

# Understanding Audience Engagement with Japan Travel Itinerary Videos Across Social Media Platforms

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**Abstract:** Social media plays a central role in shaping destination image and tourist behavior. Beyond providing information and entertainment, it influences how viewers explore places, plan trips, and share their experiences after visiting destinations. While some prior studies have examined the role of social media in shaping tourists' choices, most have focused on individual social media platforms. Very few studies have compared how engagement differs across social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. This study addresses this gap by analyzing engagement on one popular 14 days Japan travel itinerary video from each platform, specifically YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. After cleaning, filtering, removing non-English comments and quality checks, the final dataset used for analysis consisted of 525 YouTube comments, 804 TikTok comments, and 451 Instagram comments. Sentiment analysis was done using RoBERTa and emotional tone was identified using the DistilRoBERTa-based J-Hartmann emotion model. Hugging Face's facebook/bart-large-mnli zero-shot model was used to assign comments to manually defined candidate labels, and final topic grouping was completed through manual mapping. Results show that YouTube generated predominantly positive sentiment and strong joy-based emotions, with viewers asking detailed trip-planning and itinerary-related questions and expressing intentions to visit Japan and follow the itinerary. In contrast, TikTok and Instagram showed largely neutral sentiment, dominated by emojis, tagging friends and family, and shorter emotional responses. Zero-shot topic analysis further confirmed this difference, showing that YouTube comments centered on information-seeking, trip planning, and past travel reflections, while TikTok and Instagram were more focused on short reactions, visual appreciation, destination praise, and social sharing. The findings show that YouTube platform supports detailed trip planning and engagement, while TikTok and Instagram encourage quick, emotion-based reactions. These insights can help influencers, destination management organizations (DMOs), and relevant policy makers design content that both guides travel decisions and inspires interest in destinations.

**Keywords:** Social Media Influencers, Sentiment and Emotion Analysis, Cross-Platform Engagement, User-Generated Comments, Destination Marketing

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## 1. Introduction

Social media has changed how tourists search for and get information and visit a destination. Traditionally, travel brochures and guidebooks were very popular among potential tourists but now they play a limited role. Nowadays, tourists are increasingly relying on digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram to gain important information about destinations. Previous studies found that users generated content (UGC) such as videos, photographs and comments act as important informational and affective tools that shape travelers' destination images, which in turn influence their intentions to visit (Aboalghanam et al., 2025; Guerreiro et al., 2024; Z. Wang et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025). Studies also suggest that visual and short-video content on social media and travel platforms enhance destination image and help to foster travel intention and reduce uncertainty with the destination (Leung et al., 2021; J. Liu et al., 2023). Travel-vlog content on YouTube enhances destination imagery and viewer engagement and information quality, vlogger credibility, and visual representation helps to jointly shape viewers travel intentions (Islam et al., 2024; Mirzamurodova Kizi et al., 2025; Silaban et al., 2022). Multiple studies demonstrate that short-video content on platforms such as TikTok influences tourist intentions (C. Liu et al., 2024; J. Liu et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). Similarly, On Instagram, research shows that travel-influencer content significantly influences travel intention and destination choice of viewers (Asdecker, 2022; Pourazad et al., 2025). Social Media Influencers are now playing a key role in destination marketing and tourist decision-making. They act as constant and trusted media channels. A recent review study found that SMI attributes such as credibility, authenticity and expertise reliably improve their audience attitudes and intentions (Barari et al., 2025). Past studies show that SMI use credibility and emotional storytelling to shape their followers' travel choices through relatable and narrative-driven content (Asdecker, 2022; A. Hussain & Ali, 2021; Pourazad et al., 2025)

SMI can influence decisions throughout the entire process, from creating initial interest and awareness to encouraging bookings and actual travel (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Wei et al., 2025). Research also shows that influencers not only help build destination image but also help in playing a role in shaping travel planning decisions (Pettersen-Sobczyk, 2023; Uniyal & Pant, 2024).

Each social media platform has its own features that shape how people create and understand travel stories. YouTube long-form videos allow creators to combine attractive storytelling, visuals, and personal thoughts and the viewers often leave comments that show their feelings and impressions about destinations shown (Asdecker, 2022; Carvache-Franco et al., 2023a; K. Hussain et al., 2024). TikTok relies on short, highly-scrolled videos and algorithmic discovery which usually get quick reactions like tagging or sharing. Its emotion-driven, interactive short videos significantly shape tourists' behavioral intentions by enhancing engagement, destination image (C. Liu et al., 2024; Y. Wang et al., 2025). In contrast, Instagram focuses on visual storytelling, where photos, captions, and short videos let users share moments and inspire others. On Instagram, influencer posts and Reels attract viewers through visuals and credibility, creating emotional bonds that influence travel choices.

