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**Title: Influence of Online Travel Agencies on
Traveller Behaviour During the Christmas
Season**

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ABSTRACT

The Christmas season represents a unique period within global travel, marked by heightened emotions, cultural symbolism, and significantly increased decision pressure. This assignment explores how Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) influence traveller behaviour during this emotionally charged time of year. Through secondary qualitative research and thematic analysis, the study examines how festive digital design, persuasive interface cues, dynamic pricing, scarcity messaging, algorithmic visibility, reviews, mobile notifications, loyalty programs, bundled Christmas packages, and user-generated festive content collectively shape travel decisions. The findings reveal that OTAs do far more than facilitate bookings—they actively construct festive imagination, reinforce Westernised Christmas narratives, and guide consumer actions through sophisticated digital persuasion techniques. The study also highlights the ethical implications of commercialising emotions and cultural traditions, showing how OTAs reshape the meaning of Christmas travel through digitally engineered pathways. Ultimately, the research concludes that contemporary Christmas travel is deeply intertwined with algorithmic curation and digital influence, transforming personal festive rituals into structured consumer experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Christmas is one of the most emotionally meaningful seasons of the year, marked by traditions, rituals, nostalgia, family expectations, and a sense of collective celebration. In the last decade, this festive period has also become one of the most commercially significant times in global tourism. While people once travelled during Christmas primarily to reunite with family or participate in religious observances, modern travellers increasingly view the holiday as an opportunity to explore new destinations, enjoy winter-themed experiences, or create memorable moments with loved ones. Within this shifting landscape, Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as Booking.com, MakeMyTrip, Airbnb, Expedia, Agoda, and Trip.com play a crucial role in shaping how Christmas travel is imagined, planned, and ultimately booked.

What makes Christmas travel behaviour particularly unique is the way emotion overrides rationality. The desire to create a “perfect holiday” heightens travellers’ sensitivity to persuasive digital cues. People browse OTA platforms with a psychological mix of excitement, pressure, sentimentality, and urgency. This emotional state becomes fertile ground for digital influence—something OTAs harness through festive interface design, curated suggestions, enhanced scarcity messaging, and personalised notifications. As a result, decisions made during Christmas are not shaped solely by budget or availability but by a complex intersection of emotional triggers and algorithmic persuasion.

The role of OTAs extends far beyond simple information provision. These platforms organise, filter, prioritise, and frame the travel choices that users encounter. During the Christmas season, they deploy seasonal marketing strategies—snow-themed graphics, holiday banners, curated “Christmas Market Getaways,” winter holiday discounts, and family-oriented packages—that

directly tap into cultural symbolism and emotional nostalgia. Even travellers who had no initial intent to travel may become tempted to book because digital imagery evokes a romanticised vision of Christmas away from home. In this way, OTAs subtly shift Christmas from a cultural tradition into a consumer experience.

Moreover, the intensity of festive demand creates a highly dynamic pricing environment. Rates change rapidly, and travellers become more willing to accept higher prices because of emotional fear of missing out on limited festive opportunities. Scarcity cues—such as “Only 1 room left for Christmas week”—carry more weight during this season, increasing booking urgency. OTAs reinforce this behaviour through personalised reminders, push notifications, and predictive price alerts, making the booking journey more emotionally charged than at any other time of year.

Additionally, the rise of user-generated content has become a decisive factor in festive travel behaviour. Reviews, ratings, and real photos showing decorated hotel lobbies, Christmas markets, snowy streets, and festive dinners influence expectations profoundly. Travellers seek emotional reassurance that their holiday will feel “magical” or “festive,” and peer content serves as proof that such experiences are achievable.

