

# Traveling Through Word-of-Mouth:

## Is Your Brand a Part of the Trip?



**According to the US Travel Association, direct spending by resident and international travelers in the U.S. averaged \$2.6 billion a day, \$108.1 million an hour, \$1.8 million a minute and \$30,033 a second.**

Consumers collectively spend thousands of dollars per second and there is massive competition among travel and hospitality brands, with brand marketers battling to capture market share and loyalty. How do marketers stand out and outshine their competition? What impacts consumers in their travel purchases and brand preferences, and how can brands influence?

Social Media Link conducted a study among 21,000 members of its consumer influencer community, Smiley360, to help answer these questions. In this study, travelers shared travel habits, popular travel brands, purchase influencers and sharing activity.

### REPORT QUICK HITS



**Consumers seek travel opinions on social media.** 48% have solicited advice from their social media friends and followers for vacation recommendations.



**Social sharing is native to vacationing.** 92% post to social media at least once while on vacation.



**Loyalty programs help spark advocacy.** 52% have recommended an airline or hotel loyalty program in the last six months.



**Friends and followers sway travel decisions.** 40% said they have actually changed vacation plans based on reviews and recommendations shared by social media friends and followers.

## Travel Habits Overview

The Smiley community is an active group of holidaymakers. **Of the 21,000 respondents, 47% take more than one vacation a year and close to two-thirds (65%) plan to take a vacation this year between May and September.** The majority plans vacation 2-3 months in advance and the family tends to come in tow as **64% plan to take their children with them.**

## Most Popular Airline and Hotel Loyalty Programs

Roughly 43% participate in an airline loyalty program and 50% say they participate in a hotel loyalty program. And they're not afraid to share about it. In the past six months, more than half (52%) have recommended an airline or hotel loyalty program.

### Top 5 Airline Loyalty Programs

1		Southwest-Southwest Rapid Rewards	43%
2		Delta-Delta Skymiles	37%
3		American Airlines-AAdvantage	34%
4		United-United Mileage Plus	24%
5		Jetblue-Jetblue TrueBlue	16%

### Top 5 Hotel Loyalty Programs

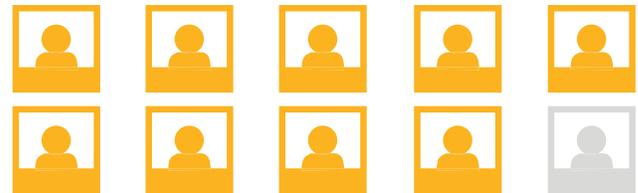
1		Hilton-HHonors	36%
2		Marriott-Marriott Rewards	28%
3		Best Western-Best Western Rewards	27%
4		Comfort Inn-Choice Privilege	24%
5		Wyndham-Wyndham Rewards	19%

## Social Activity While on Vacation

### Sharing is a vacation activity.

It seems like a distant past when scrapbooks and photo albums captured vacation memories. It's been overwhelmingly replaced with pic stitches, check-ins, colorful filters and selfie sticks.

Roughly 9 in 10 (92%) post at least once to social media channels during vacations.



A little more than one-third will post multiple times a day.

### Where are they sharing?

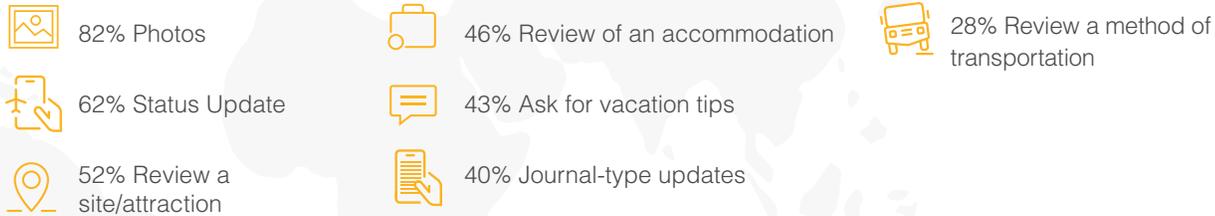
Not surprisingly, Facebook dominates as the most popular channel, but other sites like Instagram and Twitter are frequently used by 42% and 32% respectively. Additionally, roughly 18% share to Pinterest and 16% share to Snapchat.

### Vacation Sharing by Channel



Typically respondents will share the obvious: photos (82%).

However, more than half say they review a site/attraction, 46% review an accommodation and 28% review a method of transportation like airlines and buses.



## Social's Impact on Decisions

### Vacation decisions can be swayed.

Respondents heed the words of their friends and followers. Forty-percent have actually changed vacation plans based on what they learned from social connections.

Most notably, 48% of those who have changed plans said they changed accommodations. Other changes included planned vacation activities (47%) and restaurant reservations (40%). About 16% said they have changed airlines as a result of social media recommendations. Remarkably, 23% said they have changed to another destination entirely!

### Consumers actively seek vacation advice from their online circles.

In the last 12 months, close to half (48%) said they have explicitly solicited advice from their social network friends and followers for vacation recommendations.

#### TAKEAWAY

## How Will Your Brand Capture the \$30,033 Spent Each Second on Domestic Travel?

Social media advocacy and word-of-mouth has a huge impact on every industry and travel is no exception. Social word-of-mouth plays a central role in the entire travel experience including the destination, travel methods, accommodations and activities.

Advocacy is one of the most powerful forces in a marketer's arsenal: creating authentic relationships with the right consumers amplifies influential conversations which in turn ignites action around brand decision-making. Consumers are trained to research before purchase and they increasingly turn to their networks of friends and followers, and travel brand marketers have an incredible opportunity to be a part of the conversation.

### Survey Methodology

Social Media Link conducted a survey of 21,835 people from its consumer influencer community, Smiley360.com from February 16 to April 5. 94% of respondents were female; Half (50%) were 18 to 34 years old; 45% were 35 to 44 years old.

Contact us at [info@socialmedialink.com](mailto:info@socialmedialink.com) if you have questions or are interested in learning more about advocacy and influencer marketing solutions.