Japan aims to attract 60 million international visitors by 2030 and under its *Tourism Nation* strategy. The Japan Tourism White Paper suggests promoting regional destinations through engaging digital content as a key strategy to disperse tourist flows and enhance distinctive local experiences (Japan Tourism Agency, 2024). Many past studies confirm that social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram now play a pivotal role in promoting destinations and inspiring travel decisions. However, comparative, cross-platform research on viewers' sentiment, emotions, and key discussion topics remains scarce. Therefore, this study fills that gap by examining comment patterns on Japan travel-itinerary videos across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram to explain how platform design and influencer storytelling shape destination perception. It investigates how viewers' sentiment, emotions and key discussion topics vary by platform, and explores which platforms prompt more interest in following the itinerary or planning travel.

## 2. Literature Review

Social media is significantly influencing tourists' travel in recent years (Tang et al., 2024). Research shows that these platforms influence how people select destination and plan their trips (Dai et al., 2021; Matikiti-Manyever & Kruger, 2019). UGC, such as travel videos, photos, and online reviews, has become an important information source which shapes tourists' perceptions of destinations and influences their travel intentions (Aboalghanam et al., 2025; Nguyen & Tong, 2023). Among social platforms, YouTube is the most examined in tourism studies as its long-form travel vlogs mix information with strong narratives, enhancing persuasive impact. A study with 154 Indonesian respondents found that *content* comprehensiveness and attitude toward YouTube travel content significantly predicted destination-visit intention (Siti & Sugeng, 2021). Similarly, Yanget al. (2025) analyzed user-generated short videos promoting rural tourism and found that destination image perception significantly mediated the relationship between TikTok content and willingness to visit. Similarly, Instagram uses its influence to promote destinations through visual storytelling. Overall, the most effective YouTube, TikTok, Instagram travel content combines narrative clarity, visual quality, and informational completeness which leads to stronger destination image and viewers' visit intention.

Beyond engagement metrics, researchers are increasingly examining viewer comments to understand their emotional reactions to travel content. Recent advances in social media data analytics are using comment data from platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram to uncover how audience sentiment and emotional response shape destination perception and viewers' intentions. Recent studies show that large-scale analysis of YouTube comments offers valuable insights into tourists' emotions, perceived destination image, and regional tourism potential, demonstrating the platform's growing relevance in tourism behavior research (Carvache-Franco et al., 2023; Kurniawan et al., 2023). Beyond YouTube, some studies using Instagram and TikTok comments show that user discussions on these platforms reveal emotional cues and destination-image themes, highlighting their growing importance in understanding tourists' perceptions and engagement (Binbasioglu Hulisian & Yilmaz, 2023; C. Liu et al., 2024c; Sobarna, 2023).

Sentiment, emotion, and discussion patterns in user comments reflect how viewers see influencer content and develop the desire to visit a place. Comparing these sentiments and emotions across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram will show how each platform shapes viewers' feelings, emotions, and perceptions of destinations.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study utilizes advanced large language model techniques to analyze viewer comments on influencer travel-itinerary videos of Japan across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. It examines how audiences express their sentiment, emotion, and thematic focus in response to Japan travel content shared on these platforms. The key purpose is to examine how each platform's design and influencers' storytelling style influence viewers' emotions, perceptions, and perception of Japan as a travel destination.

### 3.1 Videos Selection

To ensure comparability, one highly viewed two-week Japan itinerary video was selected from each platform:

1. YouTube: How To Spend Two Weeks in Japan – A Travel Itinerary by Inaka Adventure (uploaded 4 June 2022; ~1.7 million views, over 1,000 comments including replies, influencers with ~50 k subscribers).
2. TikTok: 2-WEEKS JAPAN ITINERARY by KarenExplores (uploaded 7 May 2023; ~436 k likes, ~66.8 k shares, and over 1,000 comments including replies).
3. Instagram: Best of Japan in 14 days by ColorCrush (uploaded 7 February 2024; ~11.1 million views, over 1,000 comments including replies, influencer with ~112 k followers).