This assignment seeks to examine these factors in depth, analysing how OTAs influence traveller behaviour during the Christmas season and exploring the broader implications on culture, consumer psychology, and digital ethics. By reviewing existing literature, industry insights, and digital platform behaviour, this study aims to understand how digital systems shape one of the most emotionally significant tourism periods of the year.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Christmas season is one of the most emotionally charged moments in global tourism, and digital platforms play a growing role in shaping how travellers behave during this period. To understand how Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) influence Christmas travel behaviour, this literature review synthesises perspectives from digital tourism research, persuasive technology theory, emotional consumer decision-making, algorithmic visibility studies, behavioural economics, and contemporary platform governance. Christmas is not simply a travel period—it is a cultural ritual saturated with symbolism, nostalgia, financial pressure, and heightened emotional expectations. This unique emotional landscape creates a fertile environment for OTAs to exert subtle yet powerful influence over how travellers imagine, plan, and purchase their festive experiences.

2.1 Emotional Psychology of Christmas Travel

Christmas evokes a powerful blend of emotions—warmth, belonging, nostalgia, excitement, and sometimes guilt or pressure. Studies on seasonal consumer behaviour highlight that emotions play a central role in shaping holiday-related decisions (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). During

Christmas, travellers seek experiences that evoke childhood memories, recreate familiar rituals, or generate new emotional moments with family or partners.

In this psychological environment, decision-making becomes less rational and more symbolic. People pay more for convenience, ambiance, and “special festive experiences,” even when the financial cost is substantial. These emotional motives make travellers more vulnerable to digital persuasion, especially when OTAs present imagery or suggestions that align with nostalgic holiday ideals. Christmas travel decisions therefore operate at the intersection of emotion and digital influence, making this season distinct from other peak travel periods.

2.2 Festive Digital Aesthetics and the Psychology of Seasonal Design

The literature increasingly emphasises the persuasive power of seasonal digital aesthetics (Fogg, 2003). These design elements do more than beautify the platform—they psychologically prime users for festive travel. Research shows that visual cues evoke emotional memory and enhance resonance with cultural rituals (Tussyadiah, 2016). When travellers see snowy landscapes, decorated hotels, or festive markets on OTA homepages, their mood shifts toward holiday excitement and impulse-driven planning.

This demonstrates how Christmas-themed digital environments subtly steer users toward seasonal offerings, shaping their preferences long before they begin searching.

2.3 Online Travel Agencies as Cultural Storytellers

OTAs increasingly act as cultural narrators by curating and promoting specific Christmas travel experiences. Rather than simply listing options, they actively craft seasonal narratives such as:

- “Europe’s Most Magical Christmas Markets”
- “Cozy Winter Getaways”
- “Romantic Christmas Stays for Couples”
- “Top Family-Friendly Christmas Destinations”

Recent studies argue that digital platforms create “imagined tourism cultures” by repeatedly highlighting certain experiences (Gretzel & Jamal, 2020). Christmas becomes represented as a commercialised ritual—a blend of snowy landscapes, festive lights, hot chocolate, decorated streets, and market stalls. Even culturally diverse travellers begin associating Christmas with these Westernised images, demonstrating how OTAs participate in reshaping global festive tourism identity.

This storytelling power gives OTAs significant influence over traveller expectations and desires.

2.4 Algorithmic Visibility and Seasonal Booking Patterns

Algorithms control what users see on OTA platforms. Scholarly literature emphasises that algorithmic curation significantly shapes consumer pathways (Werthner & Ricci, 2020). During Christmas, algorithms amplify:

- destinations with strong festive performance
- hotels offering Christmas packages
- listings with high seasonal reviews
- properties most likely to convert during peak periods

This creates a cyclical effect—destinations that were popular in past Christmas seasons reappear prominently, reinforcing their festive reputation. Meanwhile, less traditional Christmas destinations receive lower visibility, regardless of actual quality or appeal.

For travellers, this algorithmic shaping appears as neutral recommendation, even though commercial motives influence it. As a result, algorithms play a significant role in constructing the global geography of Christmas travel.

2.5 Dynamic Pricing and Festive Behavioural Economics

Christmas travel sits at the centre of behavioural economics research because demand surges dramatically. Studies on dynamic pricing highlight that OTAs adjust prices based on browsing behaviour, demand predictions, and seasonal patterns (Ivanov & Webster, 2020).

