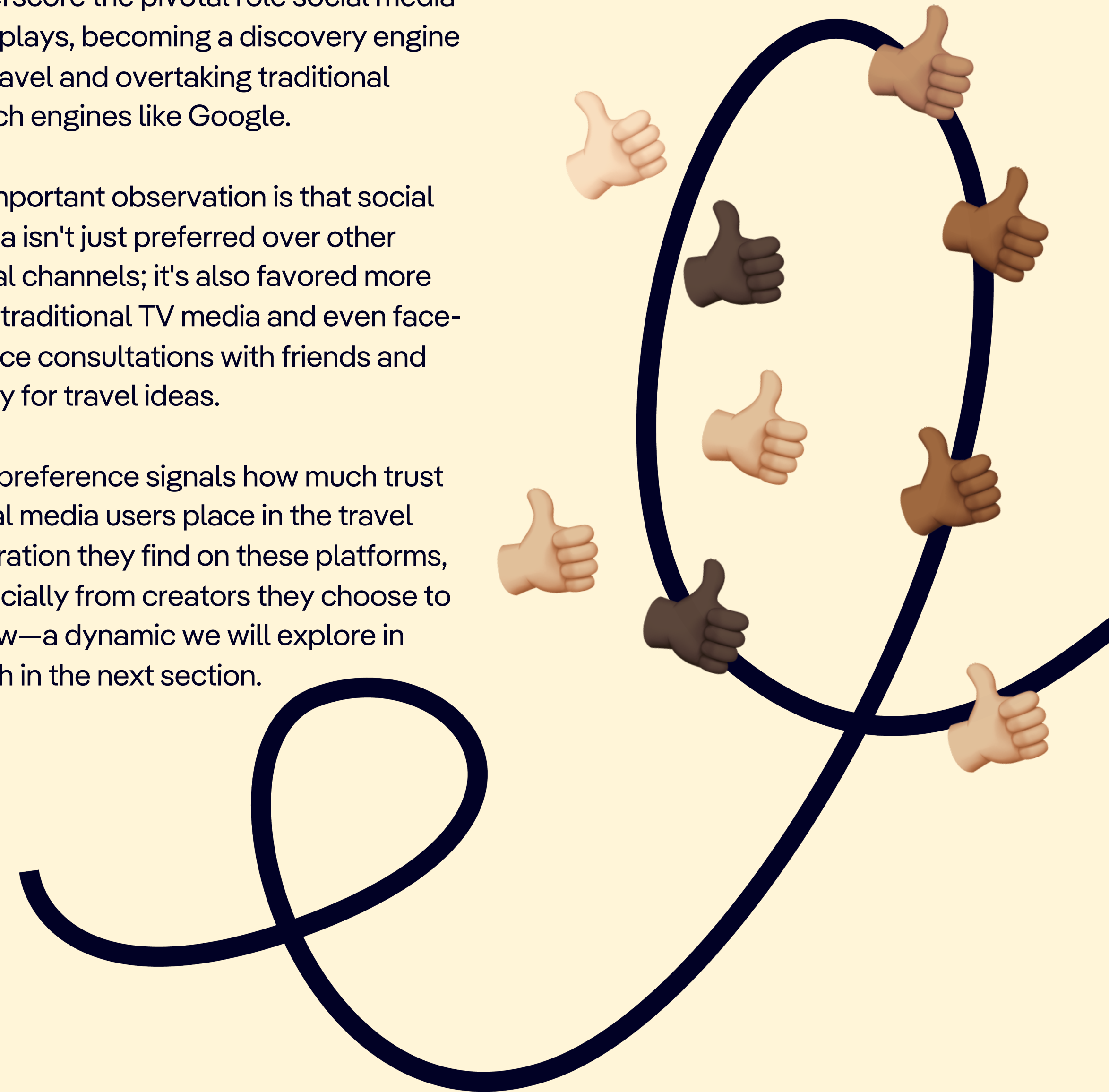
Source: American Express, Morning Consult



All these statistics collectively underscore the pivotal role social media now plays, becoming a discovery engine for travel and overtaking traditional search engines like Google.

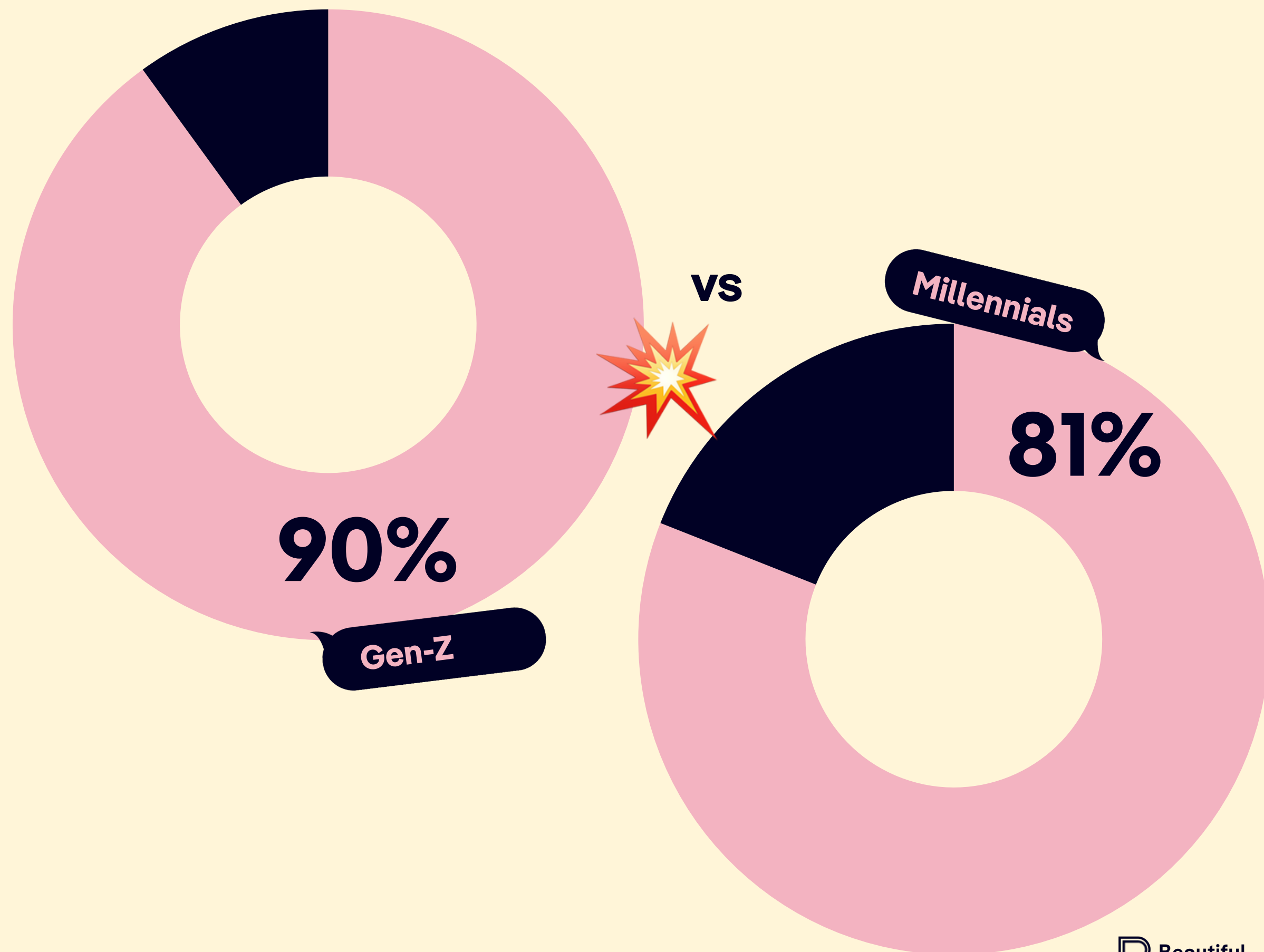
An important observation is that social media isn't just preferred over other digital channels; it's also favored more than traditional TV media and even face-to-face consultations with friends and family for travel ideas.

This preference signals how much trust social media users place in the travel inspiration they find on these platforms, especially from creators they choose to follow—a dynamic we will explore in depth in the next section.



Social Media First, not only for digital natives

Share of travelers (in the U.S.) using social media for travel inspiration



Source: Phocuswright, Expedia



This social-media-first mindset is not exclusively prevalent among the youngest travelers, such as Gen-Z digital natives who have never known a world without social media and smartphones.

Data from Phocuswright reveals that approximately **four out of five Millennials**—travelers born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s—utilize social media for travel inspiration as well. This figure is only about 10 percentage points lower than the 90% of Gen-Z who engage in similar behaviors.

This statistic effectively debunks the myth that social media's influence is confined to the newest generation of travelers. Millennials, who experienced the pre-digital era before the rise of mobile phones and social media, are also turning to these platforms for travel ideas. Notably, they tend to favor certain platforms, such as Facebook, which enjoys higher penetration among this demographic compared to others. The significance of this trend cannot be

overstated, especially considering that Millennials already represent the largest demographic in terms of travel expenditure; see the next page.

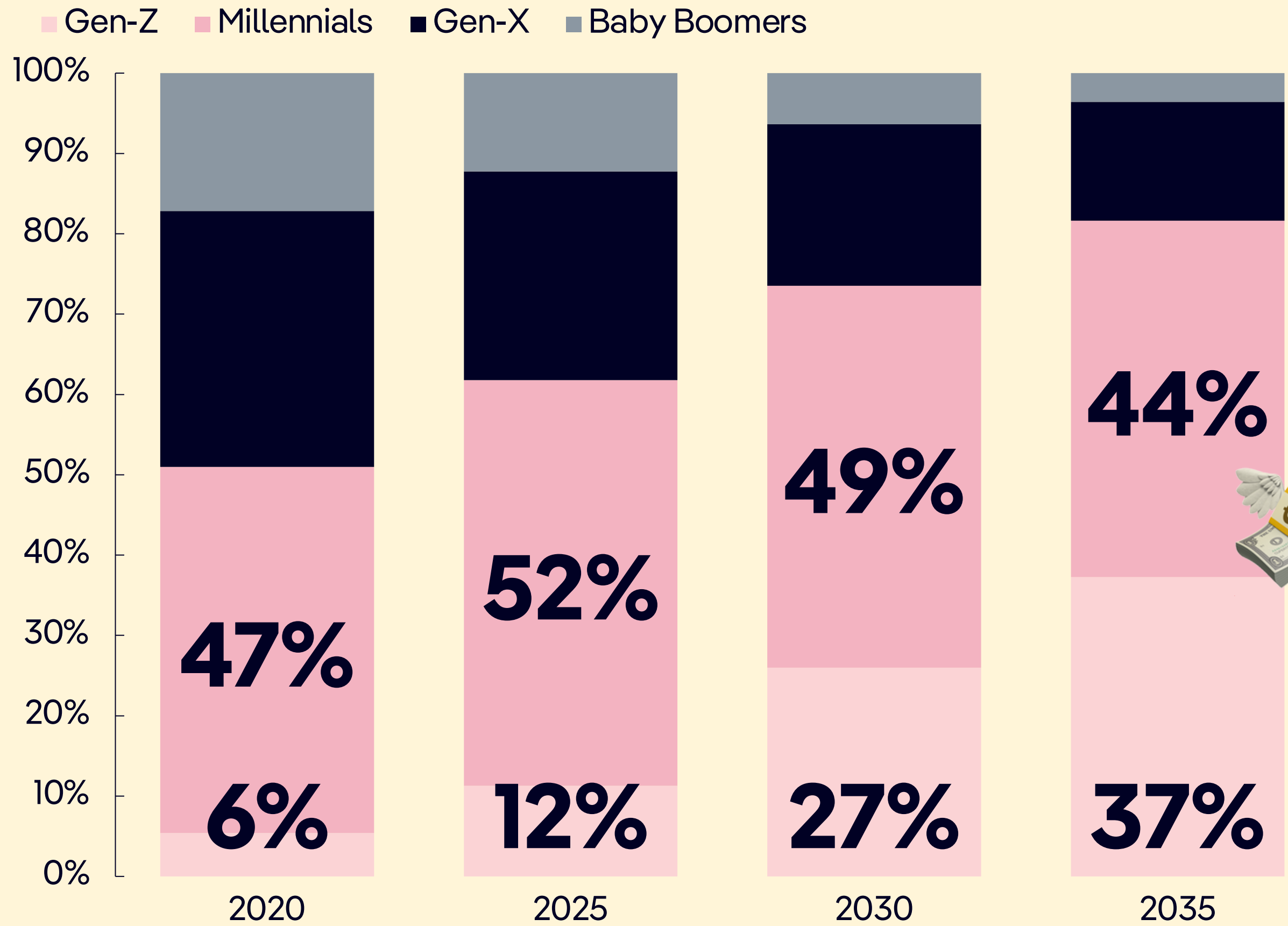
Looking 10 years into the future, Millennials and Gen-Z combined will account for roughly 80% of all travel spending power—a significant cohort with social media at the heart of their travel discovery habits.

Given these new realities, travel brands—including destinations, hotels, and airlines—must urgently recalibrate their marketing strategies to effectively reach travelers where they are most actively seeking inspiration: on social media platforms.

Despite its proven impact, social media often remains a secondary concern within the broader marketing strategies of many travel organizations. Brands that fail to prioritize this channel going forward risk not only reduced visibility but also diminished relevance among a rapidly evolving consumer base.

Millennials & Gen-Z: the biggest travel spenders

Estimated distribution of (airline) travel expenditures by generation, worldwide



Source: KPMG, Statista



In summary: the shift towards social media as the primary source of travel inspiration not only highlights changing consumer behaviors but also the evolving digital landscape of the travel industry.

As we delve deeper into the reasons behind this transition, it becomes clear that the appeal of social media for travel discovery lies in its ability to offer instant, visually striking, and uniquely creative content, making it a more dynamic and engaging source of inspiration than traditional methods. But who is creating this content? Let's explore this next.



“In our studies, something like almost 40 percent of young people, when they’re looking for a place for lunch, they don’t go to Google Maps or Search. They go to TikTok or Instagram.”
Prabhakar Raghavan - Senior Vice President at Google



As social media cements its status as the premier platform for travel discovery, even acknowledged by search giants like Google, there's been a notable shift in WHO influences travelers' decisions, particularly regarding their choice of destination.

A crucial aspect to grasp in this context is the inherent openness of most social media users seeking travel inspiration—they often don't have a predetermined destination in mind, making them highly susceptible to influence, as seen in the chart.

This receptiveness to new ideas finds a natural home on social media platforms,

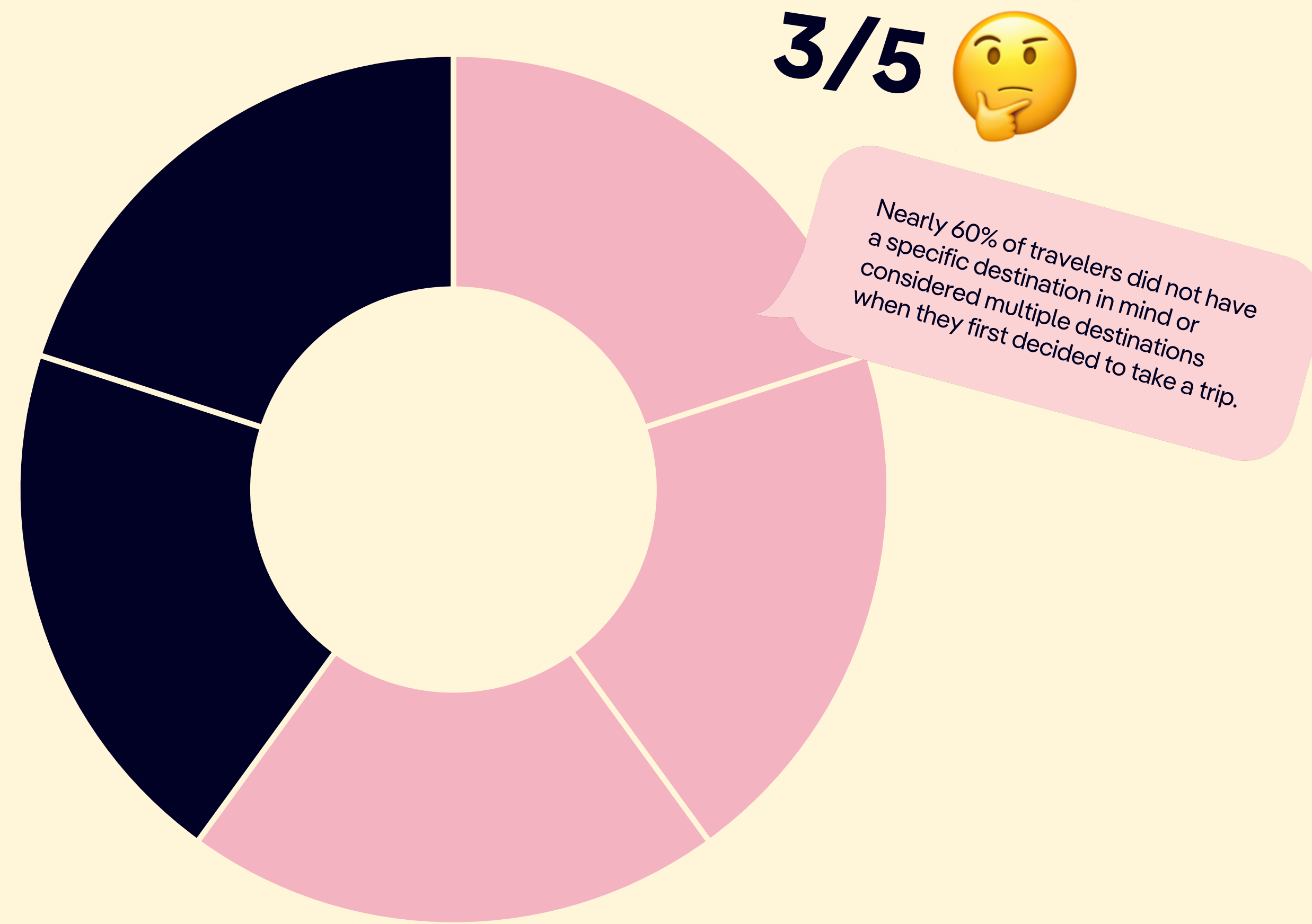
where visual content reigns supreme. Unlike Google's text-heavy search results (despite its increasing integration of images and videos), social media's visually-driven content much more effortlessly sparks people’s imaginations.

Another significant difference between search engines and social media is the latter's use of algorithmic learning to deliver personalized results to users.

This means individuals are exposed to content more closely aligned with their preferences, leading to a much more targeted and, consequently, more relevant travel discovery experience.

Travelers turn to travel creators for inspiration

Share of travelers (in %) with undetermined travel intentions



Source: Expedia

The impact of social media has led to a unique culture of discovery, fostering an openness among travelers to be inspired. This explains why travelers (particularly those from the U.S.) spend an average of 176 hours per year on social media seeking travel inspiration.

This brings an essential question: Who is currently providing the most meaningful content on social media for travelers? The answer lies with a new generation of content creators. These creators are not merely the masses of self-labelled “influencers” flooding upscale travel brands with promotional requests. Instead, they are ultra-creative, highly ambitious travel and video experts producing uniquely influential work, with platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as their stage.

To unlock the full potential of these creators, travel brands benefit most by working with strategic partners like Beautiful Destinations. With over a decade of experience in channeling creators’ expertise, we act as a bridge, translating long-term brand objectives

into actionable, platform-specific content strategies that drive business results. We don’t just know the best creators in the industry; we understand which of their unique skills best match each brand’s brief, guiding travel brands to maximize impact without sacrificing authenticity. Our operational expertise, data and deep creator network enable us to assemble the ideal creators for every campaign into small, agile teams, handling the entire spectrum of content creation from pre- to post-production.

Our success lies in an intimate understanding of how to craft the right content for specific platforms, thereby ensuring our partners’ business outcomes are achieved whilst creating beautiful, impactful marketing campaigns.

The versatility required across different digital channels and travel experiences underscores the quality of our creator network, from those specialized in underwater cinematography to experts in architecturally focused hotel photography, and everything in-between.