Each video presents a comparable 14-day travel route and was chosen for its narrative similarity, good audience engagement and number of comments.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

All public comments from the selected YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram videos were collected and analyzed. Comments from YouTube were extracted through YouTube Data API, while those from TikTok and Instagram were obtained using the Apify Comments Scraper tool. Manual verification was also done to ensure accuracy. Duplicate comments, replies, irrelevant, and non-English entries were excluded to ensure data better quality. The final dataset comprised 525 comments from YouTube, 804 from TikTok, and 451 from Instagram. The cleaned data were then analyzed using a multi-stage natural language processing (NLP) pipeline integrating sentiment analysis, emotion detection, and zero-shot classification. Sentiment polarity was identified using the RoBERTa model while emotions were classified using the Large Language Model DistilRoBERTa (j-hartmann Model), and zero-shot classification with BART-MNLI assigned comments to thematic categories such as inspired to travel Japan, asking trip related question, electronic-word of mouth about Japan, tagging friends or family and aesthetic and visuals appreciation.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment results varied clearly across the three platforms (Fig. 1). For the YouTube video, most comments were positive, followed by neutral and a small number of negative sentiments. Viewers frequently praised the itinerary and visuals, asked question about travel to Japan, showing intentions to travel to Japan and follow the itinerary.

In contrast, comments on TikTok and Instagram were mainly neutral, with fewer positive and very limited negative responses. The short, reel-based nature of these platforms led viewers to post brief comments, tagging friends and family, or praising visuals and creators rather than detailed feedback and sharing travel intentions. Overall, YouTube generated more expressive and appreciative comments, while TikTok and Instagram showed shorter, more neutral responses.

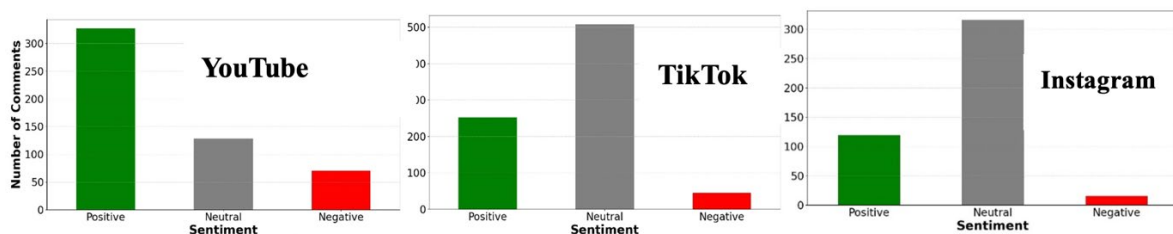


Figure 1: Sentiment Distribution of Comments on Japan Itinerary Videos across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram

### 4.2 Emotion Analysis

Emotional patterns varied clearly across the three platforms (Fig.2). YouTube comments showed the strongest sense of joy, as viewers often expressed content appreciation, excitement to visit Japan, and personal connection to the travel itinerary. The YouTube longer videos seemed to give viewers space to reflect and write comments

in more detail. On TikTok, most comments were neutral, with only a few showings joy or surprise. This suggests that viewers engaged briefly, tagging friends and family and reacting more to visuals and itinerary highlights. Instagram showed a mix of neutral and surprise, where comments focused on beauty, creativity, and admiration for Japan. In general, YouTube encouraged detailed and expressive engagement, while TikTok and Instagram encouraged shorter and visual reactions.

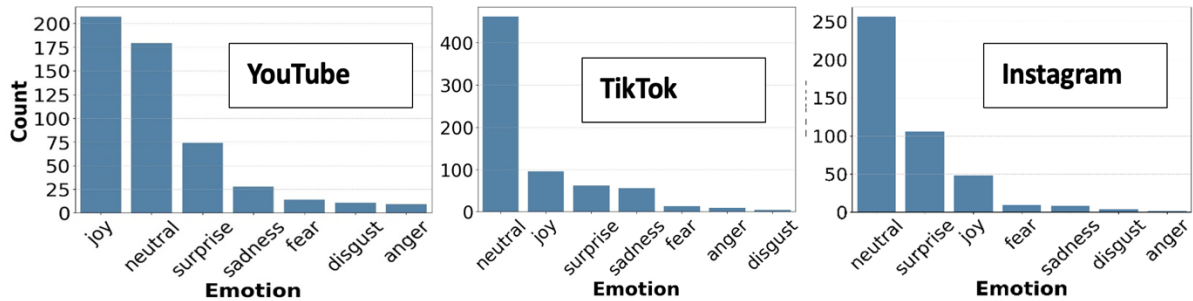


Figure 2: Sentiment Distribution of Comments on Japan Itinerary Videos across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram

### 4.3 Zero-Shot Classification

Zero-shot classification was performed using the Hugging Face *facebook/bart-large-mnli* model to assign comments to predefined candidate labels, which were manually mapped to broader topics. The following subsections present the zero-shot topic results for YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram videos comment.