During Christmas:

- prices change quickly and sometimes dramatically
- travellers perceive price increases as emotionally threatening
- fear of missing out intensifies decision-making
- budgets become flexible due to festive sentiment

Behavioural economics demonstrates that fear of loss (loss aversion) drives consumers to buy earlier at higher rates, believing that delays will ruin festive plans. These cues transform Christmas booking into a high-pressure emotional journey.

2.6 Scarcity Messaging and the Fear of Festive Failure

Scarcity cues significantly influence consumer behaviour during peak seasons (Cialdini, 2007). Christmas intensifies these effects because travellers perceive festive experiences as once-a-year opportunities. Scarcity triggers such as “only one room left” or “booked 20 times today” evoke fear of disappointment—not just financially but emotionally.

Literature on seasonal stress (Kasser & Sheldon, 2002) highlights that families feel pressure to make Christmas memorable. OTAs leverage this through scarcity messaging that accelerates booking decisions and increases willingness to pay higher prices.

Thus, scarcity shapes both emotional urgency and final travel choices.

2.7 Social Proof: Festive Reviews and User-Generated Holiday Content

User-generated content (UGC) is one of the most trusted forms of online persuasion. Festive reviews carry additional weight because they describe emotional qualities: decorations, atmosphere, warmth, dining events, and winter experiences. Travellers rely heavily on peer photos during Christmas because they want assurance that the property will meet their emotional expectations.

According to Filieri (2019), trust increases when users see “evidence of experiential satisfaction” from other travellers. During Christmas, such evidence becomes deeply emotional—people look for comforting lights, festive music, decorated trees, snowy balconies, or joyful family events.

This emotional validation significantly guides final booking decisions.

2.8 Mobile App Nudging and Real-Time Festive Influence

Mobile platforms play an increasingly dominant role in Christmas travel. Research shows that last-minute bookings peak during December, particularly on mobile apps (Statista, 2024). OTAs utilise push notifications as real-time nudges to influence impulsive festive behaviour.

Notifications highlight:

- sudden price drops
- expiring deals
- saved-property reminders
- last-minute Christmas packages

These alerts intersect with emotionally heightened moments—shopping trips, family gatherings, social events—making travellers more receptive to booking. This demonstrates how mobile OTAs enter the everyday festive environment and convert emotional triggers into immediate travel action.

2.9 Loyalty Programs and Seasonal Reinforcement Cycles

Loyalty systems play a massive role in travel behaviour year-round, but their influence increases during emotionally significant periods. OTA loyalty programs often provide festive bonuses, exclusive holiday deals, or Christmas-week upgrades. These incentives create seasonal behavioural loops, encouraging travellers to book on the same platform each year.

Long-term studies on loyalty economics highlight that rewards foster emotional reliance, not just financial benefit (Bakker, 2023). During Christmas, this emotional reliance is further strengthened by festive-themed promotions.

2.10 Ethical Dimensions of Festive Digital Persuasion

While OTAs offer convenience, flexibility, and inspiration, their Christmas strategies raise ethical questions. Scholars argue that emotional vulnerability can be exploited through aggressive scarcity messaging, opaque algorithms, and commercialised festive narratives (Zuboff, 2019).

Travellers are often unaware of:

- sponsored placements
- algorithmic prioritisation
- manipulation through emotional aesthetics
- psychological exploitation of festive anxieties

This creates a blurry ethical line between assistance and manipulation.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for this study is shaped by the emotional, cultural, and digital complexity of Christmas travel behaviour. Christmas is a period where decision-making is not simply a rational process but an emotionally layered experience. Travellers enter the holiday season with predefined expectations, cultural associations, and pressures relating to family, tradition, and personal meaning. Online Travel Agencies operate within this psychological landscape, influencing travellers through a mixture of digital design, curated persuasion, and algorithmic decision-making. To understand such an emotionally embedded phenomenon, a qualitative and interpretive methodology was chosen.