New-gen travel creators are multi-talented pros

Key characteristics of top content creators in BD's exclusive talent pool

Content Expertise



Filmmakers
Crafting cinematic, story-driven visuals

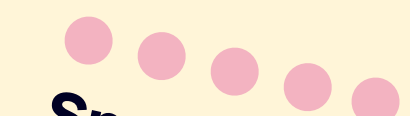


Social Shooters
Creating viral, mobile-optimized content



Photographers
Producing captivating images for digital and print

Execution Expertise



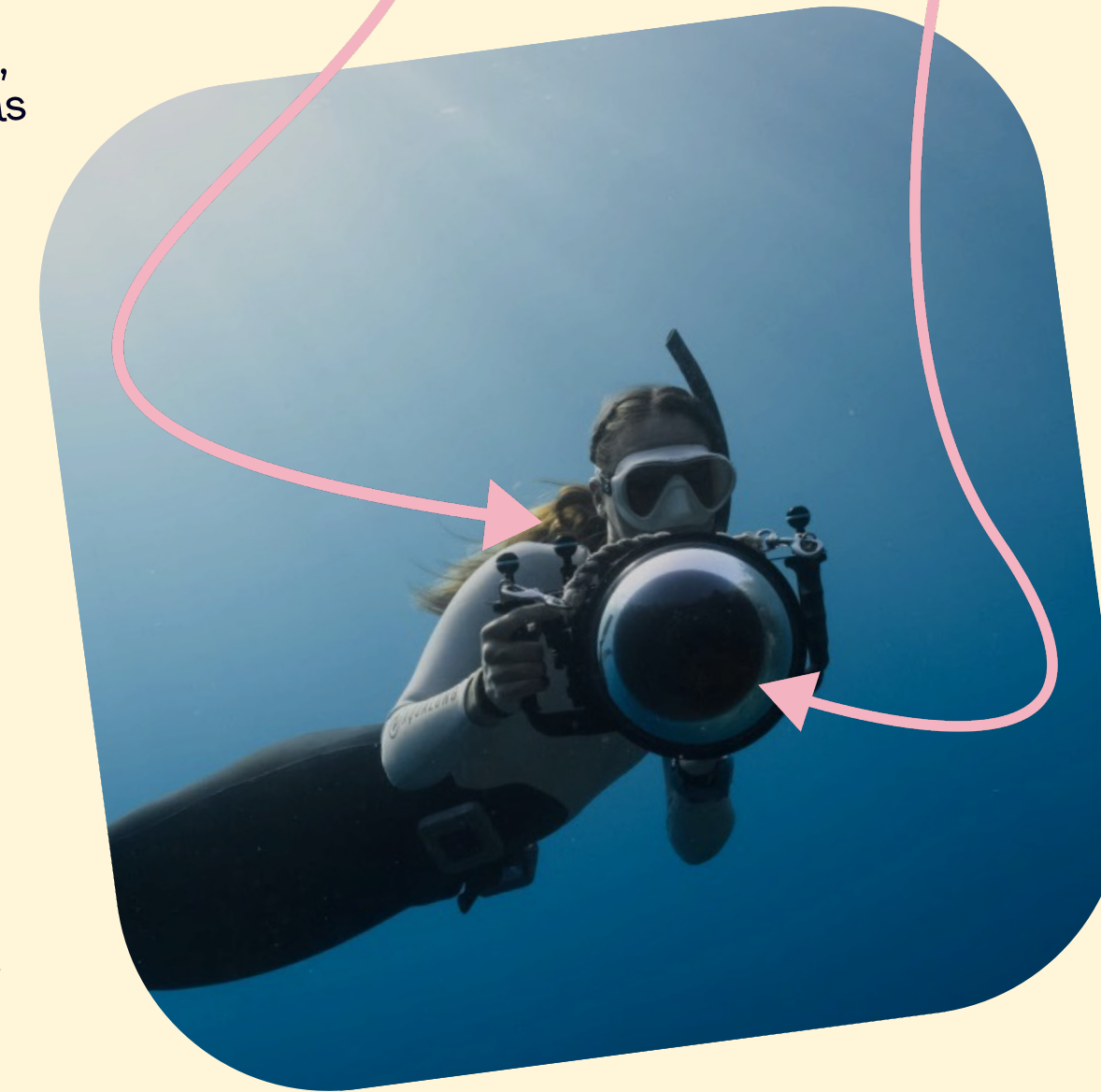
Speed
Rapid content creation, whatever the conditions



Scale
High volumes of content output for various platforms



Perspective
Unique views and narratives that resonate deeply



Source: Beautiful Destinations



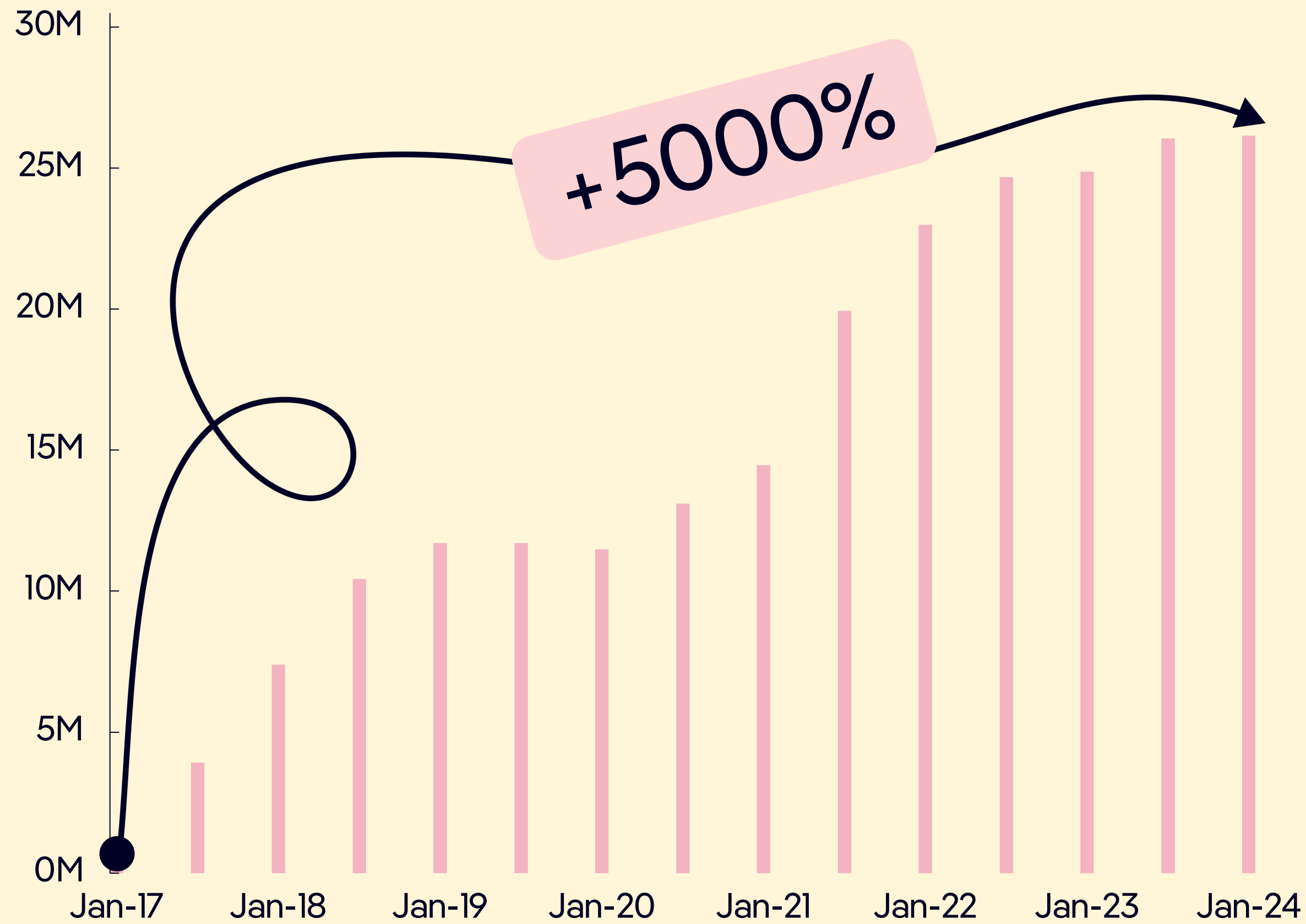
Jeremy Jauncey

Founder and CEO at
Beautiful Destinations

A new class of creators has emerged in the travel industry, transcending the boundaries of traditional creative and production agencies. With strategic partners like Beautiful Destinations, travel marketers can unlock the full potential of these creators, who leverage a deep understanding of digital platforms to deliver content that drives business results. Across YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and beyond, we create video-driven marketing campaigns, that inspire people to travel. This work influences all stages of the funnel, blending inspirational discovery content with itinerary planning and booking content for hotels and attractions. The superpower of our creator network lies in specificity—we create content tailored to each platform, speaking the language of our clients' audiences, and telling stories in visually stunning ways that today's travelers genuinely care about. As we navigate through 2025, the power dynamic in the travel industry is undeniably shifting to those who can master social-media-specific content creation. Those who fail to recognize and adapt to a world that needs faster, larger-scale, higher-quality content, at all times, and on all platforms, will inevitably be left behind.

BD has >50 million followers across our social channels

Total followers (in million) of Beautiful Destinations' Instagram account alone



Source: Beautiful Destinations

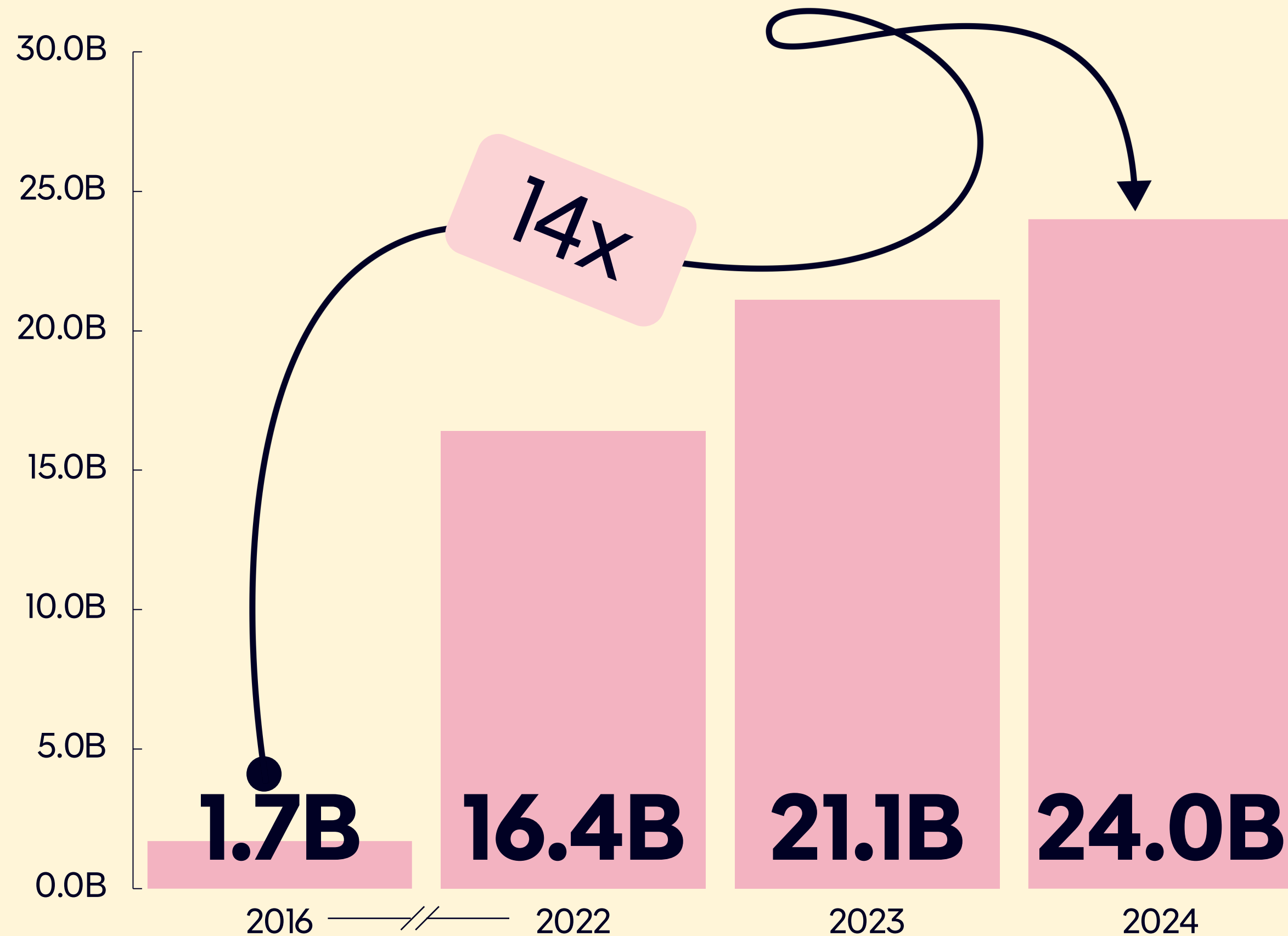


Speaking of the power of content, our own Beautiful Destinations social media channels exemplify this approach. We have seen exceptional growth over the last decade, now inspiring over 50 million people when they travel—without any investment in paid advertising. We have grown our audience solely by understanding and investing in world-class content.



The creator industry means big business

Projected market size of the content-creator marketing industry



Source: Influencer Marketing Hub



Given the allure of this new wave of travel content creators, their impact is nothing short of remarkable. YouGov statistics reveal that one in five people between the ages of 18 and 24 follow at least one travel creator, making them among the most influential figures online.

This evolution underscores a significant transformation: individual creators have not only replaced traditional travel brands as the primary source of travel discovery but have become influential brands in their own right.

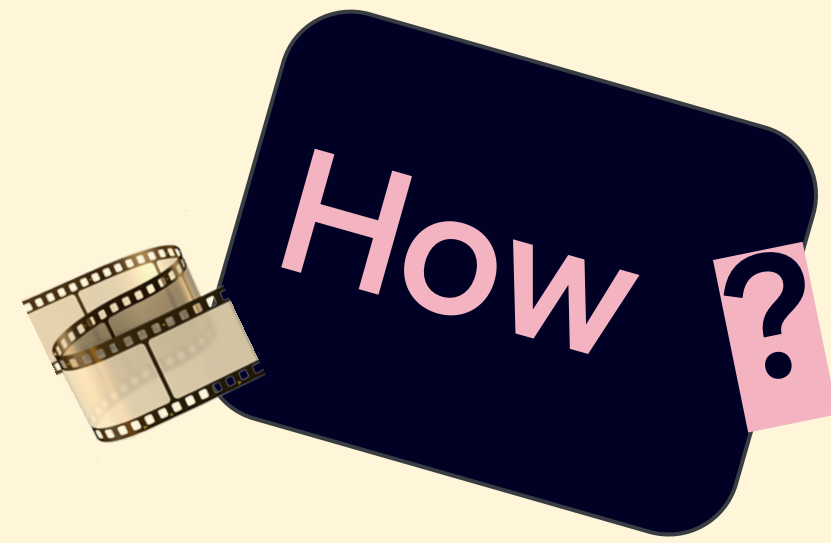
This trend has not gone unnoticed by the travel industry. An increasing number of travel brands, particularly hotel groups and travel destinations, are partnering with creators for their marketing campaigns, showcasing the rapid growth of the creator movement.

Projected to reach \$24 billion USD by year's end, the content creator market has ballooned to 14 times its 2016 size.

As a result, travel brands must embrace a significant mindset shift. The old model of communicating through brand-centric messages alone is no longer sufficient.

Today, a more personal and approachable strategy is essential, and this can be effectively achieved through integrating creators into your company's marketing mix.

For travel brands looking to elevate their social media presence and truly connect with their audience, understanding how best to make content with creators, tie their briefs to your business objectives and align them to your wider strategy, is crucial.



The pivot towards social media and the rapidly growing creator economy have significantly influenced how travel inspiration is cultivated and shared.

Central to this evolution is the meteoric rise of short-form video content, which lasts anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes.

Until recently, platforms like Instagram were dominated by image-based content. However, over the past few years, short-form videos have emerged as the predominant medium of user engagement.

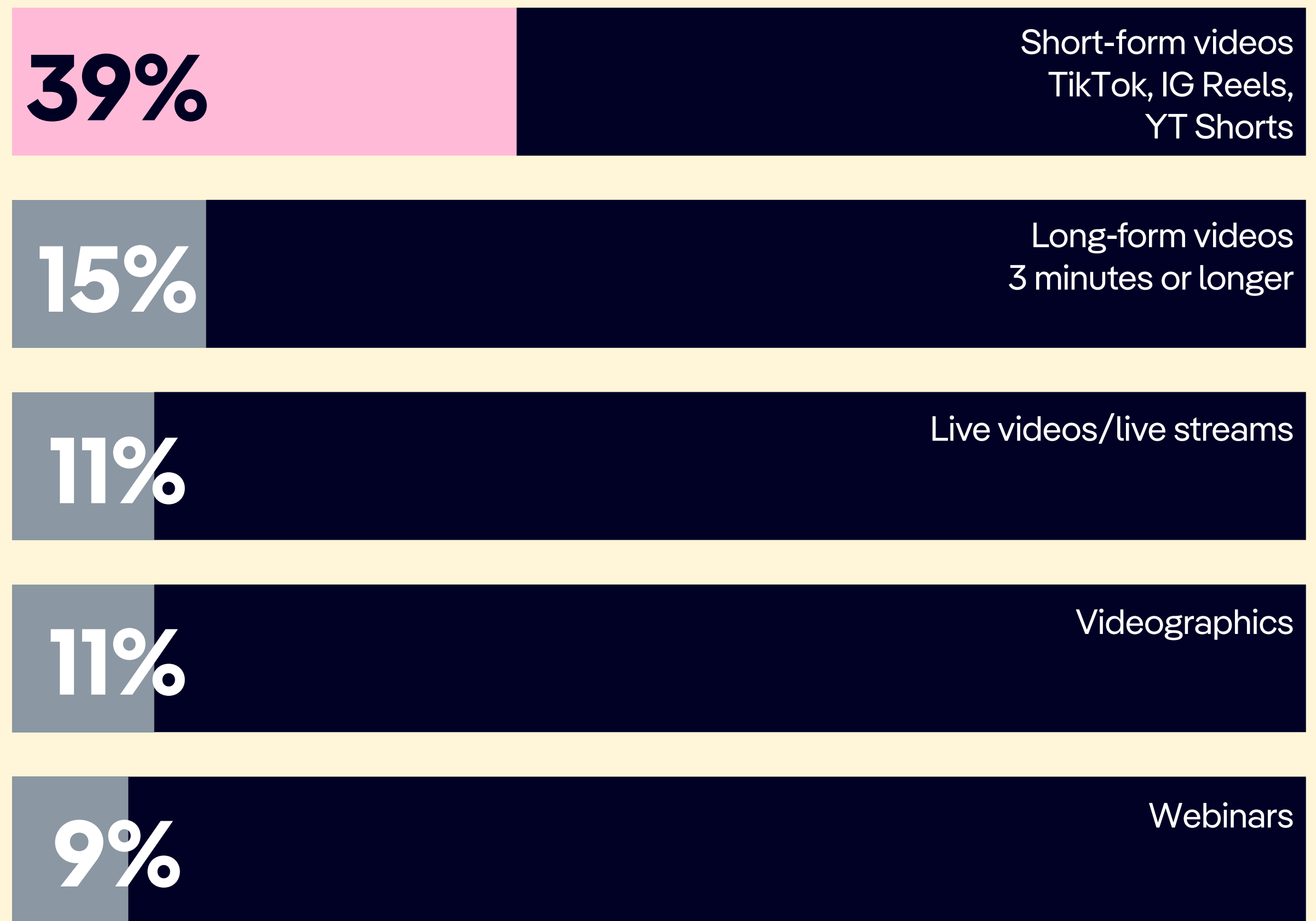
This shift has been facilitated by improved mobile bandwidth, allowing users to easily play video formats on their smartphones, and, more importantly, the format's capacity to

engage users in more immersive yet effortless ways. The allure of short-form videos lies not only in their compatibility with the shorter attention spans characteristic of today's social media users, which allows them to browse through hundreds of videos in a remarkably short time, but also in the medium's efficiency. Video content enables a denser delivery of information within a brief span, packing a multitude of messages, emotions, and insights into digestible snippets.

Additionally, the format allows creators to infuse significantly more personality into their content than static images allow, fostering a sense of connection and approachability. This added dimension of personal touch enhances its ability to engage and inspire travelers.

Short-form video content is transforming travel marketing

Survey among marketers: Which video format gets the most engagement?

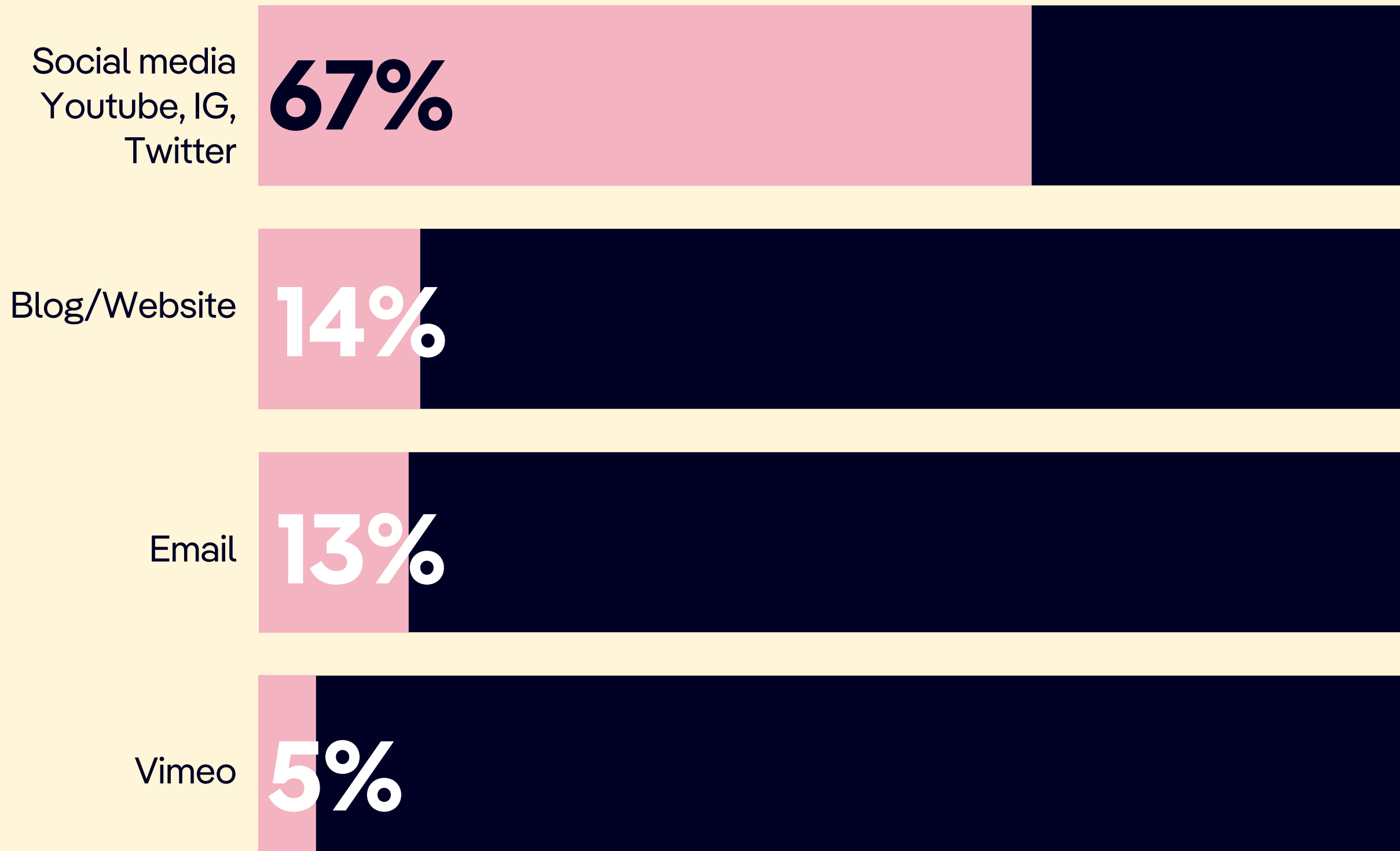


Source: HubSpot

Perfect fit: Short-form video meets social media

Survey among marketers:

“Which channel offers the biggest ROI when sharing marketing videos?”



Source: HubSpot



Given the impact and effectiveness of short-form videos, products such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts have surged in popularity in recent years, with their algorithms curating streams of short-form videos that align with users' specific interests.

This fusion of personalized entertainment and informative content meets the increasing demand among travelers for purposeful travel experiences and conscious decision-making, both in the planning stages and at the destination.