#### 4.3.1 Zero-Shot Topic Analysis of YouTube Viewers Comments

A total of 44 candidate labels were developed, each beginning with the phrase “The viewer is ...” (for example, “The viewer finds the video helpful for planning”). These labels were applied to classify individual comments, and the resulting outputs were then manually mapped to broader thematic topics for analysis. Labels like “The viewer is sharing promotional, religious, or unrelated content” were also included to filter irrelevant comments

The zero-shot classification results in 9 topics. Figure 3 shows that the highest number of comments belonged to “Informative and Helpful Video” and “Japan Trip-Related Questions”. This indicates that viewers found the video informative and helpful for practical travel guidance. Many comments contained detailed questions about various destinations, transportation, weather, seasons and budgeting which shows the role of YouTube’s as an information tool for trip-planning. Topics such as “Inspired to Travel Japan” and “Planning Japan Trip with This Itinerary” highlight the video’s role in impacting viewers intentions to visit Japan, while “Bringing Back Travel Memories” and “Regret Not Seeing This Earlier” reflect viewers emotional attachment with destinations. A smaller number of comments under “Electronic Word of Mouth” and “Followed the Itinerary” suggest destination image and following the influencers travel route.

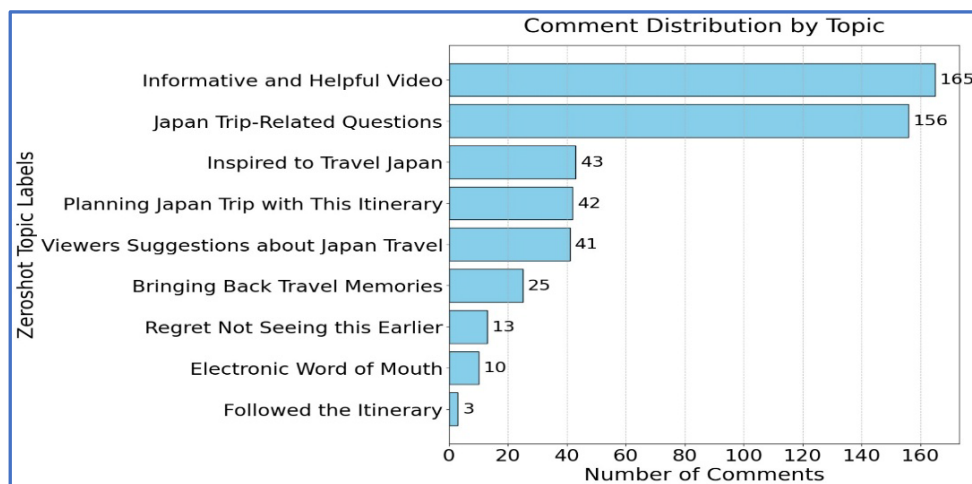


Figure 3: Zero-Shot Topic Mapping of YouTube Video Comments

#### 4.3.2 Zero-Shot Topic Analysis of Instagram and TikTok Viewers Comments

Using the same 30 candidate labels starting with “The viewer is ...” (e.g., “The viewer is expressing excitement or joy”), comments were classified and then grouped into five categories (Fig.4). Labels like “The viewer is sharing promotional, religious, or unrelated content” were also included to filter irrelevant comments. The largest group, “Emotional Reactions, Engagement & Tagging”, indicates that most users interacted through emojis, appreciative expressions, and tagging friends or family, reflecting TikTok and Instagram’s emphasis on short comments, visual appeal and social sharing. Topics such as “Planning & Inquiry” and “Destination Praise & E-WOM” indicate that some viewers were inspired to visit or recommend Japan. Finally, the topics like “Opinions & Experiences” and “Content & Creator Appreciation” reveal viewers opinion and appreciating creator. Overall, the comments show short, positive reactions, focused more on visual inspiration and social sharing than detailed discussion.

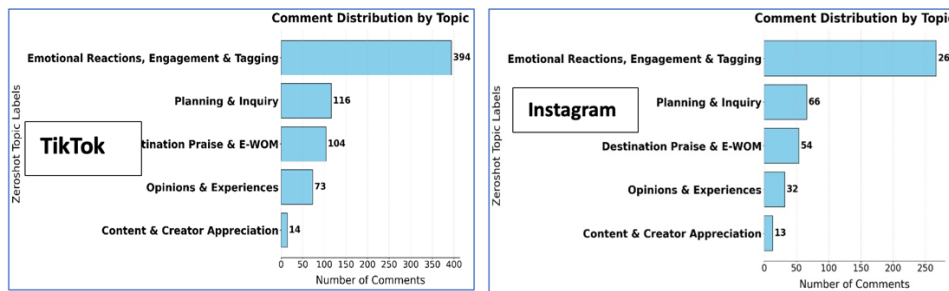


Figure 4: Zero-Shot Topic Mapping of TikTok and Instagram Video Comments

#### 4.3.3 Cross-Platform Topic Comparison

The zero-shot topic results reveal clear difference in how viewers interact with the same travel content across platforms. On YouTube, the largest share of comments fell under “Informative and Helpful Video” “Japan Trip-Related Questions,” and “Inspired to Travel Japan”, indicating that viewers treat YouTube as a source of practical information and trip planning. Users frequently ask for clarification, itinerary details, and travel tips, and intentions to visit Japan which reflects a strong trip planning-oriented engagement style.