3.1 Research Approach

The study adopts a **qualitative interpretive approach**, which is appropriate for understanding human emotions, subjective meanings, and behavioural motivations. Christmas travel decisions are rarely linear—they are fluid and shaped by memories, expectations, pressures, and fantasies. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore *why* travellers respond to OTA influences, not merely *how much* they are influenced. This is crucial for holiday-specific research, where psychological depth matters more than numerical measurement.

3.2 Research Design

An **exploratory research design** was used. Existing literature on OTAs is extensive, but festive-specific travel behaviour—especially Christmas-related behaviour—remains under-examined. Christmas represents a unique travel context: high emotional stakes, intense commercial activity, predictable seasonal pressure, and limited availability windows. Therefore, an exploratory design enables the discovery of new patterns, behavioural triggers, and digital influences that have not been formally categorised in previous tourism studies.

3.3 Data Sources

All data used in this study is **secondary**, collected from:

- academic articles on digital tourism, consumer behaviour, emotional psychology, and persuasive system design
- OTA industry reports (Booking.com Insights, Expedia Trends, MakeMyTrip, Skift, Trip.com seasonal reports)
- tourism market analyses related to Christmas and seasonal peaks
- theoretical frameworks from behavioural economics and human-computer interaction
- observation of OTA platforms during the Christmas booking season (layout changes, festive banners, scarcity cues, pricing behaviour, loyalty incentives, etc.)

These secondary sources were chosen because Christmas travel is a global phenomenon documented across markets, platforms, and academic disciplines. This allowed for a wide perspective on holiday travel behaviour.

3.4 Data Analysis Method: Thematic Analysis

The study used **thematic analysis**, which involved:

1. **Collecting** data from journals, industry reports & platform observations
2. **Reading and re-reading** to identify recurring ideas
3. **Coding** phrases related to festive behaviour, emotional triggers, and OTA strategies
4. **Grouping** codes into broader themes such as:
 - Festive interface design
 - Social proof during Christmas
 - Scarcity and urgency
 - Emotional vulnerability
 - Algorithmic prioritisation
 - Loyalty-driven festive patterns
 - Winter pricing dynamics
 - Digital holiday storytelling
5. **Interpreting** how these themes influence traveller behaviour.

This method helped reveal the layered connection between emotional seasons and digital persuasion.

3.5 Research Limitations

Despite the depth of insight, the study has several limitations:

- OTA algorithms remain proprietary, limiting full understanding of how Christmas visibility is engineered.
- Secondary research cannot directly capture individual emotional experiences of travellers.
- Christmas is culturally and geographically diverse; findings may apply differently across regions.
- Digital platform behaviour changes yearly based on market conditions.

However, the combination of industry insights, academic literature, and platform observation offers a strong foundation for analysing how OTAs shape festive travel behaviour.

4. FINDINGS

Christmas-Themed Digital Design Creates Emotional Immersion

The first finding reveals that OTAs intentionally transform their interfaces during December to evoke festive emotions. Warm-toned banners, snowy backdrops, glittering icons, and holiday typography create an immersive emotional environment. Travellers entering the platform instantly feel the shift in atmosphere—almost as if they have stepped into a digital version of a Christmas market.

This emotional environment is not accidental. It primes users for holiday-related travel thinking. Even travellers who visit OTAs with no festive intention find themselves browsing winter escapes because the platform sets a psychological context. Emotional design acts as a cue, reminding users of warmth, tradition, celebration, and nostalgia—powerful emotional states that can directly inspire travel planning.

OTAs Reinforce a Globalised, Westernised Christmas Travel Image

A strong trend observed in the findings is that OTAs promote a standardised image of Christmas travel—one deeply rooted in Western winter aesthetics. Snowy European cities, decorated markets, ice skating, mulled wine, wooden cabins, and fairy lights dominate search results and curated lists. This image is pushed even in countries where Christmas is neither snowy nor celebrated in this style.