Short-form videos, with their multi-sensory storytelling approach, offer a compelling way to inform travelers, addressing their unique interests and preferences more effectively than traditional media.

The effectiveness of short-form video content isn't just anecdotal; it's also supported by data. Insights from HubSpot highlight that short-form videos boast the highest return on

investment of all video-based content formats, ranking as the premier format for lead generation.

Consequently, social media platforms are increasingly prioritizing short-form video content in their feeds, creating new avenues for travel inspiration.

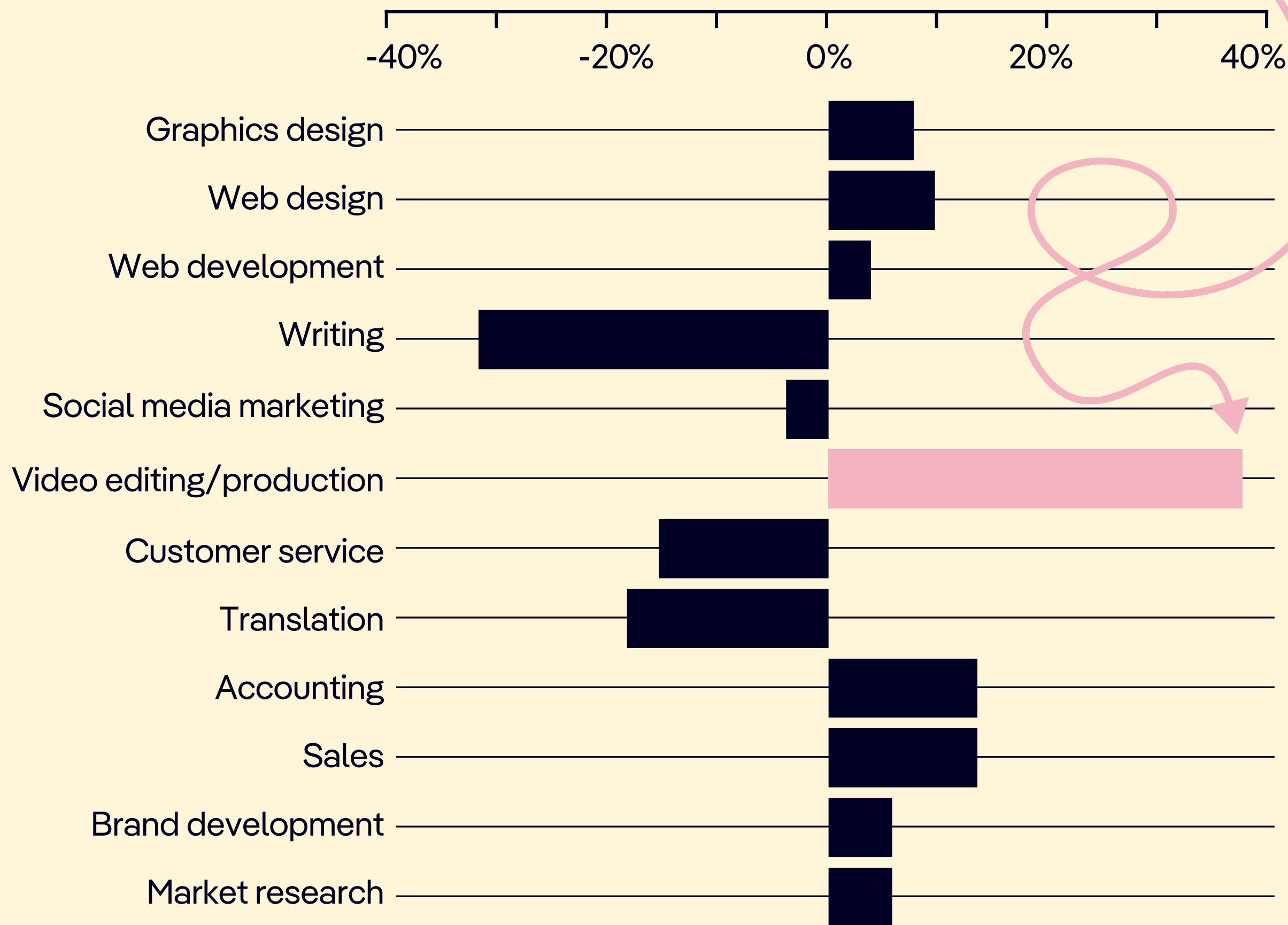
Through engaging narratives, breathtaking visuals, and succinct storytelling, short-form videos have emerged as a powerful tool in the travel industry's marketing arsenal, offering creators and brands alike the opportunity to captivate and influence the travel decisions of millions.

However, as the realization of the power of short-form video spreads, social media platforms are becoming increasingly saturated with this type of content. Going forward, quality will be the key factor that separates truly effective short-form videos from the rest, determining which content can genuinely engage and inspire travelers.

Videos are more popular than ever, despite GenAI



Change in number of Upwork jobs since ChatGPT was released



Last but not least, the appeal of short-form videos has also seen a boost from the rise of Generative AI, notably ChatGPT. How so?

With an increase in people creating and sharing text content automated by ChatGPT on social media, such as entire travel blogs and fake travel guides, videos have surged in value for their standout character and authentic touch—a direct result of human creation.

While this landscape may evolve with future advancements in AI video technologies like OpenAI's Sora, Meta's Movie Gen or Runway ML, currently, videos stand out for their authenticity and are more popular and relevant than ever.

Data supports this trend: an analysis of 5 million freelancing jobs on Upwork revealed that video editing and production jobs saw a 39% increase in 2024 compared to the year before

ChatGPT's rise in 2022, whereas writing jobs experienced a 33% decrease. The surging demand for video production and editing skills underscores the critical role of video content in today's digital age, highlighting its trustworthiness and appeal in a market increasingly oversaturated by AI-generated text.

Given the current AI trajectory, it is essential for travel brands to double down on creating high-quality video content to distinguish themselves from the competition. Specific and authentic videos are content formats that, in the near to medium term, cannot be replicated by Generative AI, offering a solid foundation for truly unique marketing content.

As video continues to dominate in engagement and effectiveness, investing in top-notch video production capabilities will prove crucial for brands aiming to captivate and convert today's discerning travelers.

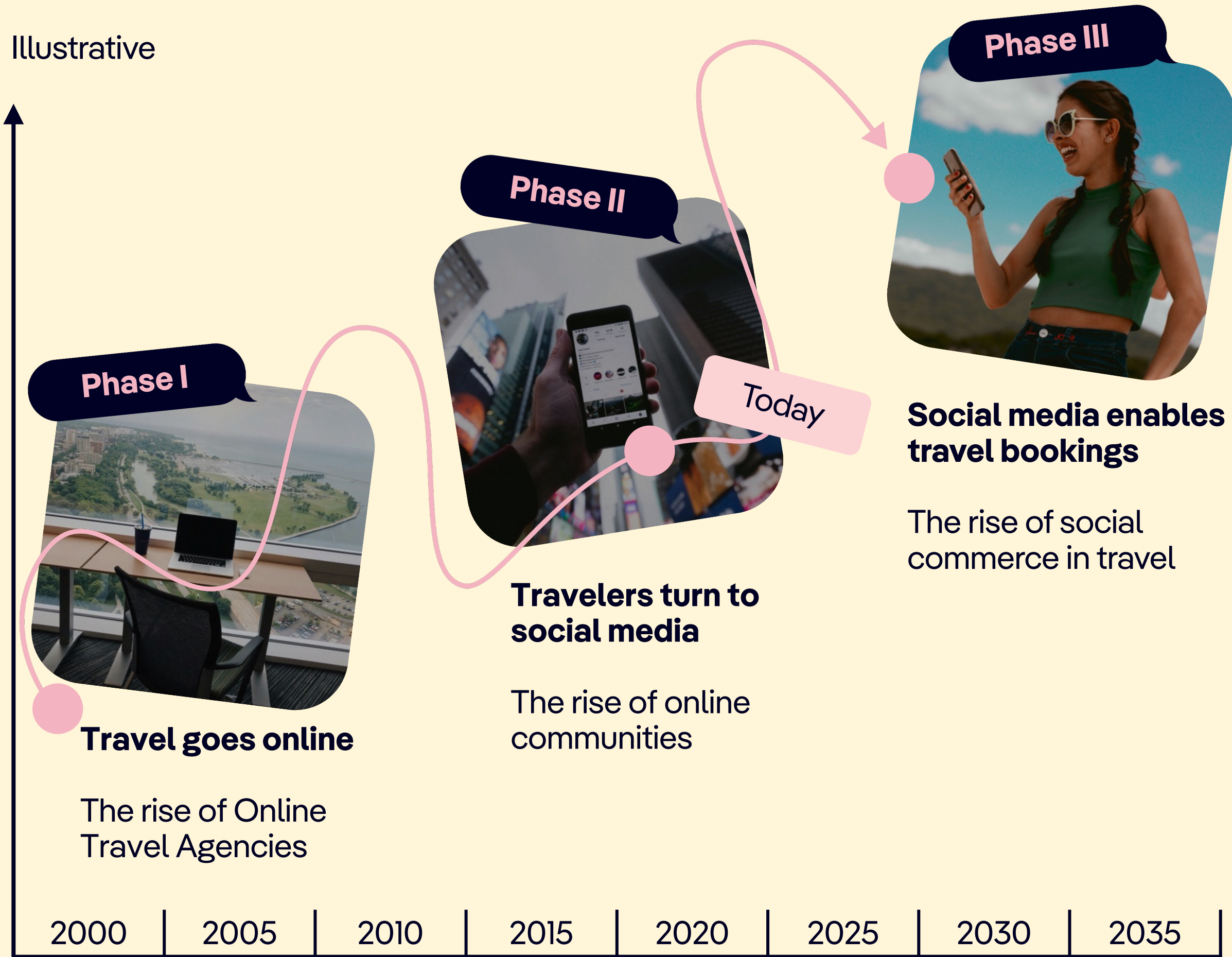
Beyond Impressions: Social Media as the New Frontier for Travel Bookings



2

The digital evolution of the travel industry

Illustrative



In the first chapter, we unveiled the dynamic trio of social media, content creators, and short-form videos as transformative forces in today’s travel industry.

Yet, the journey towards harnessing social media's full potential in the travel industry is just beginning.

In this second chapter, we delve deeper into this structural, long-term shift poised to redefine the travel landscape even further. The true scope of social media's impact on the travel industry becomes clear when we step back and examine the digital transformation of travel discovery and booking since the onset of the internet era.

This journey reveals that the digital evolution of the travel industry unfolds in three distinct stages, each marking a significant leap forward in how we explore and book travel.

We aim to take a closer look at all three of these stages:

Phase I: Following the post-dotcom burst, the internet wave of the 2000s marked the beginning of travel's digital transition.

Phase II: This phase, discussed in Chapter 1, details the quiet yet profound shift towards the growing influence of social media and online travel communities.

Phase III: Over the next decade, we anticipate a significant transition towards the social commerce era, fundamentally changing how travel bookings and engagements occur.

The pivot towards social commerce, represents the most crucial trend for travel brands to monitor. It signifies a shift where the impact of social media will extend beyond mere impressions to actual revenue generation directly on social platforms. Many travel providers, still acclimating to the initial era of social media, often overlook this transition, thereby missing out on substantial, untapped commercial opportunities ahead.

The transition from offline to online travel booking



Number of travel agents (in thousands) vs. online hotel revenue in the U.S. (in B\$)



The dawn of Phase I in the early 2000s marked the internet transition of the travel industry with the emergence of Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). This period witnessed the digital transformation of travel discovery and booking, transitioning from traditional, physical travel agencies to the online arena.

The defining change of this era was the rise of OTAs, which began by bringing travel inventory—initially flights and hotel bookings—online. Pioneers in this shift included Expedia and Booking.com, which played crucial roles in making travel more accessible.

These platforms later expanded to include more fragmented services like ground mobility and tours and activities, further broadening their reach.

The travel industry was among the first e-commerce sectors to significantly transition to online buying, facilitated by the industry's unique characteristics: the inherent standardization of core components such as hotel rooms and airline seats made them ideally suited for online comparisons and bookings.

Additionally, the travel industry's information-heavy nature adapted well to the digital format, allowing consumers to research and make informed decisions from anywhere in the world.

This digital transition has been instrumental in democratizing travel planning, which led to a significant decline in physical travel agencies which, while not completely vanishing, have been relegated to a much smaller, niche role in the industry.

Source: Business Insider, McKinsey, Phocuswright





Starting around 2010, Phase II marked a major shift in how travel discovery transitioned from relying on OTAs and search engines like Google to social media platforms.

Despite this change occurring over a decade ago, many travel executives are still realizing the profound impact social media has on the travel industry. A telling statistic is that three-quarters of travel bookings are now influenced by content first encountered on social media platforms, as illustrated in Chapter 1.

What has essentially occurred in Phase II is a transformation of the travel inspiration process from a linear journey to a continuous cycle.

Past: Previously, the travel experience

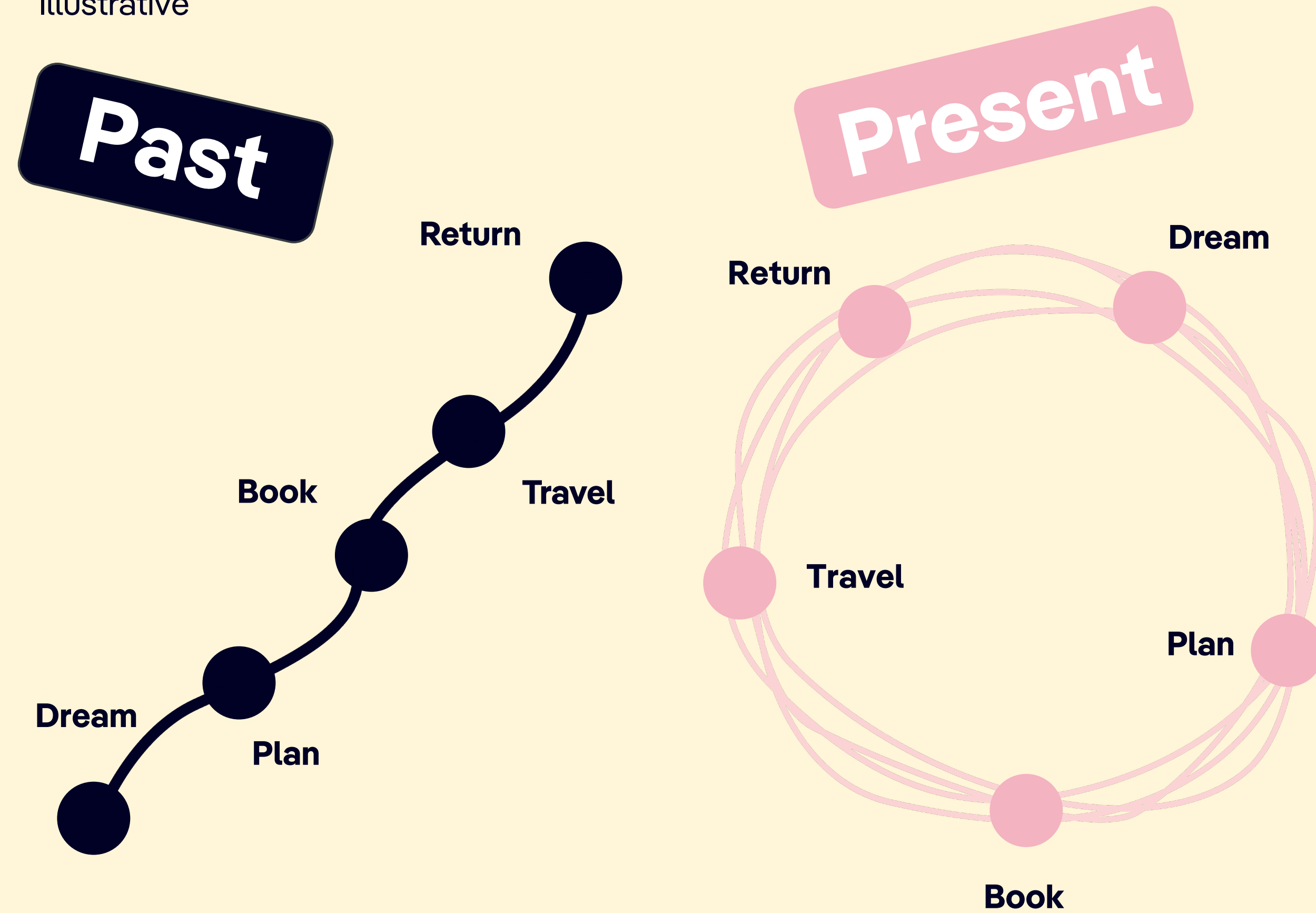
was a linear process that began with booking and ended upon returning home. Future trips would restart this cycle, initiating a new phase of travel inspiration from scratch.

Today: With the emergence of social media, platforms like TikTok and Instagram keep users engaged in a constant loop of vacation planning: from inspiration and search to the trip, followed by sharing reviews and recommendations.

This keeps travelers always in the travel inspiration loop, making travel inspiration a part of our daily lives. Consequently, travel as a retail category now enjoys a far greater mental footprint in people's minds than ever before.

Social media has enabled the infinite travel loop

Illustrative



Source: Beautiful Destinations



Phase #3

The most transformative shift in online travel is yet to come. Over the next ten years, social media's role is set to expand beyond dominating travel inspiration. It will begin to drive travel bookings, thereby impacting the industry's top-line revenue in ways previously unimagined. To grasp this immense social commercial potential, it's imperative to examine the current influence of social media throughout the travel booking process, a journey that spans an average of 71 days.

As highlighted before, about three-quarters of travelers begin their initial inspiration on social media. Once inspired, nearly all these travelers remain on social platforms, utilizing various search features to delve into details like specific hotel options or activities, often guided by their trusted

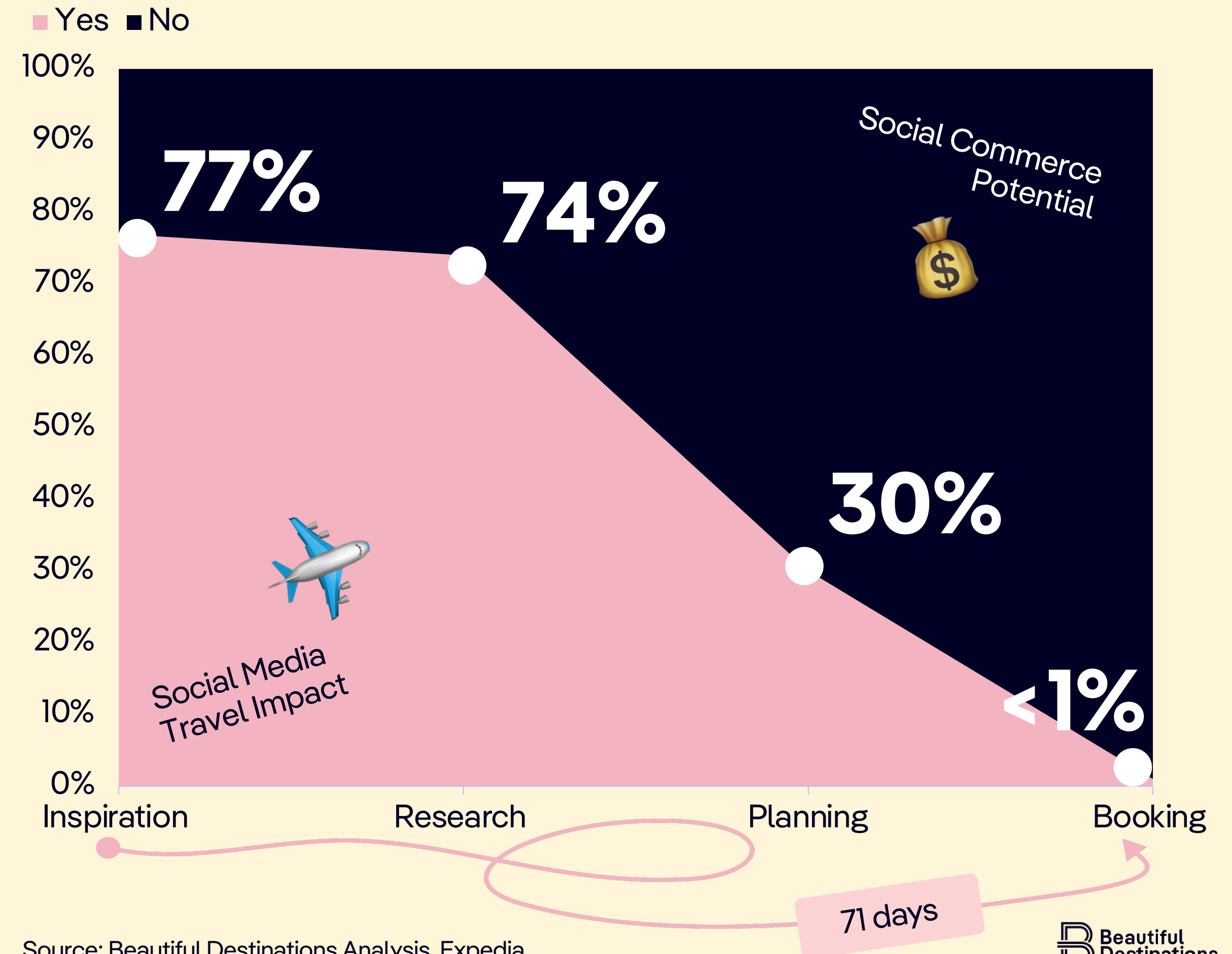
content creators. Yet, when it comes to assembling concrete travel itineraries, the pattern shifts. Less than half of those researching on social media continue within these platforms for their planning. The majority revert to traditional booking channels, such as OTA websites, to finalize their plans.

Unsurprisingly, when it comes to actual bookings—be it flights, hotels, or activities—virtually no one completes their travel booking journey on social media platforms, as it is currently not feasible to do so, except in a few rare instances.

However, this drop-off rate from social media platforms—the further we progress along the travel booking process—will undergo significant changes in the coming years.

The social commerce opportunity in travel

Share of travelers using social media along the path to booking



Source: Beautiful Destinations Analysis, Expedia

Before diving into the trends unlocking social commerce in the travel industry, it's crucial to tackle today's primary booking challenge: complexity. This complexity arises mainly from two issues:

Fragmentation: The travel industry is a highly fragmented ecosystem without seamless integration for bookings like flights, hotels, activities, and in-destination mobility in one cohesive place. Consequently, travelers in the U.S. navigate an average of 277 websites to craft an ideal itinerary that suits their specific preferences.