On TikTok and Instagram, the dominant topic was “Emotional Reactions, Engagement & Tagging,” indicating brief, expressive, and socially oriented interaction through emojis and tagging family or friends. While some topics with fewer comments are related to trip planning which shows some curiosity about travel. Overall, engagement on both platforms was driven more by visual appeal and social sharing than by detailed trip preparation.

In summary, YouTube supports information-seeking and trip planning, while TikTok and Instagram encourage emotional engagement, curiosity, social sharing, and visual appreciation. These differences show how each platform shapes user behavior and influences how travel content is viewed and followed.

## 5. Discussion

Building on the topic-level patterns, the differences observed across various platforms highlight how social media content shapes the way viewers engage with it. It suggests that YouTube facilitates a form of engagement that goes beyond brief reactions. YouTube travel videos often elicit comments in which viewers express impressions and feelings about destinations, reflecting engagement with both visual content and personal narratives (Carvache-Franco et al., 2023a; K. Hussain et al., 2024). As a result, the study shows that YouTube comment sections provide spaces for reflection and opinion sharing, where viewers often express travel plans, ask trip-related questions, and reflect on past memories and impressions of the destinations featured in the videos.

In contrast, viewer response on TikTok and Instagram videos in this study was mostly quick and socially driven. Comments were often short and focused on emojis, tagging, and brief reactions, rather than detailed discussion or travel planning. This pattern is consistent with recent findings showing that TikTok travel videos influence the travel intentions of Generation Z and Millennials primarily through enjoyable and immersive viewing experiences (C. Liu et al., 2024). Similarly, research on Instagram influencer content shows that visually rich travel posts mainly create feelings of wanderlust and emotional interest through images and personal presentation, rather than encouraging detailed reflection or information sharing. (Asdecker, 2022). Overall, these findings suggest that TikTok and Instagram function mainly as inspirational platforms that promote emotional

engagement and social sharing, with a more limited role in practical travel planning while YouTube allows detailed space for viewers interactions.

## 6. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study contributes to tourism and social media research by showing that viewers' engagement with the same travel content varies across platforms due to differences in format and video style and viewer interaction norms. The findings clarify that YouTube tends to support more reflective, information-seeking, and trip planning-oriented engagement, while TikTok and Instagram content mainly encourage emotional reactions and social sharing. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that YouTube is more suitable for detailed travel guidance, whereas TikTok and Instagram are better used to generate inspiration and interest. Using these platforms will help travel influencers and destination management organizations to reach audiences more effectively across different stages of the travel decision process.

## 7. Conclusion

With social media now playing an important role in shaping tourist decisions, understanding how viewers respond to travel content across platforms has become essential. This study analyzed comments from YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram travel-itinerary videos to examine sentiment, emotional expression, and viewer topic focus. The cross-platform comparison shows that the similar kind of travel content generates different forms of engagement depending on platform style.

YouTube generated the most detailed interaction, with viewers asking practical questions about transport, budgeting, weather, timings, and how to follow the same itinerary. Many viewers connected the video to their own trip planning, showing that YouTube has become a helpful tool for gathering information and making travel decisions. In contrast, comments on TikTok and Instagram were shorter and more emotion-driven. Viewers reacted with excitement, tagged friends, posted emojis, and responded mainly to the visuals, while only a small number engaged in detailed travel planning. Overall, YouTube encouraged practical engagement, while TikTok and Instagram were used more for inspiration and quick emotional responses.

These findings show that platform design and communication style influence how viewers engage with travel content. YouTube encourages more thoughtful and planning-based engagement, while TikTok and Instagram promote short, visually driven emotional reactions. This suggests that a destination can go viral on TikTok or Instagram overnight through visual excitement, whereas YouTube encourages more thoughtful and responsible trip planning.

## 8. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its use of a single video from each platform, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research using larger and more varied sets of videos from every platform would help to test whether the observed engagement patterns and findings hold across different content types, creators, and destinations.

## Ethics Declaration

This study used publicly available data and did not require ethical approval.

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