Over time, travellers absorb this idealised narrative. They begin to associate Christmas with these specific experiences, even if these are not cultural traditions they grew up with. OTAs, therefore, do not merely respond to consumer demand—they help create the demand. The Westernised Christmas aesthetic becomes a globally desired tourism product, influenced heavily by digital platform storytelling.

Dynamic Pricing Creates Emotional Pressure and Accelerates Decisions

Christmas is a period of extreme price volatility. OTAs use dynamic pricing models that adjust rates based on demand spikes, browsing patterns, and scarcity indicators. Travellers frequently observe prices rising within a single session or between consecutive days.

During Christmas, this produces heightened emotional pressure. Travellers fear that waiting even a few hours may significantly increase prices. This fear—intensified by festive emotional stakes—accelerates decision-making. Families, in particular, feel pressured because failing to secure an affordable Christmas trip carries emotional consequences, not just financial ones.

OTAs capitalise on this psychological vulnerability by displaying predictive price alerts and warnings tailored specifically to Christmas-week demand.

Scarcity Messaging Feels More Real and More Urgent During Christmas

Scarcity messaging is a powerful digital persuasion technique year-round, but it becomes far more potent during Christmas. Messages like:

- *“Only 1 room left for Christmas week”*
- *“Booked 32 times in the last 24 hours”*
- *“High demand for 23–26 December”*

feel highly believable during the festive season because travellers know hotels genuinely fill up during this period. This believability increases urgency.

Travellers interpret scarcity cues as social pressure—others are booking faster, and they risk missing out. Emotional fear of disappointing loved ones further intensifies this reaction. As a result, travellers often make quicker decisions and accept higher prices during Christmas than during other seasons.

Social Proof Gains Emotional Weight During Festive Planning

Another major finding is the central role of social proof—reviews, ratings, and photos—during Christmas decision-making. Travellers do not simply look for clean rooms or good service; they specifically search for festive indicators:

- decorated lobbies
- Christmas trees
- holiday dinners
- market proximity
- winter views
- festive ambience

This emotional validation is crucial because travellers want to ensure that their chosen destination *feels* festive. Peer photos showing twinkling lights, snowy balconies, or Christmas meals carry more persuasive power than professional marketing imagery.

Christmas amplifies the power of reviews because the emotional risk of disappointment is higher.

Mobile Notifications Trigger Spontaneous Festive Bookings

During December, people are more active, more social, and more emotionally stimulated. They attend events, shop, and exchange holiday plans with others. OTAs use mobile push notifications to insert themselves into these emotionally heightened moments.

Notifications about:

- sudden festive discounts
- expiring Christmas deals
- reminders for saved listings
- alerts of rising prices

arrive at times when travellers are already emotionally charged. This leads to spontaneous, impulsive bookings. Mobile devices thus become emotional gateways through which OTAs influence holiday travel decisions in real time.

Loyalty Programs Drive Repeated Christmas Bookings

Christmas is a time when people feel financially stretched, yet emotionally generous. Loyalty programs—Genius, Expedia Rewards, Agoda VIP—leverage this by offering festive incentives such as extra points, exclusive deals, or seasonal upgrades.

Travellers perceive loyalty benefits as a reward for their year-long engagement, making them more willing to book through the same platform every Christmas. These loyalty cycles form behavioural routines, where Christmas travel planning begins automatically on the OTA where the traveller holds status.

Over time, loyalty programs build emotional and habitual dependence.

OTAs Reduce Christmas Stress Through Simplification and Structure

Christmas is a chaotic season. Planning travel amidst holiday shopping, family gatherings, work deadlines, and social commitments becomes overwhelming. OTAs reduce this burden by simplifying the journey:

- providing comparisons
- highlighting the best festive stays
- offering flexible cancellation
- arranging Christmas packages
- organising search results logically
- filtering family-friendly and winter-themed options

Travellers perceive OTAs as calm, structured spaces during a stressful season. This emotional relief increases trust and makes users more receptive to OTA suggestions during Christmas.