Personalization: Travel is deeply personal. Industry experts, such as Saad Saeed from travel-planning app Layla, note that individuals subconsciously weigh up to 1,000 different parameters when planning their vacations.

Current online booking platforms, with limited filtering options, fail to meet the extensive personal needs and desires of travelers.

This complexity is evident when examining device usage throughout the travel discovery and booking process. According to OAG, nearly 60% of travelers start their travel inspiration journey on mobile devices, yet less than 40% complete their purchases on smartphones.

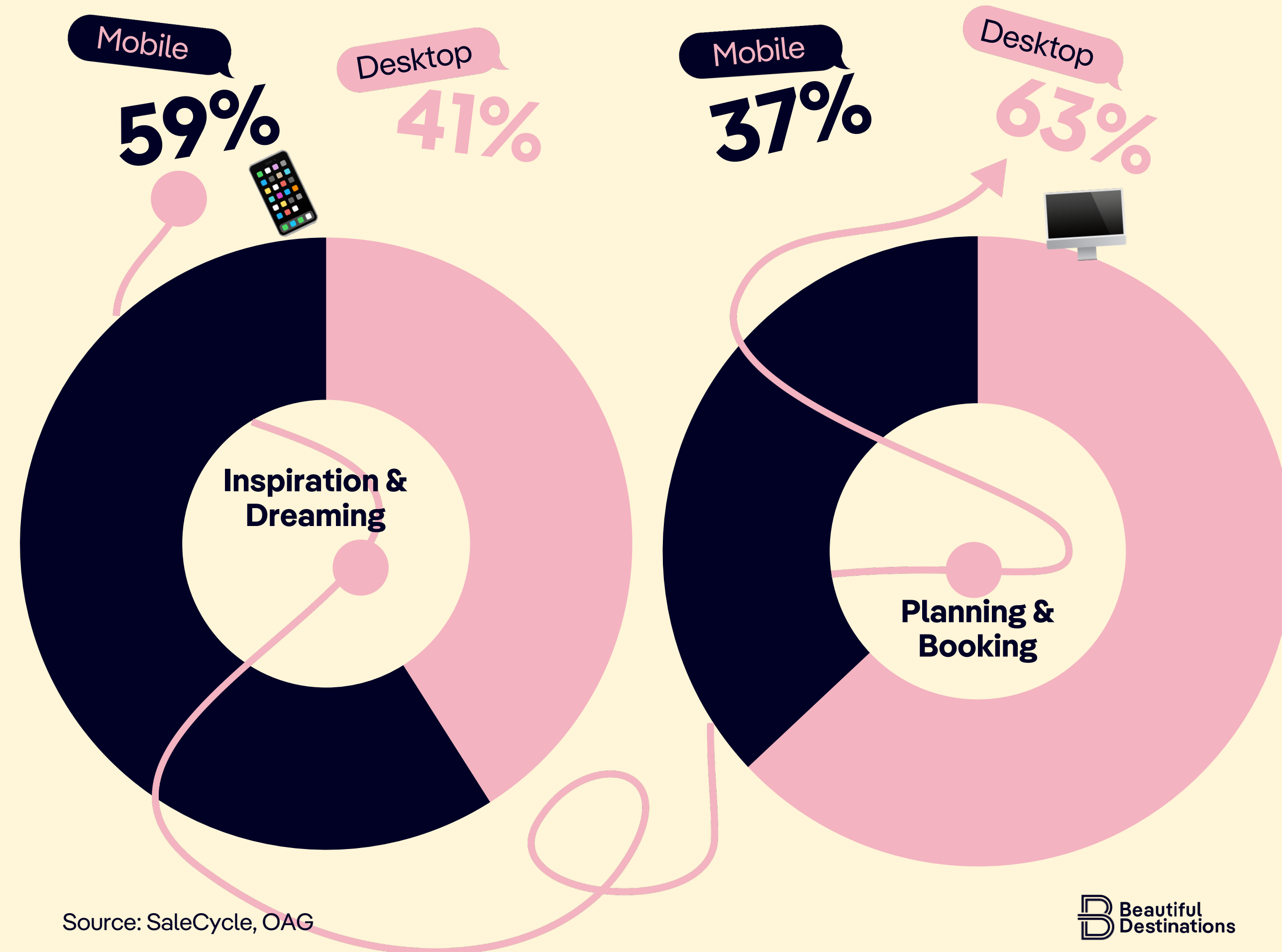
This significant drop-off is due to the challenges of managing multiple tabs and comparing numerous high-stakes options on smaller screens. Research suggests that for some, booking a hotel can be as daunting as purchasing a car or securing a mortgage.

In conclusion, simplifying the booking experience is essential to bridging the gap from travel inspiration to actual booking.

Here, next-generation social media tools and platforms become crucial, poised to offer a more immersive and personalized booking experience that significantly reduces complexity and integrates direct booking functionalities.

Problem: Today's inspiration to booking gap in travel

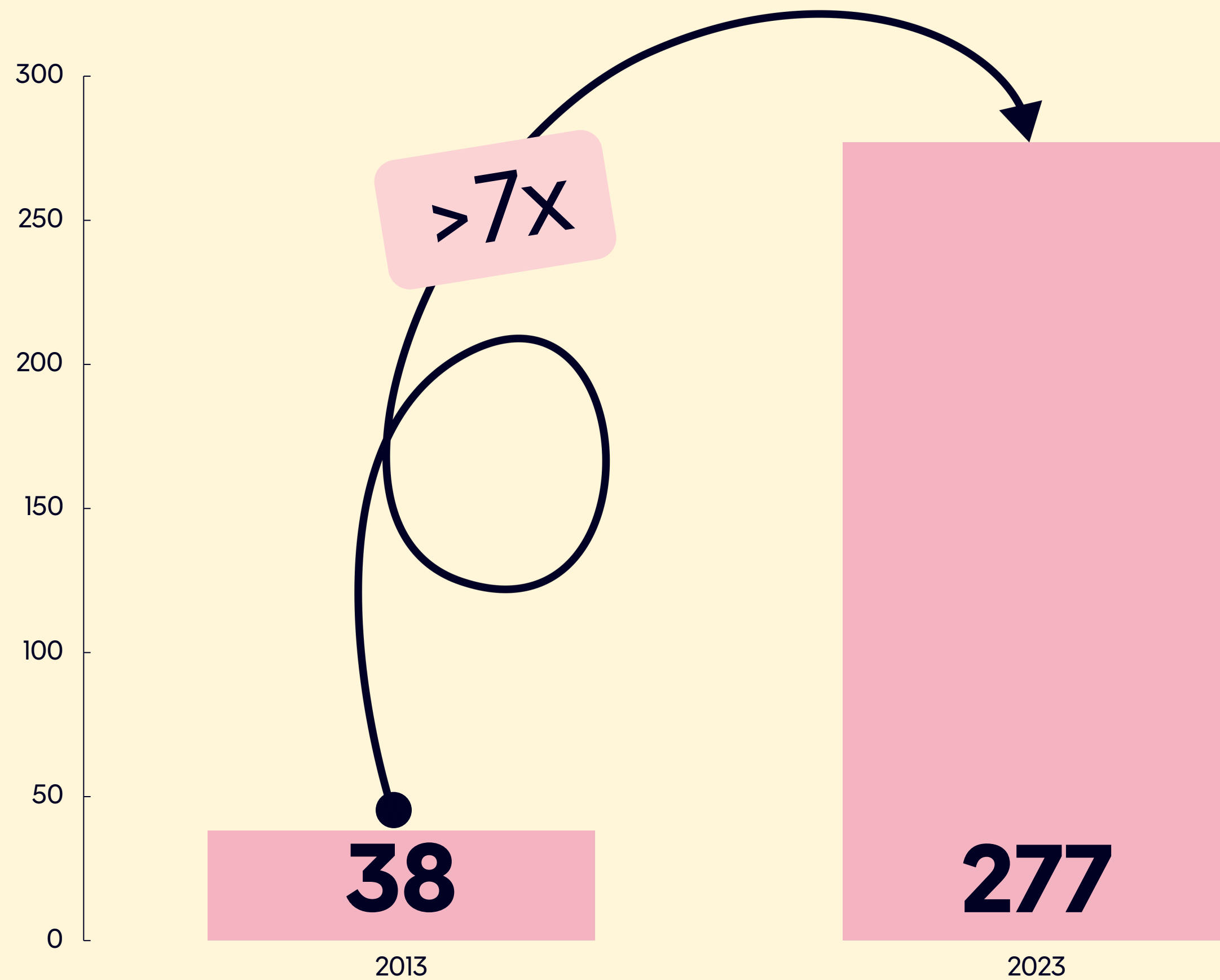
Share of device usage during today's travel discovery journey



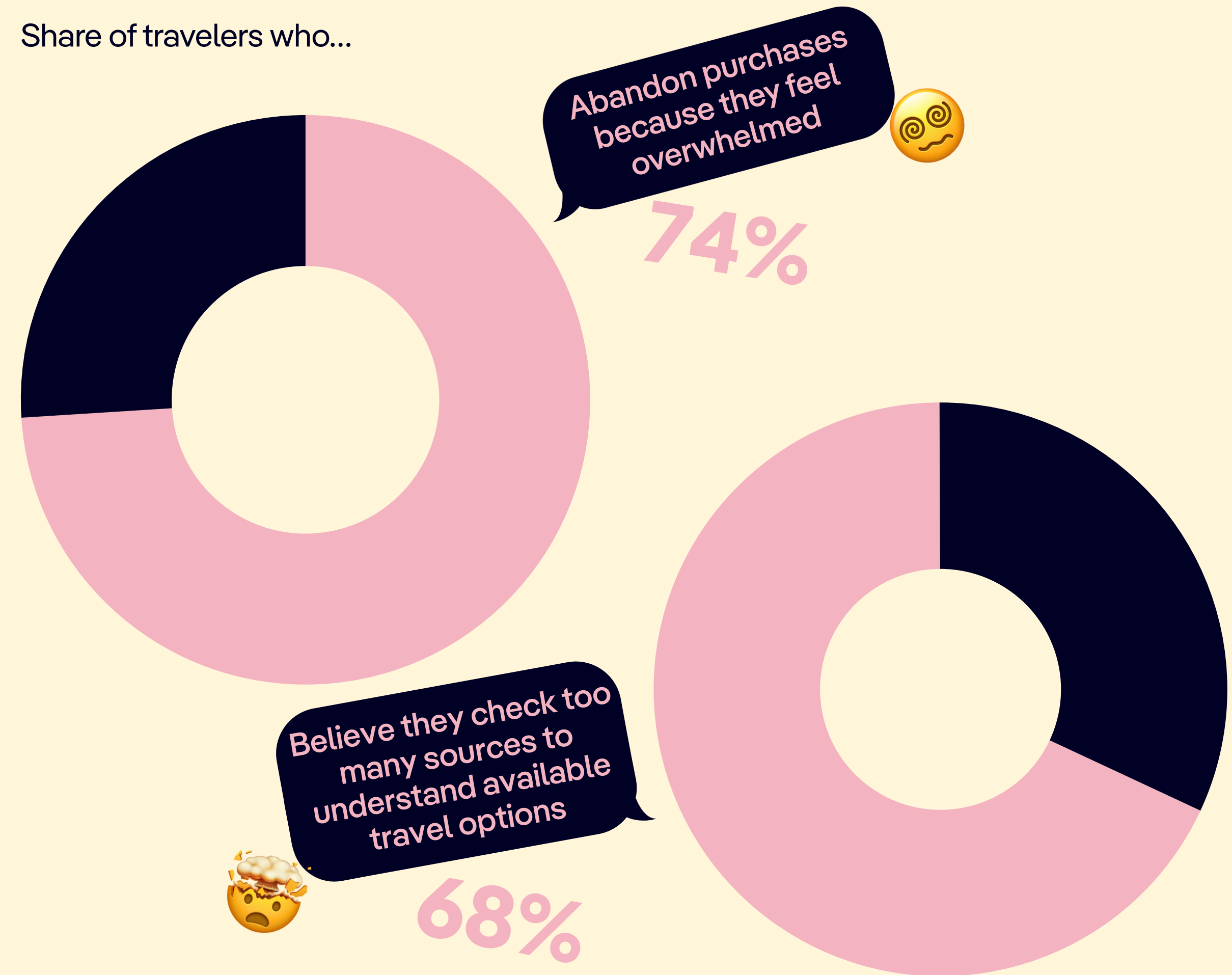
Source: SaleCycle, OAG

Travel booking today is more nerve-wracking than ever

Number of webpages travelers in the U.S. visit before making a travel decision

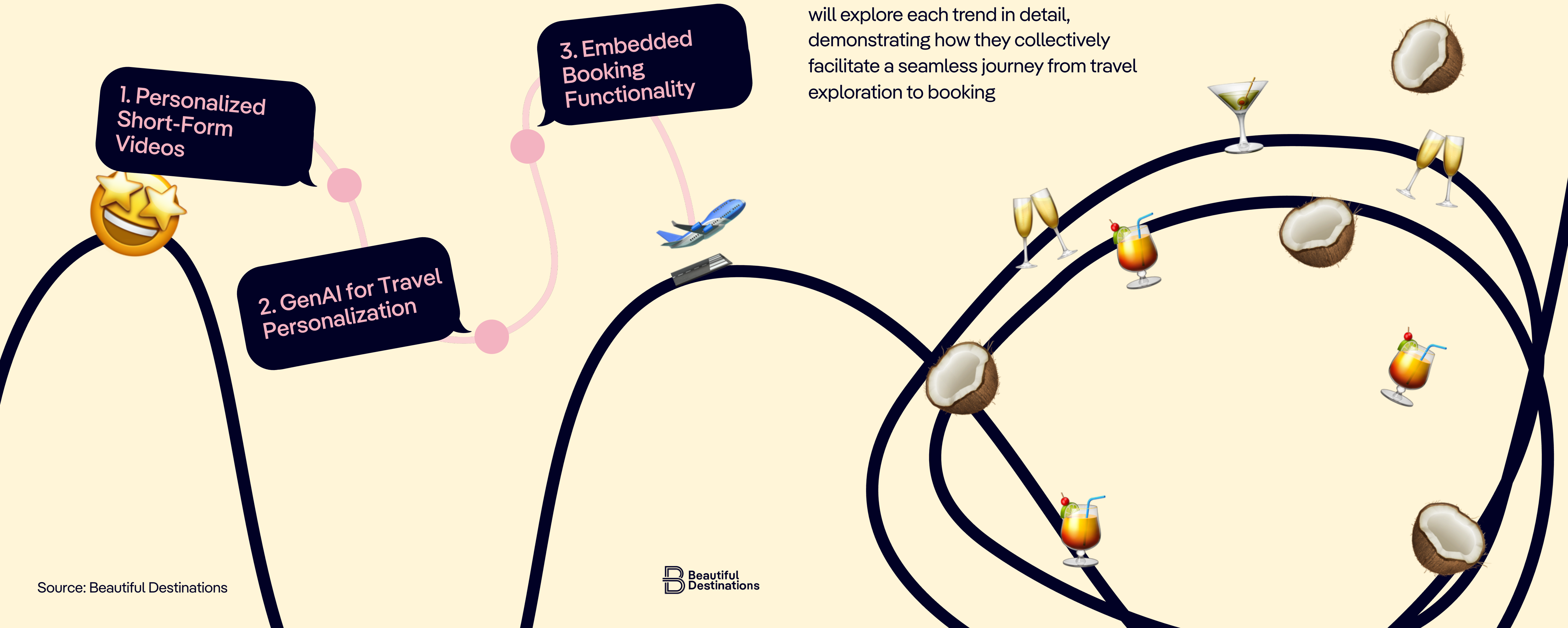


Share of travelers who...



The future of travel discovery on social media

Three emerging trends are transforming social media into a key interface that simplifies today's booking complexities. These trends are setting the stage for social platforms to handle both direct and indirect travel transactions effectively. In the following sections, we will explore each trend in detail, demonstrating how they collectively facilitate a seamless journey from travel exploration to booking



#1 Personalized Short-Form Video

Short-form video formats have emerged as the most immersive tools for inspiring travelers, providing close-up, in-depth views of potential destinations and travel experiences. The strength of short-form videos on social media lies in the platforms' algorithms' capacity to tailor content to individual user preferences, showcasing exactly the kind of video content that resonates most with each viewer.

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram excel in this personalization, making it possible for users to encounter content that matches their unique interests with uncanny precision. This targeted approach significantly reduces the effort needed to sift through generic Google search results and travel blogs, especially beneficial for travelers who might not know exactly what they're

looking for until they encounter inspiring video content.

As social media platforms refine their algorithms through increased user interaction going forward, we can anticipate personalization to become even better. Despite the scarcity of detailed research into the inner workings of these algorithms, a recent academic study sheds light on their functionality, particularly in the context of content exploration and exploitation on social media feeds.

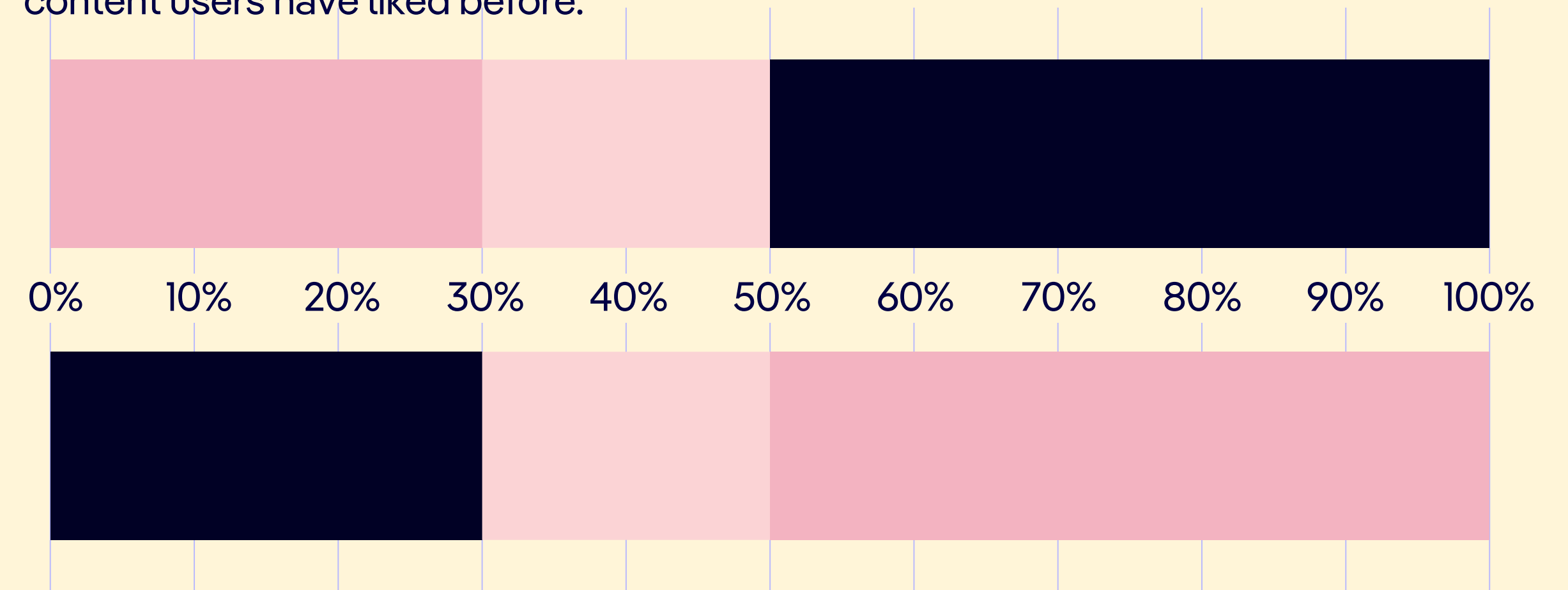
It turns out that 30-50% of the first 1,000 videos TikTok presents to a user are tailored based on their existing interests (exploitation), while the remainder introduces them to new topics (exploration), balancing familiar content with new discoveries.

Social media algorithms master user engagement

New Academic Study: How does TikTok decide what a user gets to see?

Exploitation

30-50% of videos served are based on past interests, so content users have liked before.



The remaining 50-70% of videos served are new content TikTok thinks a user might like.

Exploration

Source: Karan Vombatkere at Boston University and colleagues

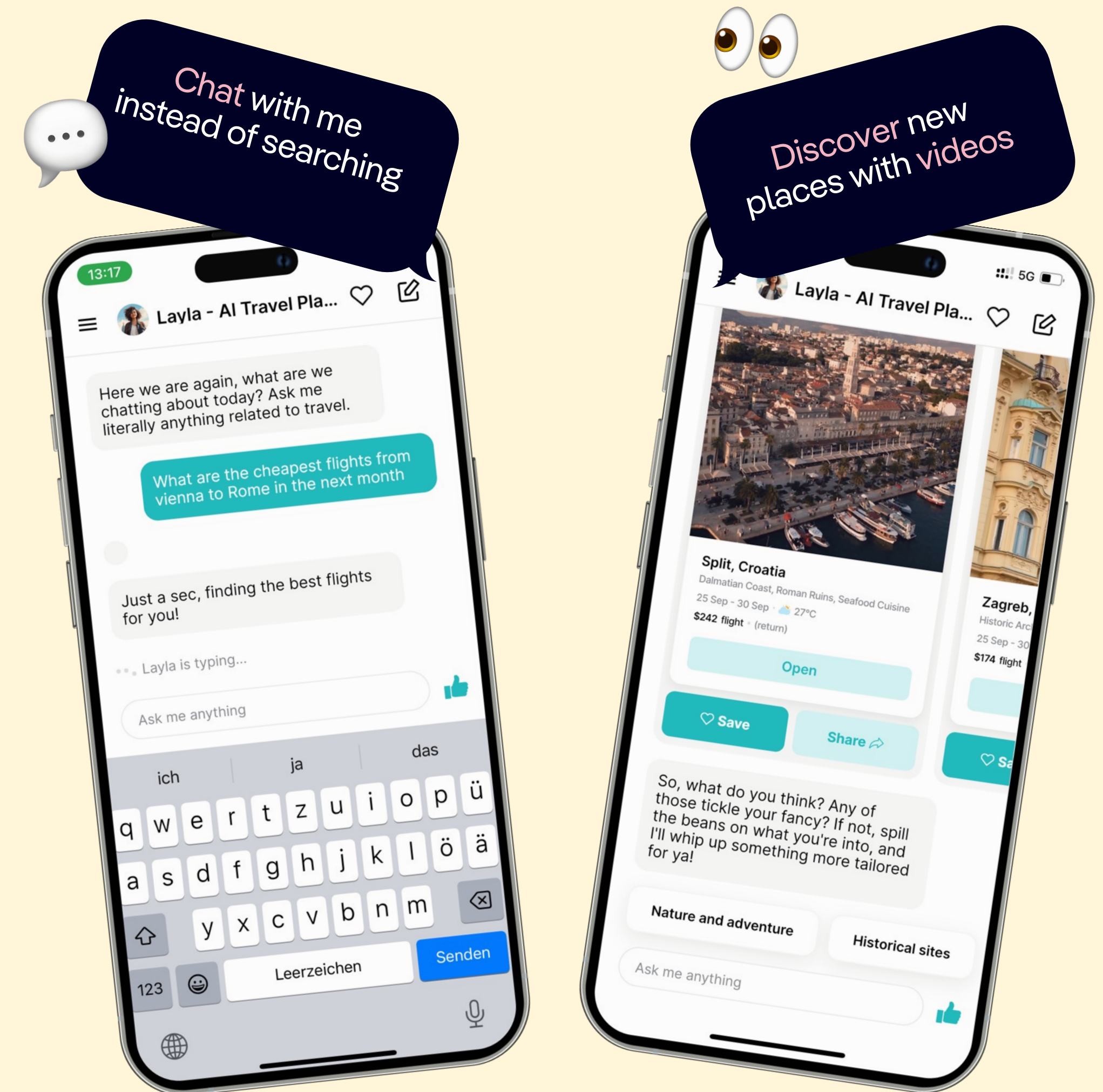
#2 GenAI for Travel Personalization

The second key factor in reducing the complexity of the travel inspiration and booking process is the advent of Generative AI (GenAI). Conversational AI technologies are poised to offer social media platforms entirely new ways to interact with users and understand their unique travel preferences. One of the biggest challenges so far has been cost, limiting the widespread adoption of AI-powered personalization at scale. But that is rapidly changing. The emergence of new AI players like DeepSeek—which claims to rival OpenAI's ChatGPT at a fraction of the cost—suggests that GenAI will soon become much more accessible for travel companies, leading to faster AI integrations across OTAs and social media channels. This shift is part of a larger trend, as AI-powered travel assistants increasingly merge with social media ecosystems.