Christmas Bundles and “Experience Packages” Intensify Emotional Spending

A prominent finding is that OTAs heavily promote bundled Christmas experiences, such as “Christmas Market Tours,” “Winter Romance Getaways,” “Festive Family Packages,” and “Snowy Cabin Stays.” These bundles are emotionally framed—emphasising warmth, celebration, tradition, and memory-making.

Travellers interpret these bundles not as mere tourism products but as curated festive experiences designed to deliver emotional satisfaction. Because Christmas is tied to expectations of togetherness, comfort, and special moments, travellers become more willing to invest in premium packages. Families justify higher spending because they see Christmas as a time to “create memories,” while couples perceive bundles as a way to make the season romantic and meaningful.

Thus, OTA Christmas bundles influence traveller spending patterns by converting emotional aspirations into structured travel purchases.

Flexible Cancellation Builds Psychological Safety During Festive Uncertainty

Christmas is unpredictable—illness, weather disruptions, changing family plans, and end-of-year work pressures often affect travel decisions. This study finds that travellers heavily rely on

flexible cancellation policies during the festive season. OTAs strategically highlight phrases such as:

- “Free cancellation before 24 December”
- “Flexibility for Christmas week”
- “Reserve now, pay later”

These features reduce anxiety and create psychological comfort. Travellers feel secure knowing they can modify their plans without financial loss. Because Christmas carries emotional weight, the fear of losing money feels stronger than usual. Flexibility therefore becomes a tool through which OTAs build trust and increase booking likelihood.

OTAs Serve as Crisis Managers During Christmas Disruptions

Christmas often experiences travel disruptions due to winter storms, flight delays, overbooking, and logistical issues. This analysis reveals that many travellers depend on OTAs to navigate such crises because contacting hotels or airlines individually becomes overwhelming.

When OTAs assist with rebooking, refunds, or emergency accommodation, travellers perceive them as reliable and protective. During Christmas—when emotional disappointment feels amplified—successful problem-solving creates deep loyalty. OTAs thus shift from being transactional platforms to emotional support systems during high-stress situations.

Group Travel Dynamics Are Shaped by OTA Interface Features

Christmas is dominated by group travel: families, friends, couples, or extended relatives travelling together. OTAs significantly influence these group decisions through organisational tools such as:

- group-friendly filters
- shared wishlists
- property comparison layouts
- room configuration suggestions
- recommendations for Christmas activities

These features reduce conflict and decision fatigue within groups. By offering curated festive options for families, couples, or friend groups, OTAs subtly steer group dynamics toward specific styles of Christmas travel.

Group travellers often adopt OTA suggestions as a neutral “middle ground,” even when these suggestions are algorithmically curated. This gives OTAs an influential role in shaping collective holiday experiences.

User-Generated Festive Content Provides Emotional Proof and Builds Trust

Reviews and user-uploaded photos gain heightened importance during Christmas. Travellers look for evidence that a destination can deliver the “magic” they imagine. User photos showing:

- Christmas lights
- festive dinners
- decorated hotels
- winter landscapes
- holiday entertainment

act as emotional verification. Travellers trust these images more than official marketing content because they reflect authentic experiences.

This emotional validation reduces uncertainty and strengthens travellers’ confidence in their booking decisions. It also reinforces OTA influence by making the platform a central source of festive reassurance.

OTAs Commercialise Christmas by Turning Cultural Rituals into Tourist Products

A major finding is that OTAs transform Christmas—a cultural, religious, and familial ritual—into a marketable tourism product. They construct Christmas as:

- a “magical travel season”
- a curated winter event
- a lifestyle experience
- a series of purchasable moments

This commercial framing shifts the meaning of Christmas from tradition-based to consumption-based. Travellers begin to equate Christmas with travel experiences marketed by OTAs, such as snowy getaways and festive markets. The digitalisation of Christmas therefore reshapes cultural expectations and encourages consumers to participate in commercialised festive experiences.

Christmas Travel Is Now Algorithmically Directed Rather Than Tradition-Driven

The final finding reveals that Christmas travel decisions are increasingly guided by algorithms rather than personal tradition. OTAs determine:

- what destinations appear first
- which packages seem most attractive

- which hotels are promoted
- what reviews are spotlighted
- how scarcity and pricing are framed
- what festive filters and categories appear
- how mobile notifications are timed and personalised

This level of algorithmic involvement means that travellers follow digitally constructed pathways rather than self-defined desires. Christmas, once shaped by cultural norms, is now heavily curated by data-driven systems.

The festive travel journey becomes a hybrid of emotional desire and algorithmic persuasion, making OTAs central architects of modern Christmas tourism.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings illuminate how OTAs influence Christmas travel behaviour through a combination of emotional design, persuasive digital cues, curated storytelling, and algorithmic control. Christmas is not an ordinary travel period—it is a culturally meaningful moment saturated with sentiment, memory, pressure, and financial flexibility. OTAs capitalise on this emotional atmosphere by engineering digital experiences that speak directly to travellers' festive expectations.

One of the most significant themes emerging from the findings is the construction of a globalised Christmas identity. OTAs amplify a Westernised version of Christmas, shaping travellers' imagination through curated lists, snowy visuals, and romanticised winter aesthetics. This homogenisation raises questions about cultural diversity and digital influence. Many travellers begin to desire experiences not rooted in their own traditions but crafted through global digital narratives.

Another major theme is emotional vulnerability. Travellers during Christmas are susceptible to subtle manipulation because they want to avoid disappointing family members or missing out on meaningful experiences. Scarcity messages, dynamic pricing, and time-sensitive cues exploit these emotional pressures. Digital persuasion becomes highly effective because it intersects with travellers' deepest festive motivations.

The findings also highlight the dual nature of OTA influence. On one hand, OTAs reduce stress, provide convenience, and offer structured pathways for planning. During a chaotic season, travellers appreciate organisation, flexibility, and clarity—benefits that OTAs deliver. On the other hand, OTAs hold immense persuasive power, shaping decisions through algorithms and commercial priorities rather than traveller-driven preferences.

Ultimately, the discussion suggests that OTAs are not merely facilitators of Christmas travel—they actively participate in constructing festive tourism culture, guiding emotional expectations, and shaping the global meaning of Christmas travel.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Online Travel Agencies play an influential and multidimensional role in shaping traveller behaviour during the Christmas season. By blending emotional persuasion, seasonal design, curated storytelling, algorithmic decision-making, and real-time digital nudging, OTAs orchestrate the festive travel experience from inspiration to booking.

Travellers approach Christmas with emotional needs—nostalgia, celebration, family togetherness, and the desire to create meaningful memories. OTAs strategically embed themselves into these emotional spaces, shifting Christmas from a cultural ritual to a digitally curated consumer event.

Festive imagery and interface design spark emotional imagination. Reviews and user-generated photos provide reassurance. Dynamic pricing and scarcity intensify urgency. Loyalty programs build habitual seasonal patterns. Mobile notifications create spontaneous moments of influence. Algorithms determine visibility, subtly shaping what travellers perceive as “the best Christmas experience.”

Through these mechanisms, OTAs redefine how Christmas is celebrated in the travel context, creating a globalised narrative around festive tourism.

While OTAs provide convenience, inspiration, and structure, their influence also raises ethical considerations about transparency, manipulation, and cultural homogenisation. The study calls for greater awareness among travellers and more responsible digital practices among OTAs.

Christmas travel today exists at the intersection of human emotion and powerful digital systems. OTAs are not passive intermediaries but active participants in shaping festive dreams, expectations, behaviours, and global tourism patterns.

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