The recent reports of Perplexity's interest in acquiring TikTok's U.S. operations further reinforce this outlook. Soon, AI-enhanced travel discovery and booking could take place entirely within social platforms.

A prime example of this innovation in action is our own Beautiful Destinations spinoff, Layla. This AI travel planner combines short-form video content with GenAI-powered chatbot capabilities, offering travelers the most personalized travel discovery experience available today. By engaging with users in dynamic conversations and tapping into the extensive video archive of Beautiful Destinations, Layla is able to precisely determine travelers' preferences. This enables the AI to tailor insights and recommendations to each individual's specific travel desires, thereby setting a new standard in the travel industry.

Tools like Layla merge short-form video with GenAI



Source: Layla

#3 Embedded Booking Functionality

Personalization, while transformative, is only one part of the equation. The ability to seamlessly book travel directly within social media platforms—without being redirected to various third-party booking sites—is crucial in bridging the gap from planning to booking.

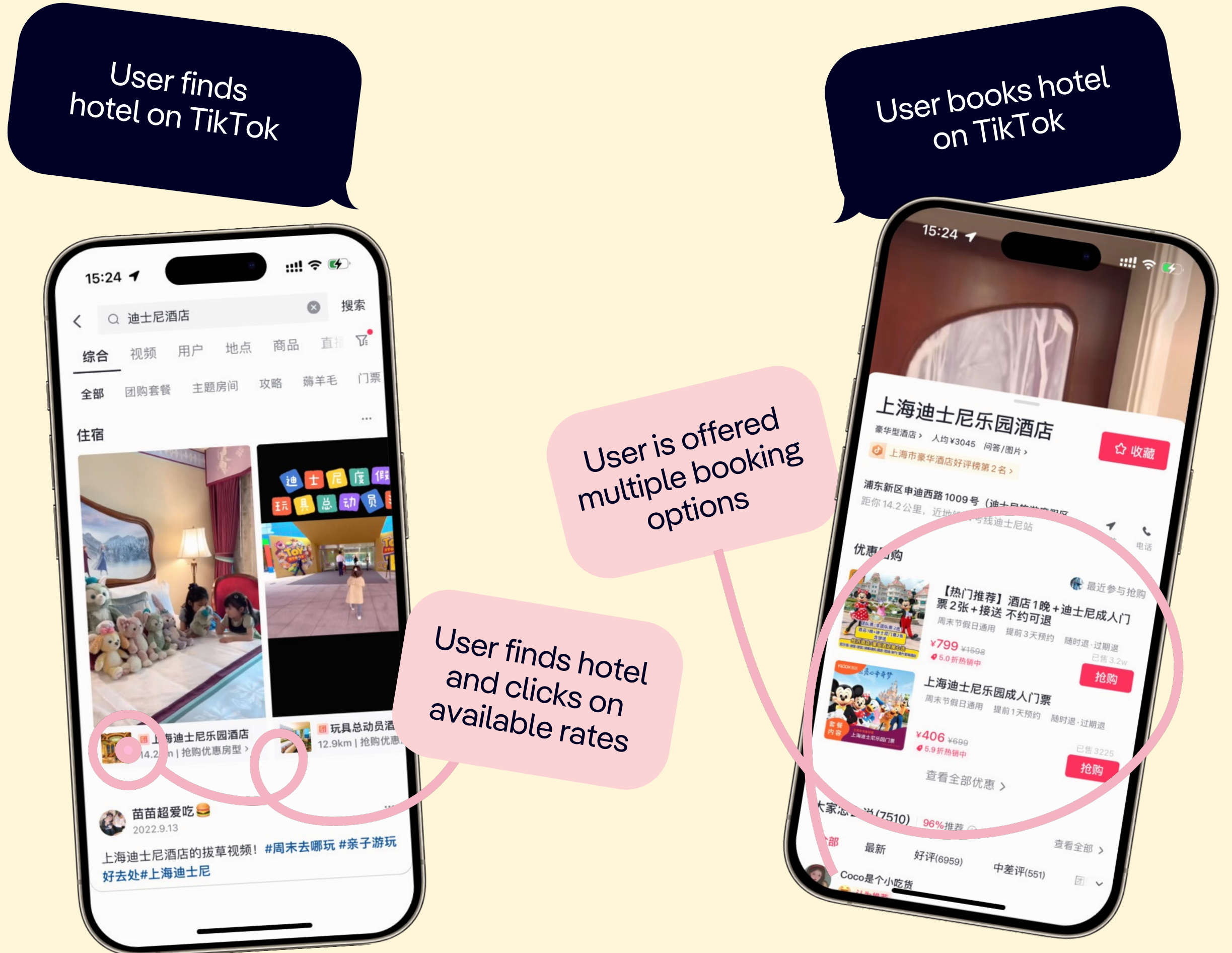
Several social media platforms are already offering a glimpse into this future with integrations and features that enable travel purchases directly within their apps. Leading the charge is TikTok, which has expanded its e-commerce capabilities through the international launch of TikTok Shop in Q3 2023.

A particularly promising social commerce travel application can already be found on Douyin, TikTok's counterpart in China.

- Here, users can interact with short-form videos showcasing specific travel accommodations, such as hotels. They can explore a hotel's location, read reviews, and assess amenities right from the app interface.
- Subsequently, users have the option to purchase discounted hotel vouchers directly within the app or, in some instances, book a room for a fixed date through API integrations with hotel OTA suppliers.

This functionality allows the entire travel discovery to booking journey to occur within Douyin—marking a significant advancement over the current travel booking experience and proving that social commerce is about to arrive in the travel industry.

Travel search & booking are blurring on TikTok



Source: Lufthansa Innovation Hub

The Dawn of a New Era in Online Travel

Conclusion

As we stand on the brink of the social commerce transformation, it's clear that we are merely scratching the surface of social media's impact on the travel industry. The best is yet to come. Today, sectors like beauty and fashion lead the way in social commerce, with nearly 40% of tik tok users in the U.S. having made purchases directly on the platform.

Travel is next. The industry is ripe for disruption, offering an untapped frontier where inspiration and booking seamlessly merge. The future will likely see travel brands, content creators, and

social media platforms recalibrating their strategies to seize the immense opportunities presented by social commerce.

Platforms like TikTok are already paving the way, innovating with initiatives such as their new creator payment scheme, incentivizing content that addresses underserved search terms by rewarding creators for videos that contribute substantial “search value,” which is one of four key metrics evaluated alongside originality, play duration, and audience engagement. Such measures represent a strategic shift towards enhancing

content discoverability and relevance within the platform, mirroring traditional search engine optimization (SEO) tactics in a unique social context.

AI will play a defining role in further accelerating this shift. With reports of Perplexity exploring a TikTok acquisition, the lines between conversational AI and social media are set to blur. This evolution suggests a new paradigm where AI not only personalizes inspiration but also facilitates travel planning and bookings in real time, turning social media into an interactive, intelligent travel concierge.

As a result, social media is no longer just about driving traffic to booking platforms; it's about integrating booking directly into the inspiration journey in unprecedented ways.

The travel brands that move swiftly to embrace AI-powered personalization, immersive video content, and seamless booking experiences on their own social media channels will redefine the future of travel distribution—and those that hesitate risk getting left behind.

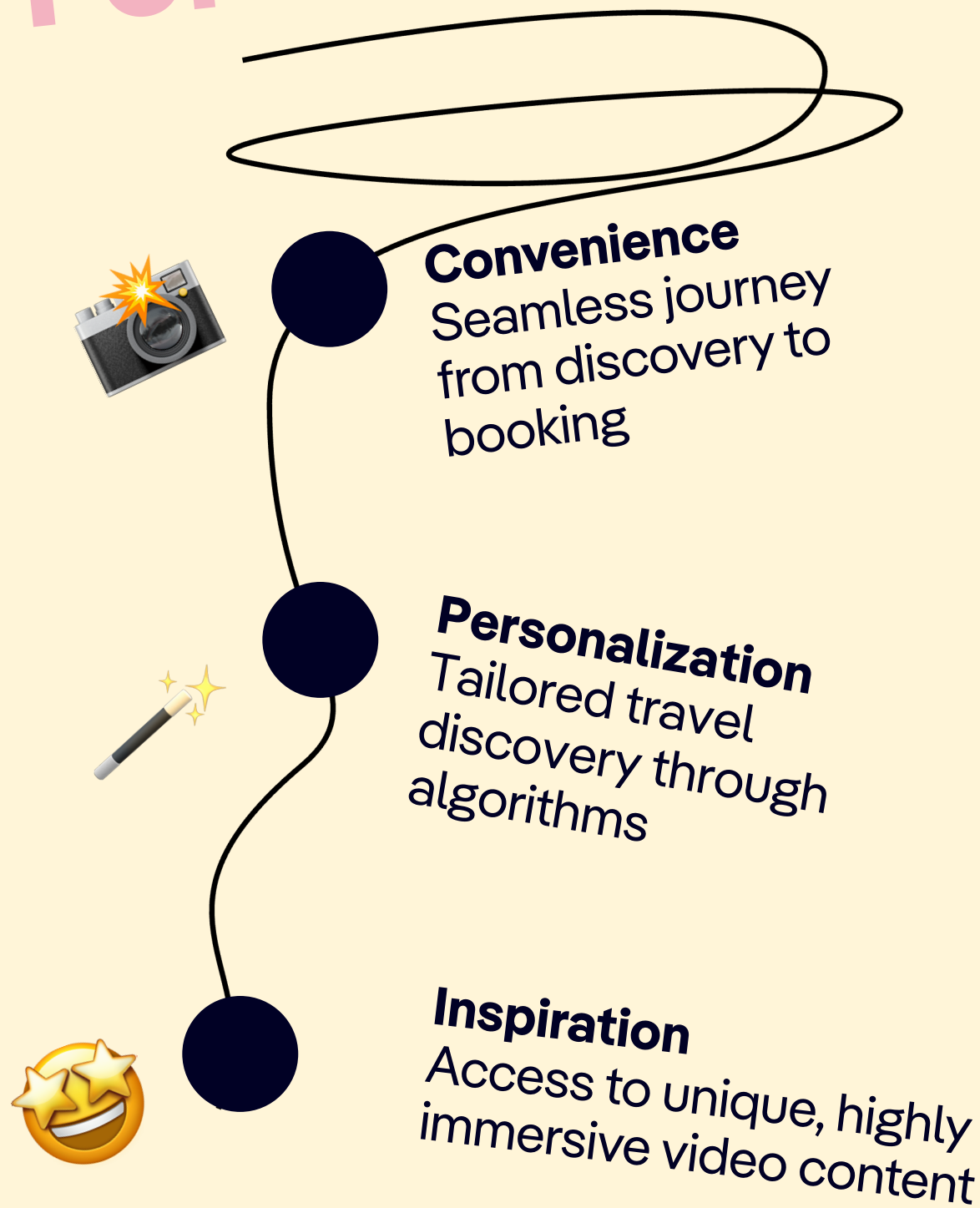
Unlocking Social Commerce in the Travel Industry



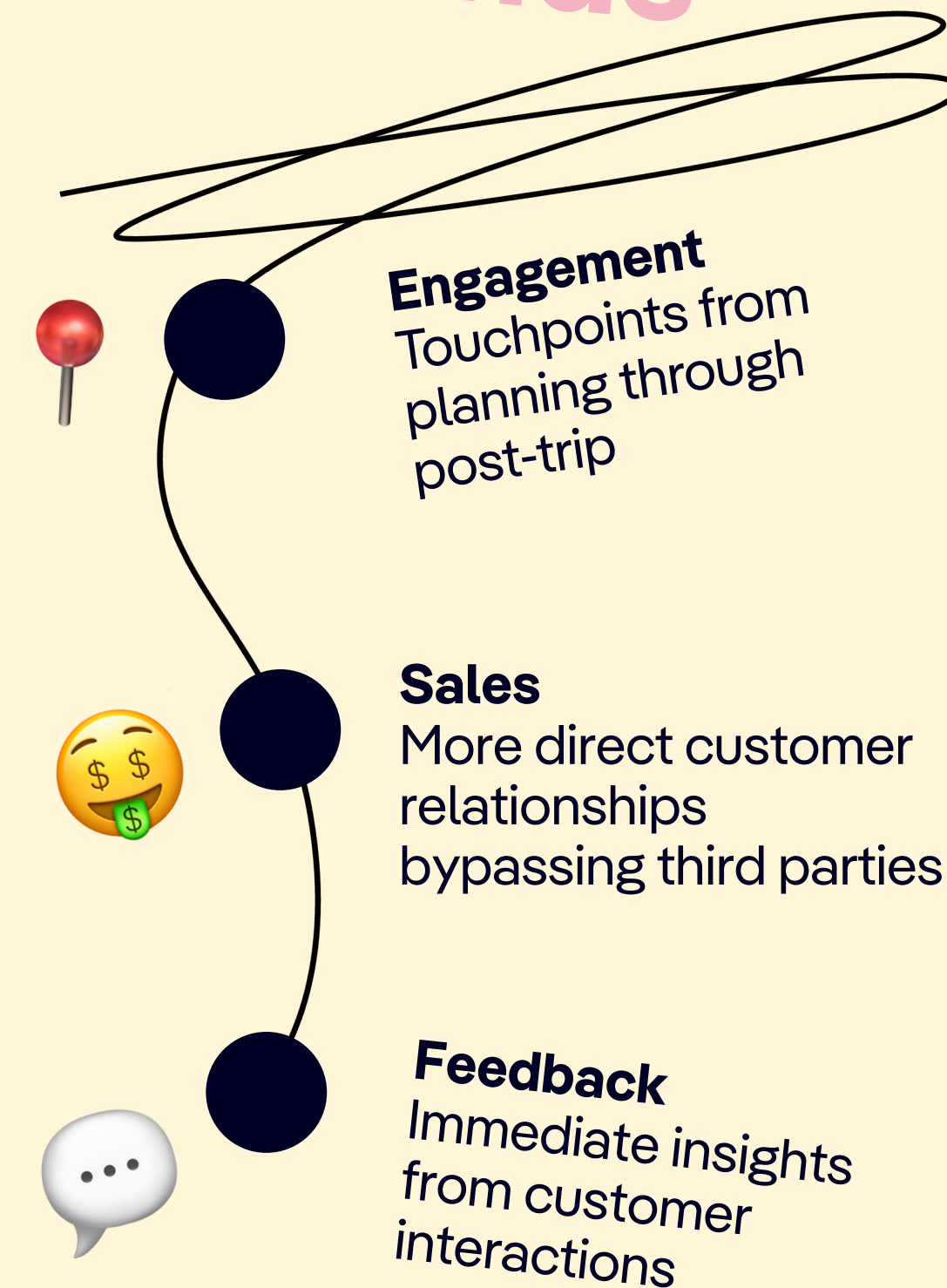
Social commerce: a win-win for both sides

Key advantages

For Travelers



For Travel Brands



In this third chapter, we delve into the concrete future of social commerce in travel, examining lessons from other industries and detailing how different travel segments will adopt social commerce based on their unique characteristics. This exploration highlights a significant shift for the travel industry, promising mutual benefits for both travelers and travel brands.

For travelers, social commerce simplifies the entire travel discovery to booking journey. This unified approach is a stark contrast to today's fragmented and complex booking environment, which proves frustrating for far too many travelers. A telling statistic: nearly half of all travelers (43% in the U.S.) report finding no pleasure in booking their travels due to its cumbersome and time-consuming nature.

As the majority of travelers now begin their journey on social media (see chapter 1), they should also have the opportunity to complete their bookings within the same platforms.

For travel brands, the benefits of social commerce are equally significant. Social media is one of the few media categories that can engage customers at every stage of their journey—from discovery and planning to purchase and even post-trip loyalty creation, giving travel brands the opportunity to build true end-to-end digital brand exposure.

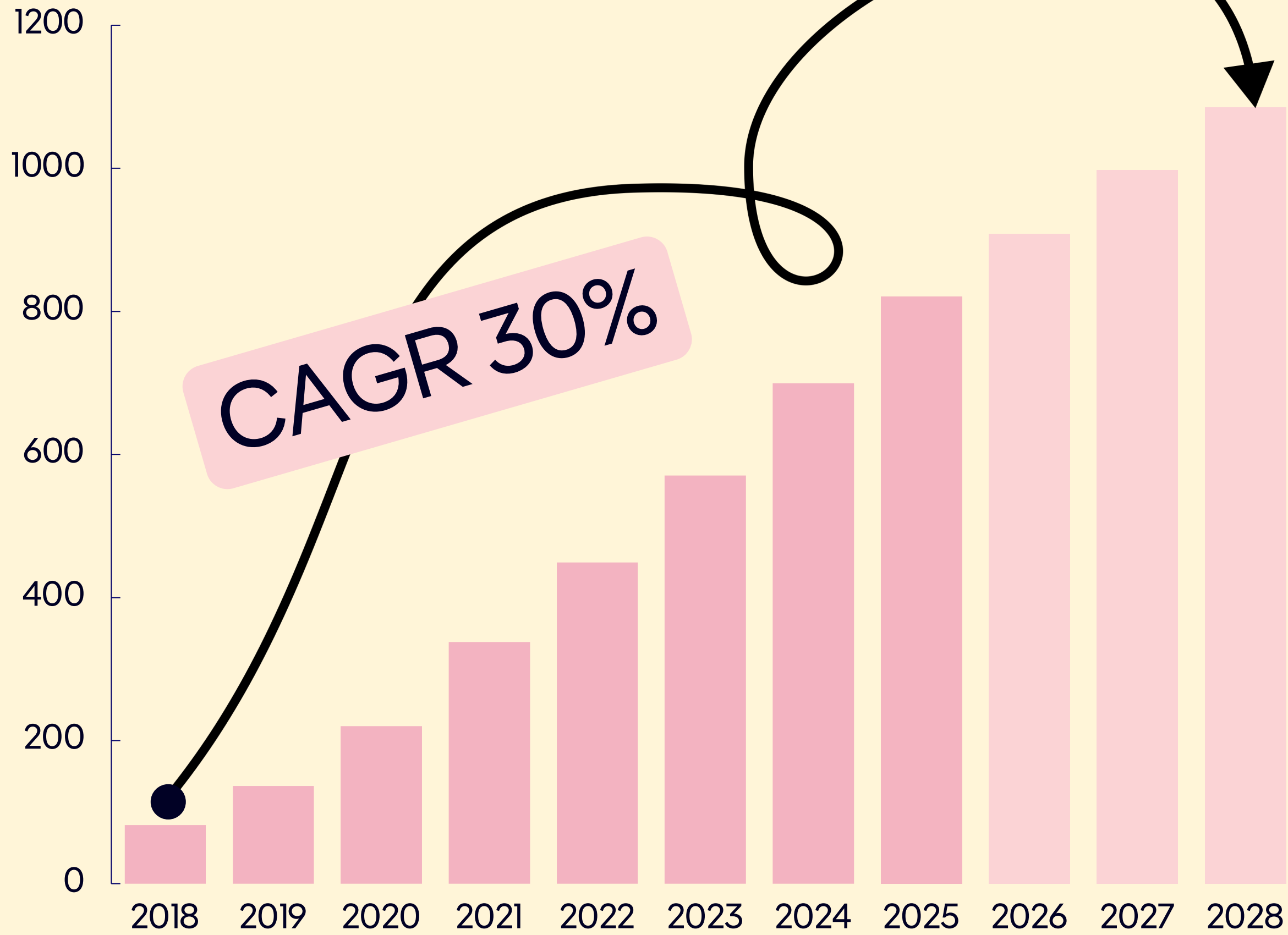
While more and more travel brands recognize the importance of social media in their marketing mix, the full implications of this online social media revolution are still being grasped.

Marketers in the travel industry finally have the long-sought opportunity to build efficient direct-to-consumer relationships in a cost-effective manner, bypassing intermediaries such as third-party booking platforms.

This is particularly crucial for hospitality providers as they depend on intermediaries like OTAs, which facilitate approximately half of all online hotel bookings in the United States.

Social commerce has a trillion-dollar outlook

Social commerce revenue (in billion USD) worldwide

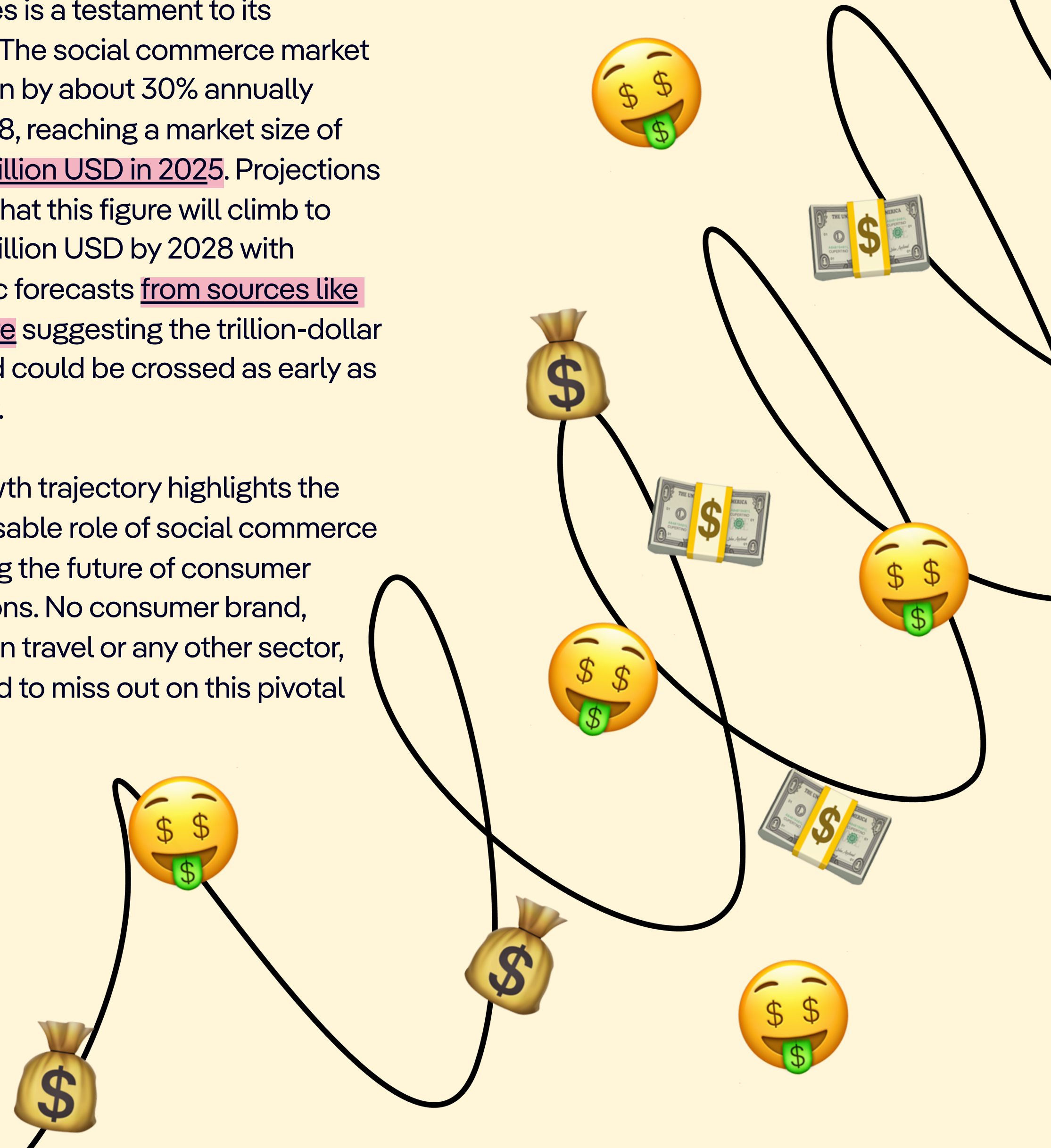


Source: Statista, eMarketer



The rapid expansion of social commerce across all e-commerce categories is a testament to its benefits. The social commerce market has grown by about 30% annually since 2018, reaching a market size of **>\$800 billion USD in 2025**. Projections indicate that this figure will climb to over \$1 trillion USD by 2028 with optimistic forecasts **from sources like Accenture** suggesting the trillion-dollar threshold could be crossed as early as next year.

This growth trajectory highlights the indispensable role of social commerce in shaping the future of consumer interactions. No consumer brand, whether in travel or any other sector, can afford to miss out on this pivotal trend.



While analysts often highlight China as the pioneer of social commerce due to its advanced e-commerce market size, maturity, and mobile-first mindset, the Western world, particularly the United States, is not far behind, especially in sectors outside of travel, like apparel.

A striking example: the number of TikTok users in the U.S. over the age of 14 who have made at least one purchase directly through the platform has increased tenfold in less than four years, reaching over 35 million social buyers in 2024, according to eMarketer. TikTok leads social commerce integration among U.S. platforms with 37% of its users having made purchases, closely followed by Facebook and Instagram.

The fact that roughly one-third of all American users across social platforms have already engaged in social commerce illustrates that this trend is much more mainstream than many realize. Moreover, the rapid adoption of social commerce shows no signs of slowing.

Initially, social shopping experiences faced challenges such as out-of-sync inventory feeds, poorly maintained social storefronts, and unclear return policies. However, social media platforms have significantly improved these commerce experiences, further accelerating the penetration of social commerce.

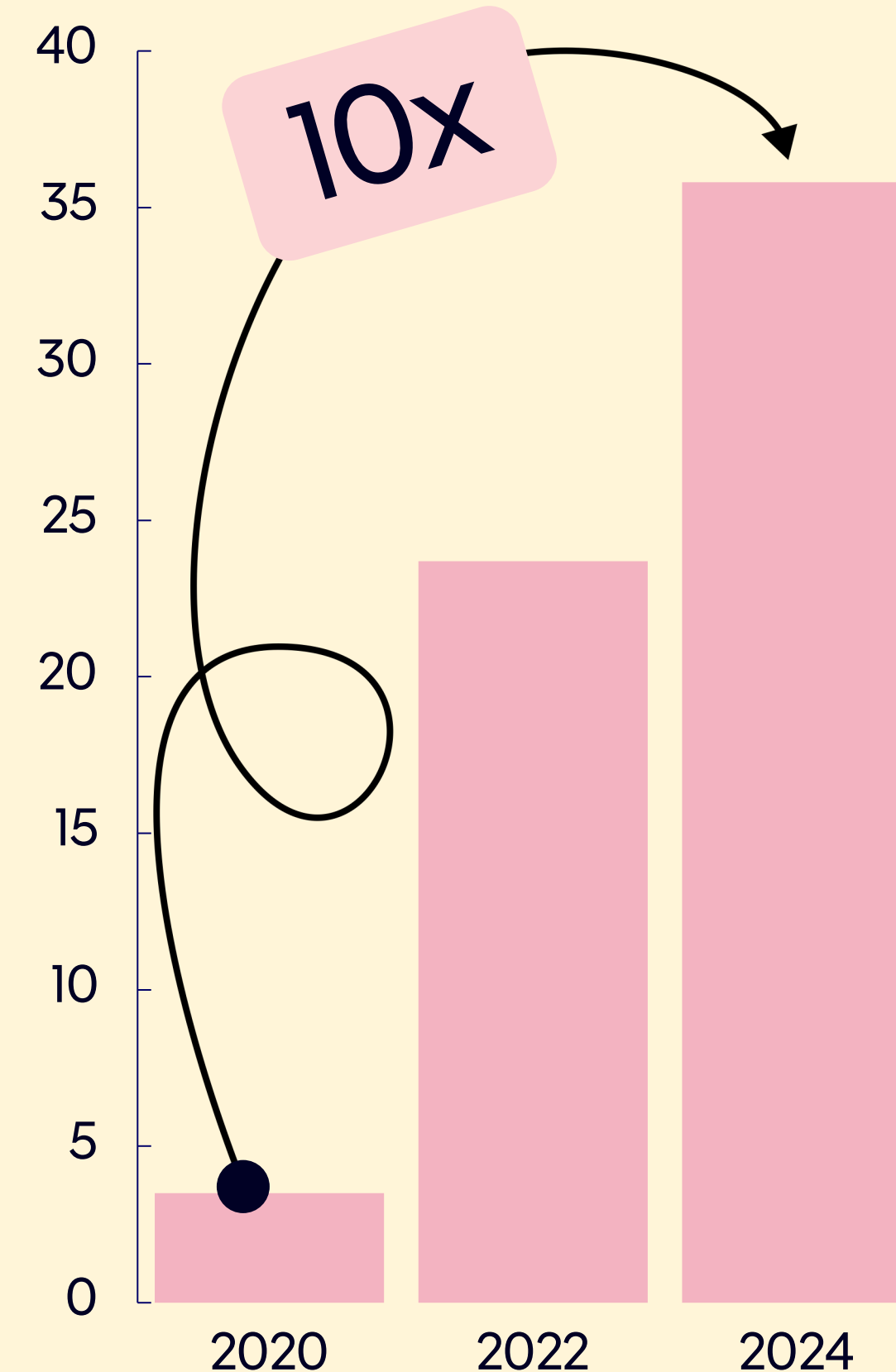
In short, social commerce is becoming the new norm for online purchasing. Travel will not be an exception.

However, despite the rapid growth of social commerce, which now accounts for approximately 10% of all e-commerce globally, the travel industry's engagement with this trend remains in its infancy; see the next page.

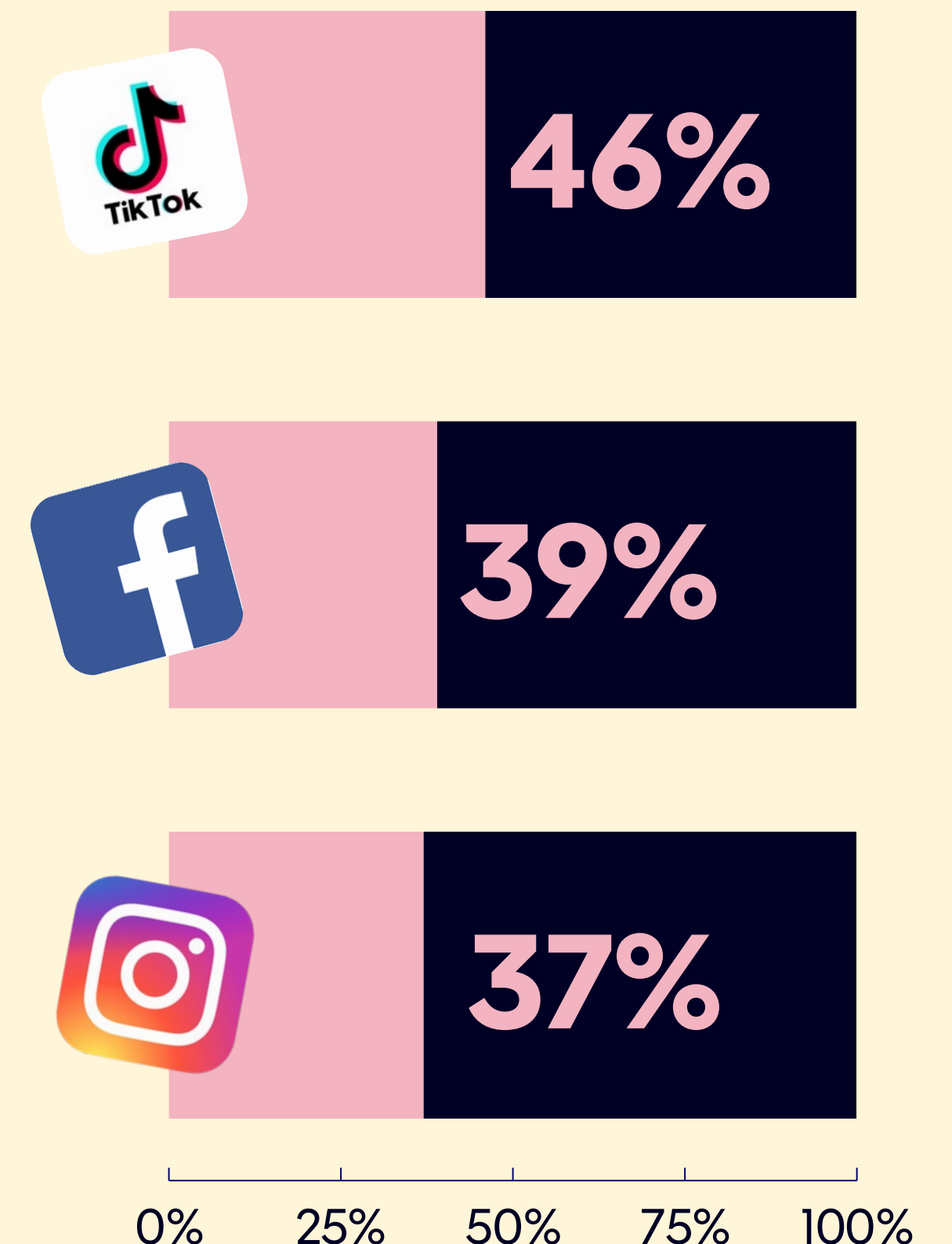
Currently, less than 1% of all travel bookings are made through social media platforms. This contrasts sharply with sectors like apparel, personal care, and groceries, where more than half of social media users have purchased products directly through social apps.

Social commerce has taken over in the U.S.

Number of TikTok social buyers (in million) in the U.S.



Share of U.S. users (14+ years) buying on each social media platform in 2025



Source: eMarketer

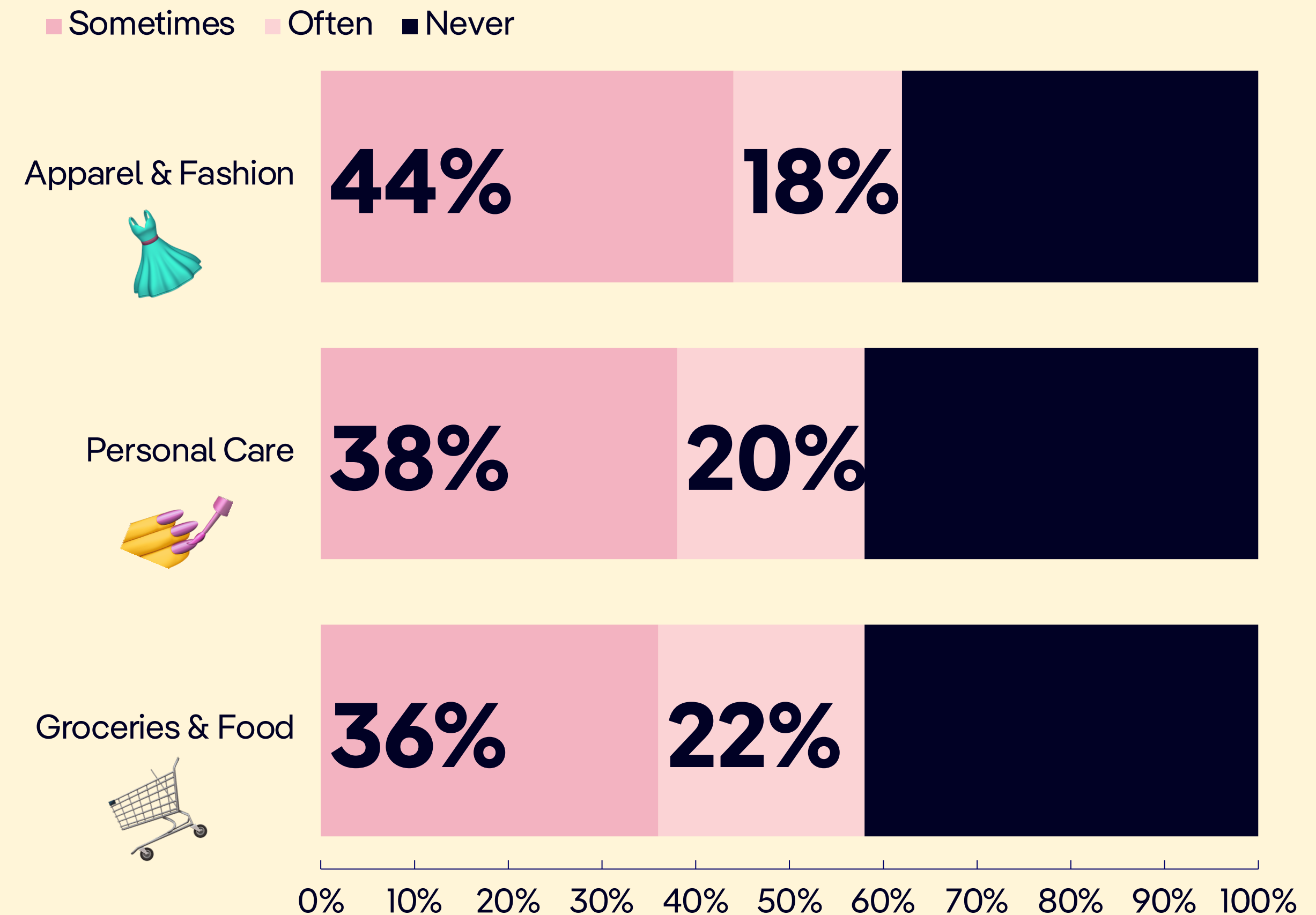
Travel is lagging behind in the social commerce shift

The leading industries in social commerce today

Social commerce revenue as a share of total e-commerce in 2024



Share of social media buyers by product category and their purchasing frequency



Social commerce in travel will unfold in three waves



Source: Beautiful Destinations



Given the relatively slow adoption of social commerce in the travel industry, a key question arises: What holds our industry back? The answer lies in booking complexity. This unique challenge has significantly contributed to the slower uptake of social commerce within travel. Unlike everyday consumer goods, travel products typically come with higher price tags and are rarely impulse purchases.

Furthermore, travel involves complex, highly personalized packages that combine multiple elements like flights, accommodation, and activities, each requiring careful coordination.

This intrinsic complexity makes purchasing travel through social commerce platforms a more advanced proposition than simpler, more straightforward product categories.

To truly capitalize on social commerce's potential, the travel industry must overcome these hurdles by developing

sophisticated, user-friendly social commerce solutions that can handle the intricate nature of travel planning and booking.

In the years to come, we anticipate the social commerce revolution in travel to unfold in several waves, each targeting different segments of the travel experience.

Over the next few pages, we will explore each of these three major waves, starting with the Tours & Activities sector. This segment offers the least complexity and will, therefore, likely be the first to fully embrace its own social commerce moment.

Current industry developments, such as Klook—Asia's leading mobile platform for experiences and travel services—integrating seamless booking capabilities across platforms, including an exciting new booking feature on TikTok, underscore this trend.



The initial wave of social commerce adoption in travel is expected to focus on in-destination activities and experiences. These elements of a trip, such as tours, sightseeing, events, and restaurant visits, generally do not involve the complex characteristics of flights and accommodation.

Instead, they are often much cheaper, with the average activity booking cart slightly above US\$150, presenting lower financial risks, and often aligning with accelerating impulse or spontaneous purchasing behaviors (see the left chart) influenced by travelers' moods and external conditions like the weather.

Hence, this segment is particularly suited to social commerce because these purchases are typically made at the last minute and “on the go.”

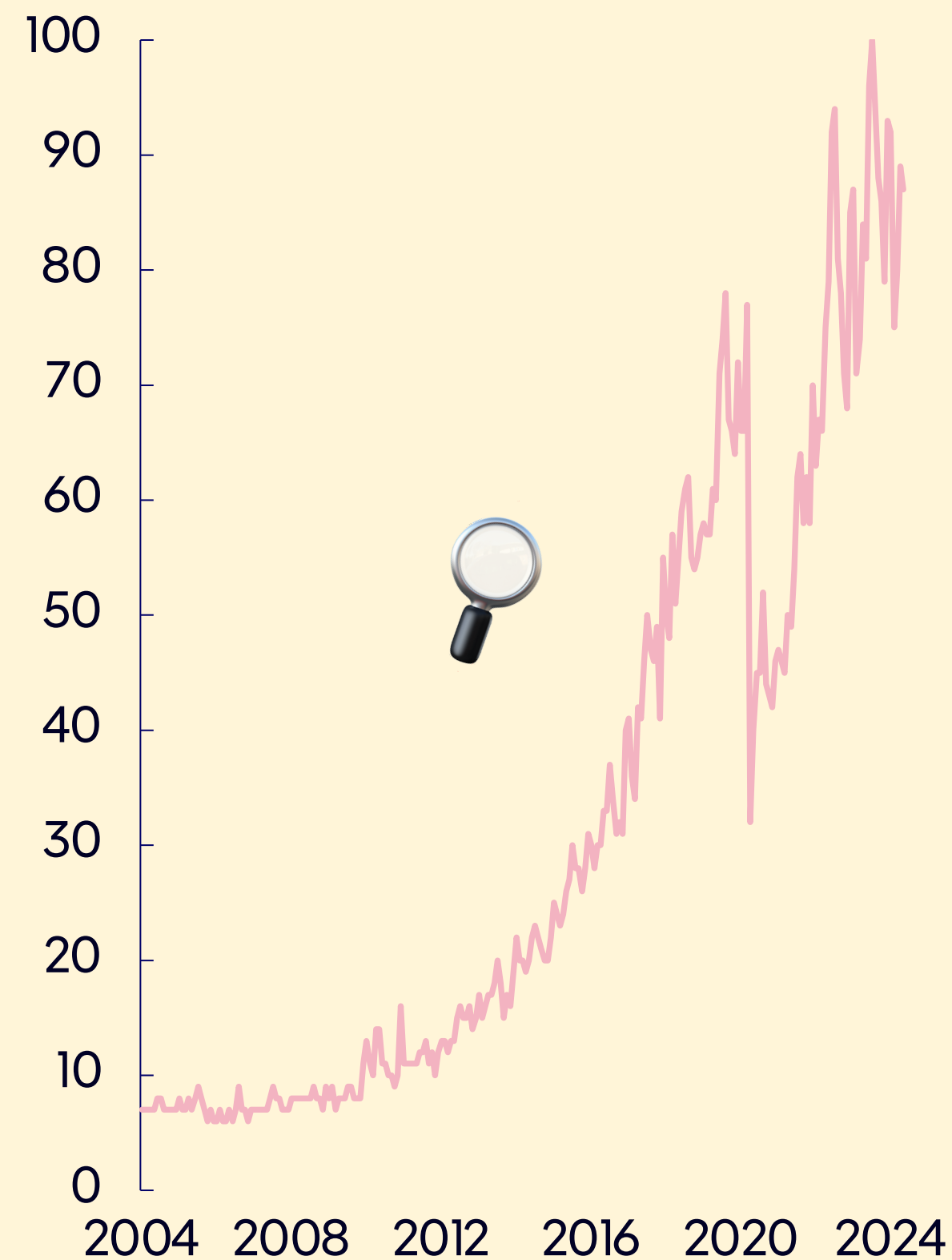
Data underscores this trend. According to TourScanner, 50% of all tours and activity bookings made on smartphones are finalized less than two days before the activity's date.

Moreover, unlike flights and hotels, which are predominantly booked via OTA websites and meta-search platforms, activity bookings often rely on Google searches or direct bookings on the websites of activity providers, with approximately 70% of bookings still occurring offline.

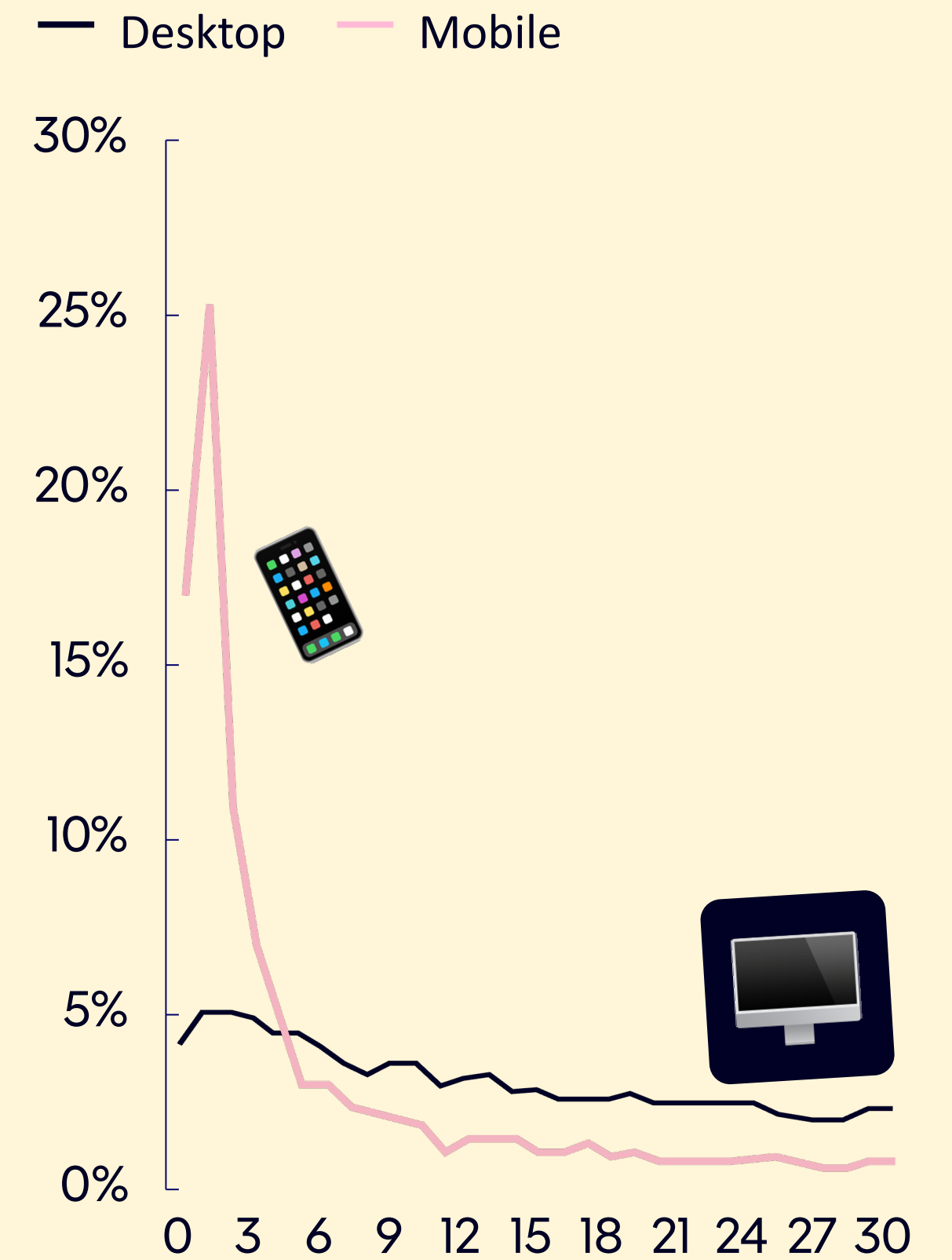
This more unstructured and traditional booking behavior could more readily transition to bookings made through social media platforms, setting the stage for the gradual expansion of social commerce into more complex travel categories.

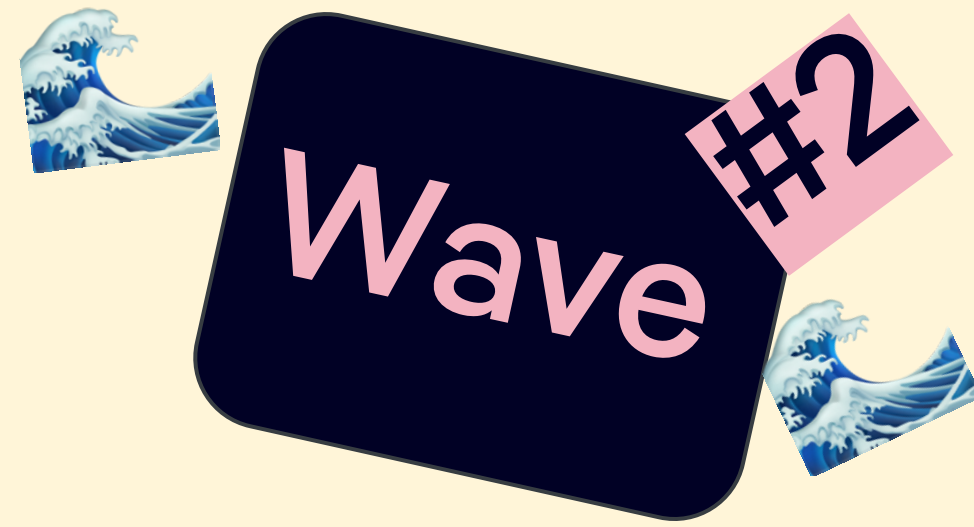
Activities tend to be booked rather spontaneously

Google search interest for “today” in the travel search context (indexed to max)



Distribution of tours & activities bookings over the # of days before the actual event





Wave 2 of social commerce adoption in the travel industry is set to focus on integrating accommodation. This segment includes hotels and alternative housing options like Airbnb, which, despite their price tags, have relatively standardized booking parameters that travelers are accustomed to managing online, such as dates, location, type, quality, and amenities.

The potential for social commerce becomes even clearer when considering the unique advantages social media offers in mastering accommodation selection.

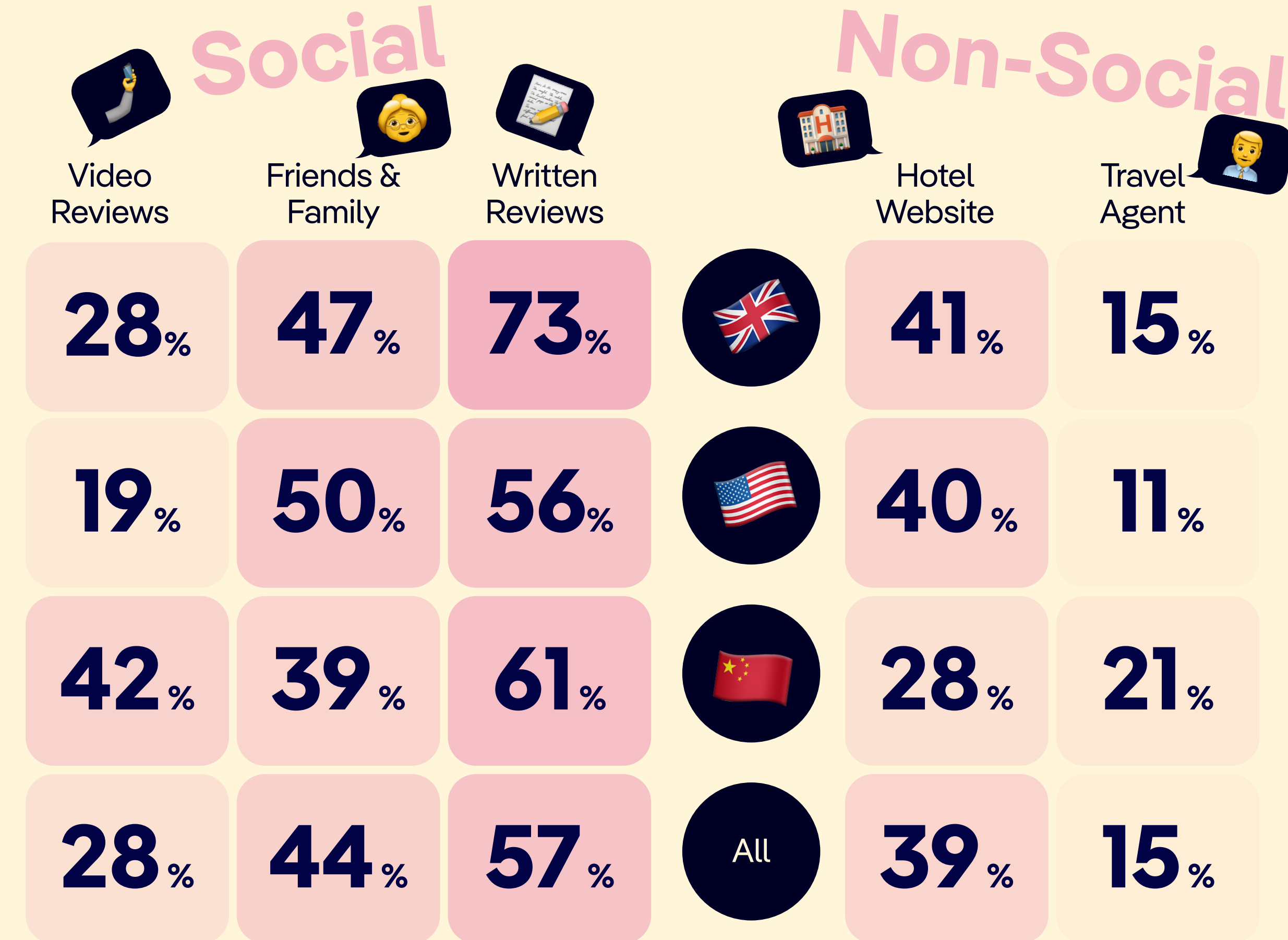
Firstly, accommodation is a critical part of the travel experience, with many travelers considering the quality and aesthetics of their stay as central to their overall satisfaction. High-quality video content showcasing lodging options

significantly aids in the decision-making process. Given that social media is a prime platform for video content, it offers an ideal medium to present these visuals effectively. Not surprisingly, nearly 30% of global travelers refer to video reviews before booking accommodation, underscoring the importance of this content type.

Secondly, the social aspect of social media aligns perfectly with how travelers make accommodation decisions. According to the same YouGov survey, 57% of travelers review other travelers' experiences before booking hotels, with 44% consulting friends and family. Social media platforms naturally facilitate this exchange of experiences and opinions, making them excellent venues for travelers to gather insights and feedback in real time.

Researching hotels is a deeply social activity

Preferred channels by global travelers (in %) for pre-purchase hotel research



Source: Beautiful Destinations Analysis, YouGov



The third wave of social commerce adoption within the travel industry will tackle integrating flights, arguably the toughest segment to transition due to several key challenges:

Flights, particularly international ones, often represent the most expensive single component of a traveler's journey. The high cost necessitates more time and detailed information before making a significant financial decision, making social media currently problematic for finalizing such transactions.

Unlike accommodation, flights are typically seen as a means to an end, with the "experience factor" playing a less significant role, especially for economy passengers. This commoditized nature of flights means differences between airlines are often

subtle, focusing travelers primarily on price comparisons.

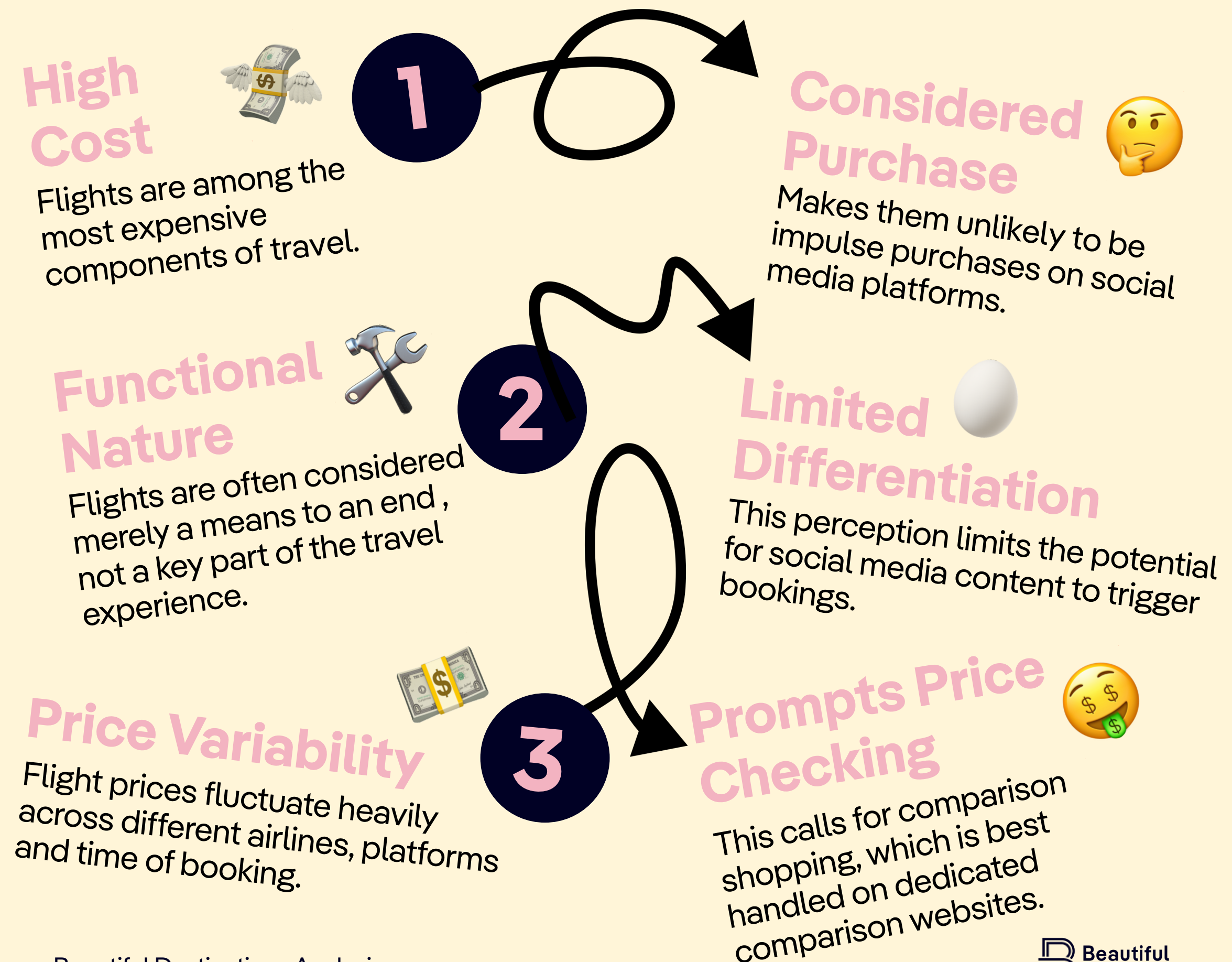
Moreover, transparency issues with flight pricing regularly add frustration, as travelers need to cross-check prices across multiple platforms, a task poorly suited to the streamlined interfaces of today's social media platforms.

Despite these challenges, integrating flights into social commerce isn't impossible but will require innovative AI-driven tools for real-time price comparisons and alerts within social platforms to enhance transparency and trust.

Leveraging partnerships with airlines to offer exclusive deals or enhanced loyalty rewards could further incentivize bookings directly through social media.

Flight booking is hard to crack on social media

Major challenges for booking flights on social media platforms



Overcoming Travel's Unique Limitations



Conclusion

As the travel industry progresses through three waves of social commerce adoption, each segment—from in-destination activities to accommodation and flights—will require tailored strategies to fully leverage the benefits of social commerce.

The ultimate goal is to (finally) simplify and enrich the traveler booking journey, transforming what has traditionally been a complex, nerve-wracking, and time-consuming process into a streamlined and much more enjoyable experience. This isn't just an opportunity for travel

brands; it's a necessity to remain relevant in an increasingly social-media-first consumer environment where ease and convenience are prioritized above all. Soon, online shoppers will expect to purchase travel products with the same ease as they buy everyday items like skincare products and t-shirts.

However, travel products face unique challenges in fully embracing the social commerce movement, unlike other retail categories. This is particularly true for complex travel packages that include multi-destination itineraries, multiple

accommodations, and costly activities, which require a significant level of consumer trust and investment due to their complexity and high cost. These highly personalized packages demand an intricate level of detail in their presentation.

To capitalize on the future of travel bookings—which will undoubtedly take place on social media—travel brands must immediately enhance their social channels by investing more in world-class content, testing advanced shopping features, and refining

strategies for offering comprehensive travel packages. The urgency to adapt cannot be overstated; brands that hesitate to embrace this shift risk missing out on significant future earnings.

We will delve into effective preparation strategies for this imminent shift in the final chapter of this report, ensuring that travel brands are well-equipped to thrive in the evolving landscape of social commerce.

Action Plan For Travel Brands to Master Social Commerce



4



As we envision the future of social commerce in travel, it's crucial to recognize the few trailblazers who have already successfully navigated this space, such as China's Mafengwo.

Originally a travel information-sharing platform similar to TripAdvisor in the West, Mafengwo has evolved into a full-fledged travel and leisure hub and stands as the world's first social-content driven OTA, engaging over 130 million monthly users.

What distinguishes Mafengwo is its integration of rich social video content, a sharp departure from the Western reliance on written reviews. This video-first approach has transformed how Chinese travelers use the platform, offering vivid, immersive insights into destinations and accommodation directly through user-generated content.

The platform's community forum enhances this experience by facilitating the exchange of honest travel feedback, fostering a trustworthy user environment. Leveraging its vast user

base and engaging content format, Mafengwo initially partnered with Trip.com, China's largest OTA, to seamlessly integrate booking capabilities directly linked to the content viewers consume. This strategic collaboration has enabled users to transition effortlessly from inspiration to transaction without leaving the platform.

Ultimately, Mafengwo delivers a more engaging and practical experience, given its social media DNA, while maintaining the ease and trust associated with traditional OTAs.

Although rooted in the unique context of Chinese travel behavior, Mafengwo's success story illustrates the potential for social commerce to revolutionize travel globally.

The platform's ability to blend video content creation, community engagement, and commerce sets a benchmark for how travel brands worldwide might adapt to and thrive in a social commerce-driven market.

Mafengwo provides the blueprint for travel commerce



Source: OctoPlus Media

How travel brands can master social commerce

Three strategic steps

More Content



- Social-First Mindset
- Daily Posting
- Across All Platforms

Master Distribution



- Study The Best Brands
- Find The Best Creators
- Own The Right Channels

Shoppable Interfaces



- Social-Selling Tech
- Storefronts on social media
- Equip your own platforms

As the travel industry unavoidably transitions toward its own Mafengwo-like social commerce future, how can travel brands best prepare for this new reality? And what lessons can we learn from industries that are further along in their social commerce journey?

At Beautiful Destinations, we've spent over a decade partnering with leading travel and hospitality brands, guiding them through the evolving digital landscape toward a social-media-first future. Our expertise in social media strategy and video-based content creation extends beyond marketing, encompassing comprehensive business strategies that drive measurable commercial impact.

Drawing on this deep experience, we've developed a robust action plan to help travel brands not only survive but thrive in the shifting landscape of social commerce.

Brands that fail to embrace this new paradigm and continue pursuing outdated marketing strategies risk

missing out on the majority of digital spending over the next decade.

To become leaders in social commerce, travel brands must adopt several strategic actions to secure a meaningful share of the digital marketplace.

Our action plan focuses on three primary objectives, beginning with adopting a foundational social-media-first mindset.

Unfortunately, many travel brands still treat their social media channels as secondary, often reusing content from traditional marketing campaigns without focus or optimization.

To succeed in the social commerce era, travel brands must prioritize producing more content daily, mastering cross-platform distribution, and ultimately building their own shoppable interfaces on social media and beyond.

Let's explore each action step in detail, supported by best-practice examples to provide actionable insights.

Step #1 More Content. Every Day. Everywhere.

To truly prepare for social commerce, travel brands must treat social platforms as their primary channels for audience engagement.

Visit Scotland exemplifies this approach, having shifted from traditional, physical tourist centers to a social media-only strategy. This shift contributed to a 33% increase in visitors and a 19% rise in spending, with 3.2 million international visitors spending approximately £3.2 billion in just the third quarter of 2023.

Secondly, daily interaction is essential. Transitioning from the outdated model of one or two major marketing campaigns per year, today's leading brands are continually producing fresh content tailored for social media, preferably in short-form video format.

This approach transforms social channels into vibrant communities that keep brands top of mind and convert followers into loyal fans. Ryanair is another example, having adopted a unique, humorous, and ever-present social media voice. This approach has resulted in over 2 million TikTok followers and increased customer trust and perceived value, despite its occasionally provocative nature.

It is also mission-critical to build up a presence on all social media platforms. A comprehensive social-first mindset involves customizing content for each channel and requires in-depth expertise. Teams should continuously monitor market trends, assess the latest product changes from all platforms, and optimize content for maximum impact.

Visit Scotland has gone all in on social media

Website snapshot



Source: Visit Scotland website

Master Content Distribution

Step #2

Mastering content creation is just the beginning; effective distribution presents even greater challenges. How can travel brands ensure their content gains the visibility it deserves?

It's crucial for travel brands to learn from sectors more advanced in social commerce, such as fashion and beauty. We can draw valuable lessons from pioneers who have long navigated this space.

For example, Sephora, a leader in the fashion and beauty industry, was an early adopter of Instagram Shopping. In 2020, they enabled their 20 million followers to purchase products directly within Instagram, integrating over 80 brands into Instagram's checkout system. Another example is Glow Recipe, known for its Korean-beauty-inspired products, which achieved social

commerce success on TikTok in early 2021. Influencers showcasing their skincare routines led to a 600% surge in daily sales, culminating in a record-breaking \$100 million USD in sales for the year. Their Shopify-connected TikTok shop set a precedent for e-commerce integration on the platform.

LTK is another pioneer in social commerce, having recently launched a new video experience that features full-screen continuous video and daily drops, leveraging the fact that videos prove to be the most engaging content on the platform. Shoppers purchase twice as much from video content and click out to retailers 64% more often compared to other formats. This development opens up new earning opportunities for creators and brands while creating a more engaging shopping experience for users.

LTK is a leader in social commerce innovation

LTK video snapshot

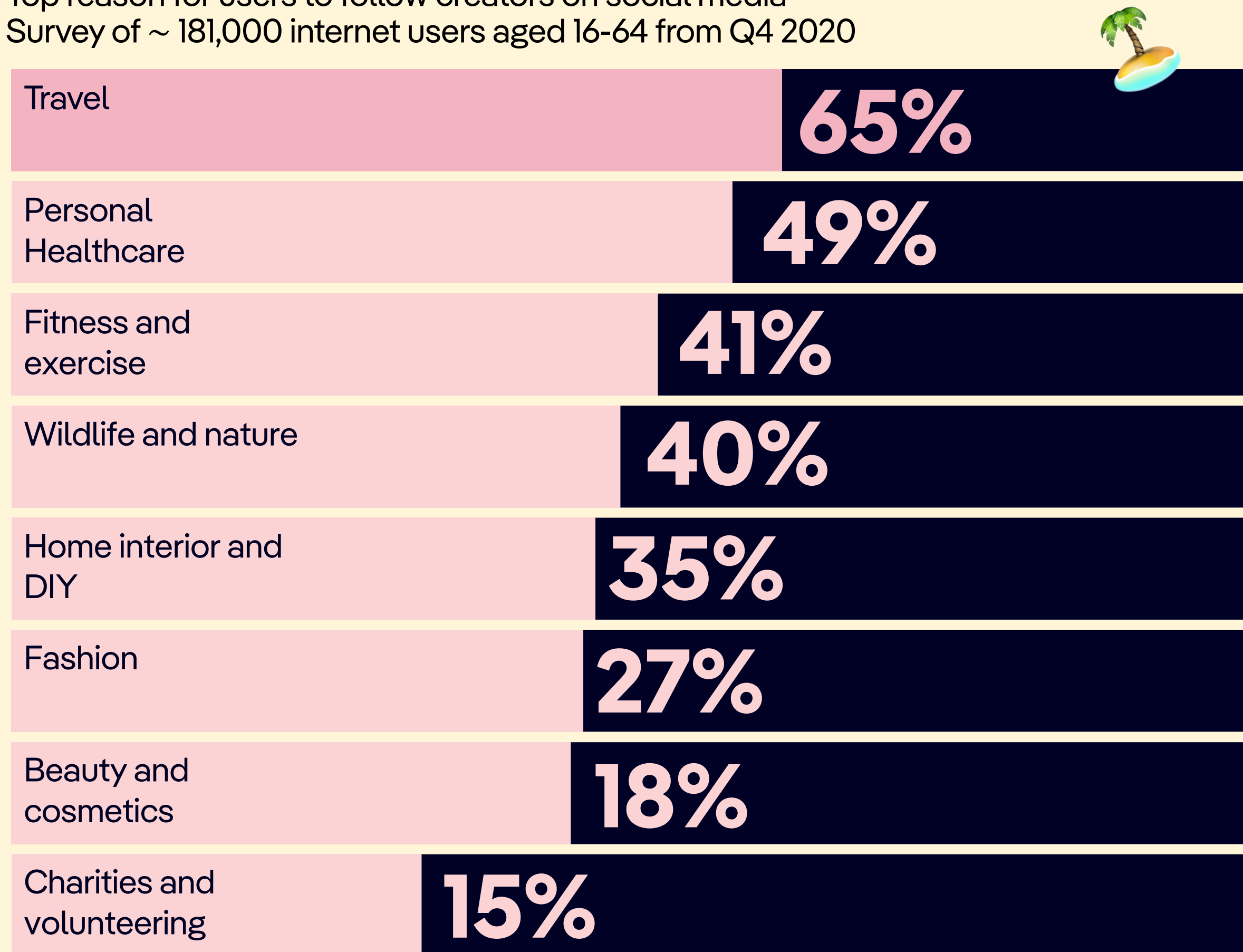


Source: LTK

Travel is the #1 reason to follow creators

Step #2 continued

Top reason for users to follow creators on social media
Survey of ~ 181,000 internet users aged 16-64 from Q4 2020



Source: GlobalWebIndex, Lufthansa Innovation Hub



Mastering content distribution also means leveraging one of the most potent tools in today's social media landscape: content creators.

To unlock the power of viral video content, travel marketers must collaborate with the right content creators. The influence of these creators in the travel industry is profound. By partnering with this new generation, brands can utilize their extensive reach and credibility to showcase authentic travel experiences.

However, to truly unlock the potential of creators, it's crucial for travel brands to move beyond one-off creator partnerships and work with strategic partners like Beautiful Destinations. With over a decade of experience in bridging the gap between travel brands and creators, BD ensures that partnerships are aligned with long-term commercial goals.

BD is a global content creation agency, offering brands the unique advantage of speed, scale and exceptional quality content through a highly curated creator

network. As a trusted partner, BD translates brands' strategic objectives into actionable, platform-specific content strategies that resonate across social media. By handling the complexities of creator selection, campaign briefing, and end-to-end execution, BD allows brands to maximize impact without sacrificing authenticity.

Establishing dedicated creator programs is essential in this context, often requiring a significant investment—indeed, a quarter of leading online brands today allocate over 40% of their marketing budgets to content creators.

Furthermore, collaboration with creators requires recognizing that each social platform hosts a unique group of top individuals. BD's content marketing expertise allows travel brands to increase the amount, quality, and speed of content they create, leveraging creator partnerships and the BD social media channels. This targeted approach enables brands to increase the impact of their marketing initiatives.

Step #3
Shoppable Interfaces

To ultimately transition from visibility on social media to generating direct revenue through social commerce, travel brands need a multi-layered approach, progressing from foundational social-selling tools to fully integrated, shoppable experiences.

Here's a three-part strategy:

Step 1: Leverage Social-Selling Tools

Starting with established third-party tools and features is the most accessible way to begin converting social engagement into bookings.

Tools like ManyChat and Chatfuel engage users through automated responses, sending relevant offers or itineraries when they comment on a post.

Platforms such as Linktree, and LTK turn bio links into rich gateways, enabling users to explore and book directly from social media profiles..

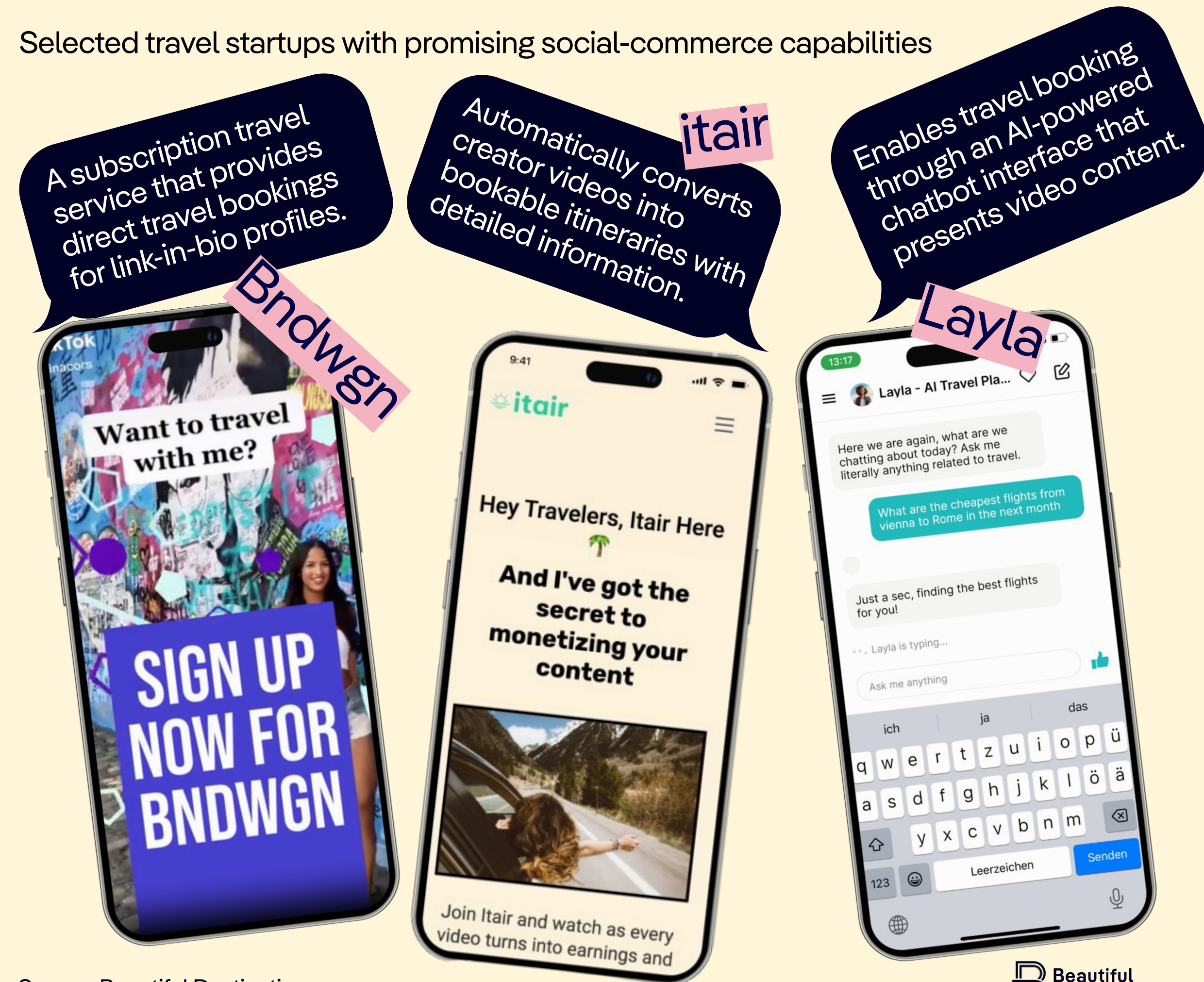
Additionally, emerging travel-specific startups like Layla, itair, and Bndwgn are making strides in simplifying the social travel purchase process, specifically focusing on the bookability of inspirational video content.

Travel brands must urgently experiment with these ready-to-use tools and platforms to kickstart their social commerce strategies.

These foundational solutions provide a manageable entry into social commerce while delivering immediate booking options to audiences.

The travel commerce ecosystem is emerging

Selected travel startups with promising social-commerce capabilities

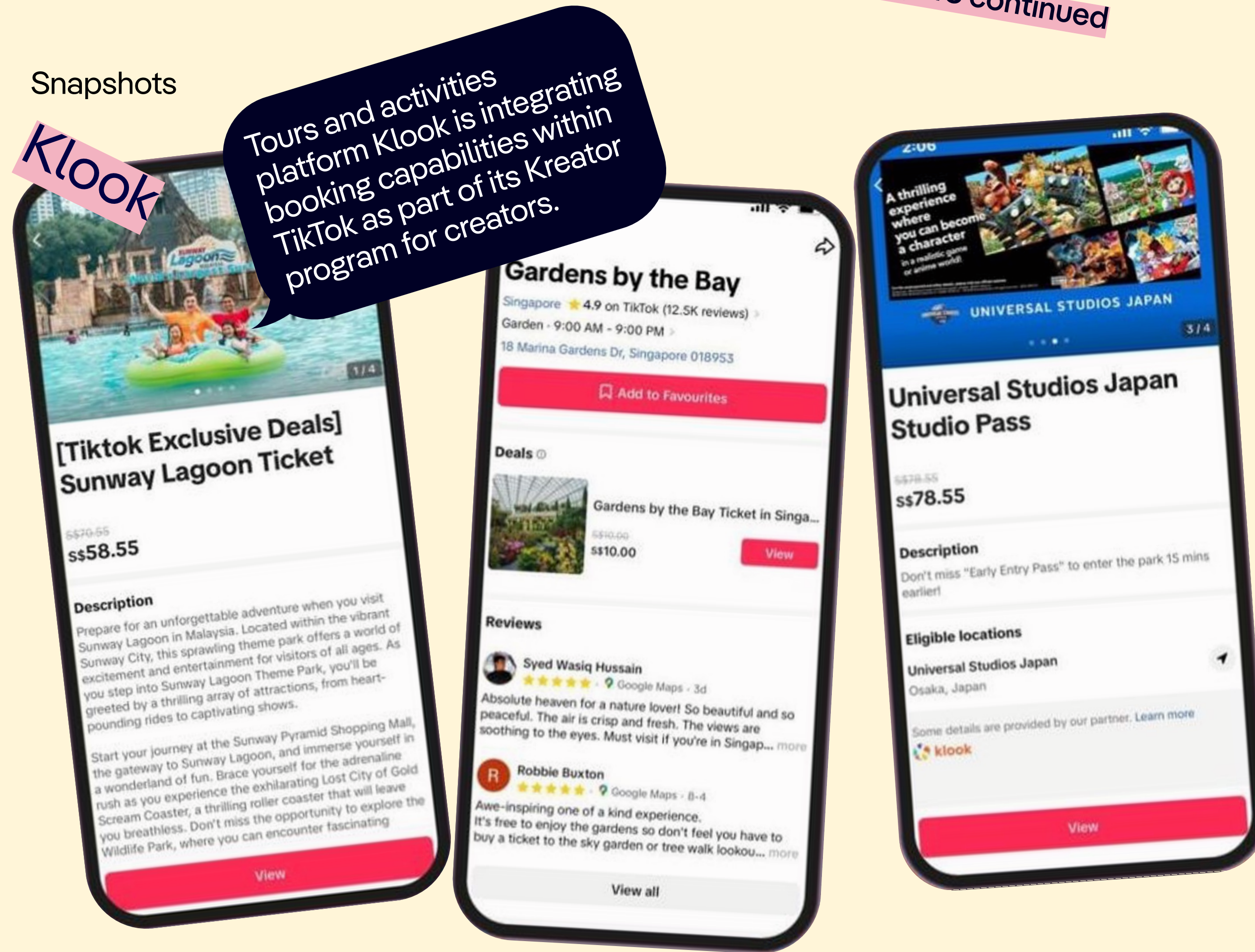


Source: Beautiful Destinations

Travel brands leading the way in social commerce

Step #3 continued

Snapshots



Step 2: Create In-App Storefronts on Social Media

Building on foundational tools, travel brands must deepen their social commerce engagement by enabling in-app bookings on major social platforms.

By collaborating with platforms like TikTok and Instagram and leveraging their white-label social shop features, travel brands can turn social engagement into direct bookings. Partnerships such as Klook's with TikTok, which allows travelers to book experiences or accommodations directly within the social media app, demonstrate how social channels can evolve into powerful booking engines.

This approach capitalizes on high engagement while reducing friction, creating a seamless pathway from inspiration to booking

Step 3: Expand Shoppable Experiences on Owned Platforms

The next evolution is creating branded, shoppable experiences not only within social-media platforms but also by transforming a brand's own mobile app

into a social-content-inspired booking platform.

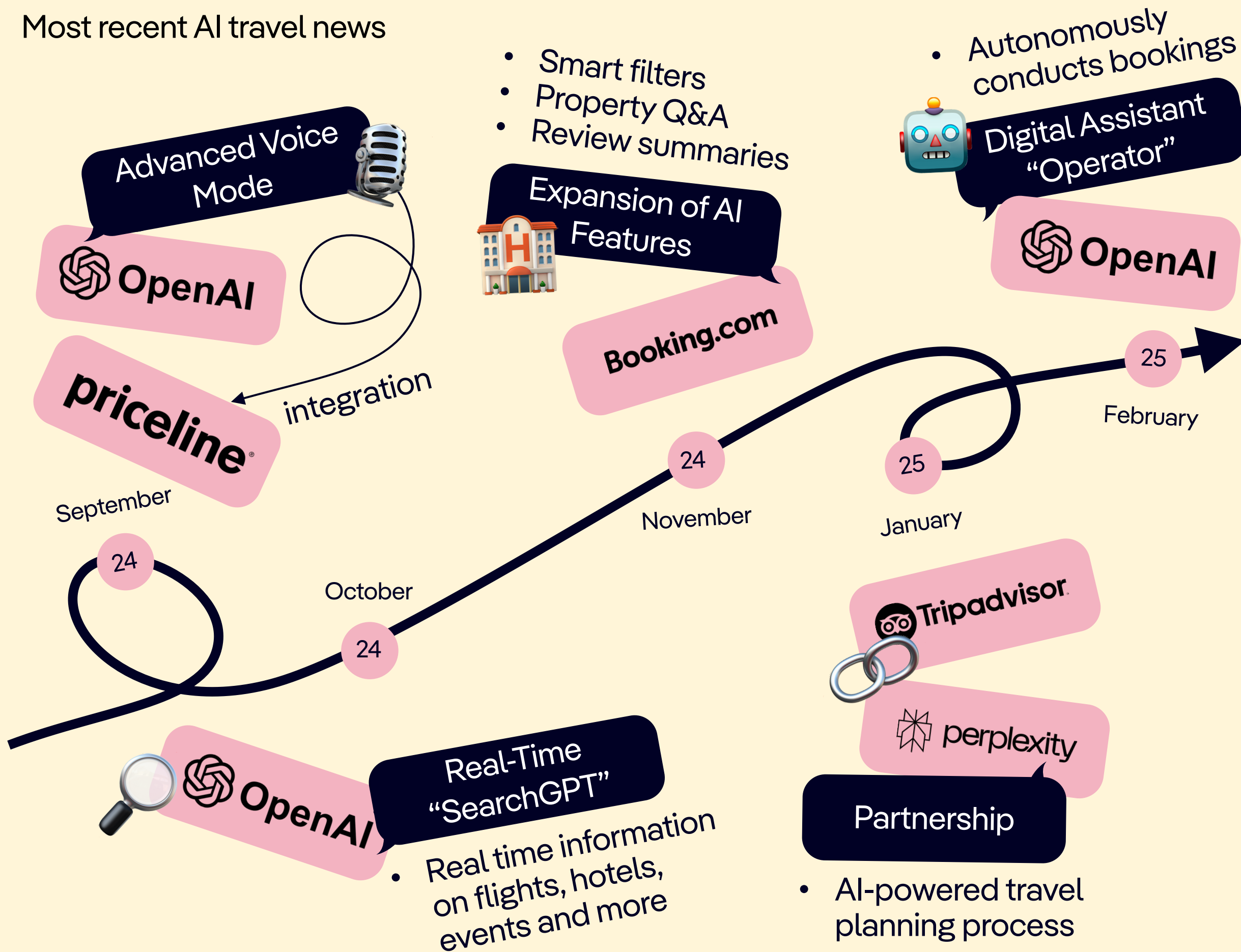
Expedia's [Travel Shops](#) leads the way here—a social-media-like environment within the Expedia app that curates recommendations from top creators and connects users to seamless booking journeys within the Expedia ecosystem, replicating a Mafengwo-style experience. Offering such an immersive, all-in-one experience enables brands to build branded social commerce environments that deepen engagement and retain audiences within their own channels.

Like Expedia's model, travel brands should collaborate with select creators to curate experiences within a dedicated storefront, providing a fully owned, shoppable social-media experience.

With Beautiful Destinations as a strategic partner, brands can expertly align world-class creator content with their commercial goals, ensuring a seamless social-commerce journey within their own platforms.

The AI disruption: Why travel brands must stay ahead

Most recent AI travel news



Beyond the three strategic imperatives presented, one force stands to reshape the social commerce era entirely: GenAI. AI is no longer a futuristic concept—it's already redefining how travelers discover, plan, and book their trips. The rumored acquisition talks between Perplexity and TikTok U.S. signal a future where AI and social media seamlessly merge, creating a radically new travel discovery and booking ecosystem.

At the same time, major travel brands are aggressively integrating AI into their platforms: OpenAI's partnerships with Booking Holdings, Tripadvisor, and Uber confirm that AI is becoming a core pillar of online travel innovation. Leading OTAs and metasearchers have also launched their own AI-powered booking features, including:

- Priceline's Penny – an AI voice assistant powered by GPT-4, designed for seamless trip planning.
- Expedia's ChatGPT integration – allowing travelers to ask open-ended travel questions, receive recommendations, and save trip details—all within the app.

- Kayak's "Ask Kayak" and ChatGPT plugin – providing curated booking suggestions in plain language.

These innovations represent just the first wave of AI in travel, and the disruption will only accelerate as cheaper AI models—like China's DeepSeek—make advanced AI integrations more accessible across the industry.

All of this will also reshape social media: Imagine hyper-personalized videos, images, or even AI avatars showcasing dream destinations—tailored to individual users based on browsing history, real-time trends, and personal preferences. AI could also transform how travel brands collaborate with creators, using AI to identify the seemingly perfect partnerships that drive business metrics with laser precision.

Undoubtedly, we are standing at the beginning of a transformative AI revolution, and no travel brand can afford to ignore its potential. Stay tuned for more thoughts on this very soon.

Pioneering the Social Commerce Era in Travel



Conclusion

The travel industry stands at the threshold of its own social commerce era, similar to the transformation seen in the fashion and beauty sectors several years ago. As the rules for applying social commerce in travel are currently being written, a significant opportunity exists for travel brands and their marketers to become industry pioneers, crafting innovative strategies that redefine customer engagement and reshape online sales.

To effectively navigate this new era, travel brands must move beyond traditional marketing and sales models,

creating unique, inspiring content formats that deeply engage audiences. Social commerce success relies on content that resonates emotionally—people buy when they feel truly inspired. Developing standout content is therefore foundational, and Beautiful Destinations is here to help travel brands produce the type of high-impact content that fuels sales.

At the same time, the rise of AI-powered personalization and conversational commerce will accelerate the shift toward social-first booking experiences. As AI capabilities rapidly advance, travel

brands must stay ahead of the curve, integrating AI-driven content strategies and dynamic booking solutions to maximize impact.

In addition, new, user-friendly storefronts and booking interfaces are essential. As social platforms expand their infrastructure to support direct transactions, the potential for social commerce in travel will only grow. Now is the time for action. By seizing first-mover advantages and implementing shoppable travel content across social media platforms, travel brands can lead this transformation.

Are you a travel leader ready to step boldly into this new era? Beautiful Destinations, with its vast expertise in content creation and digital strategy, is your ideal partner in navigating this evolving landscape.

Contact us to discuss how we can collaborate to shape the future of the travel industry.



Jeremy Jauncey

Founder & CEO,
Beautiful Destinations

Beautiful Destinations is a multi-award-winning strategy, creative, and content agency, home to one of the world's largest and most influential online travel communities.

Our team consists of travel marketing experts who specialize in inspiring and engaging global audiences through content. We use innovative marketing strategies and cutting-edge video content, to help shape the way the world travels.

Thank you



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