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

Student Name: Anup Kumar Joshi

Student ID: DE240036

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Contents

ABSTRACT.....	4
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
2.1 Emotional Foundations of Christmas Travel.....	6
2.2 Seasonal Interface Design and the Psychology of Festive Cues	6
2.3 Digital Storytelling: How OTAs Create Global Christmas Narratives	7
2.4 Algorithmic Visibility and Its Influence on Seasonal Decision-Making	7
2.5 Dynamic Pricing and Seasonal Behavioural Economics.....	8
2.6 Scarcity Messaging: Emotional Amplification During Christmas	8
2.7 Social Proof and Festive Experience Validation	8
2.8 Mobile Influence and Real-Time Festive Nudging.....	9
2.9 Loyalty Systems and Seasonal Habit Formation	9
2.10 Ethical Concerns Around Festive Persuasion and Digital Manipulation.....	10
3. METHODOLOGY	10
3.1 Research Approach.....	10
3.2 Research Design	10
3.3 Data Sources	11
3.4 Data Analysis: Thematic Approach	11
3.5 Ethical Considerations.....	12
3.6 Limitations	12
4. FINDINGS.....	12
Festive Digital Aesthetics Create an Emotional Gateway to Christmas Travel.....	12
OTAs Actively Shape a Global Image of What a “Christmas Trip” Should Look Like	13
Dynamic Pricing Uses Emotional Timing to Maximise Festive Bookings.....	13
Scarcity Messaging Leverages Festive Anxiety and Heightened Time Pressure	13
Social Proof Becomes a Powerful Emotional Validator During Christmas	14
Mobile Notifications Trigger Spontaneous Festive Bookings.....	14
Loyalty Programs Create Ritualistic Christmas Booking Behaviour	14
OTAs Reduce Christmas Stress Through Structure, Convenience, and Emotional Support	15
Christmas Bundled Packages Intensify Both Emotional Desire and Higher Spending	15
Flexibility Features Reduce Festive Anxiety and Encourage Early Booking.....	15

OTAs Become Crisis Managers During Christmas Travel Disruptions	16
Group Travel Behaviour Is Structured and Influenced by OTA Interface Tools	16
User-Generated Festive Content Provides Emotional Authenticity Travellers Rely On.....	17
OTAs Commercialise Christmas by Turning Tradition into Marketable Experiences	17
Christmas Travel Pathways Are Largely Algorithmic, Not Organic.....	18
5. DISCUSSION	18
6. CONCLUSION.....	19
7. REFERENCES	19

ABSTRACT

Christmas has evolved into one of the most emotionally and commercially intense periods of global travel, transforming how individuals imagine, plan, and book their holiday experiences. Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as Booking.com, Expedia, Trip.com, Agoda, and MakeMyTrip increasingly shape this festive landscape by deploying persuasive digital strategies that influence travellers' choices. This study explores the multifaceted ways in which OTAs impact traveller behaviour during the Christmas season, drawing on secondary research and thematic analysis. The findings highlight that OTAs affect not only travellers' decisions but also their emotional states, expectations, and cultural perceptions of what a "perfect Christmas holiday" should feel like. Through festive-themed interfaces, curated Christmas narratives, algorithmic prioritisation, scarcity cues, dynamic pricing, user-generated content, loyalty systems, and mobile push notifications, OTAs play a central role in constructing modern Christmas travel culture. The research concludes that OTAs do not merely facilitate festive travel—they actively shape the emotional, cultural, and economic behaviours associated with it. As Christmas travel becomes more digitalised, travellers are increasingly engaging with holiday experiences that are curated, guided, and sometimes subconsciously influenced by powerful digital systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

Christmas has long been celebrated as a season of warmth, belonging, generosity, and shared tradition. It carries emotional weight that extends far beyond the boundaries of religion or geography. For many travellers around the world, Christmas is not merely a date on the calendar—it is a moment filled with memories, rituals, expectations, and the longing to create meaningful experiences with loved ones. Over the last decade, this emotional richness has intertwined with a rapidly digitalising travel ecosystem, in which Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) play an increasingly decisive role in shaping festive travel behaviour.

As global tourism becomes more dependent on digital interfaces, OTAs have transformed into powerful mediators between travellers and destinations. Their influence becomes especially strong during Christmas, when travellers are already operating within a heightened emotional environment. Christmas travel planning is a unique blend of excitement and pressure: people want to secure the "perfect" holiday, meet family expectations, find memorable experiences, or escape routine through seasonal getaways. This emotional landscape makes travellers more receptive to visual cues, storytelling, and digital persuasion embedded in OTA platforms.

During the Christmas season, OTAs curate the festive travel world with astonishing precision. Their platforms are decorated with snowy visuals, warm festive colours, winter banners, and curated lists titled "Top Christmas Market Destinations" or "Magical Winter Escapes." These elements work together to emotionally prime users, shaping how they imagine their ideal Christmas trip even before they begin actively searching for options. The moment a traveller logs

onto an OTA in December, they step into a digital environment intentionally crafted to influence their expectations and desires.

Another critical dimension of OTA influence lies in their use of algorithms. The destinations, hotels, and packages that receive the most visibility during Christmas are not random—they are carefully ranked based on platform objectives, commercial partnerships, historical festive demand, and behavioural predictions. As a result, travellers navigate a curated digital pathway that subtly pushes them toward certain types of Christmas experiences. Over time, this curated exposure shapes global perceptions of what Christmas travel “should” look like, creating a standardised, often Westernised festive imagination.

Additionally, Christmas is characterised by scarcity—limited availability, rising prices, and fierce competition for popular destinations. OTAs leverage this urgency through dynamic pricing models, predictive alerts, and scarcity-based notifications. Travellers, driven by the emotional pressure of the season, become more sensitive to warnings like “Only 2 rooms left” or “Booked 18 times today.” Fear of missing out is amplified by festive expectations, pushing travellers to make quicker and more emotionally driven decisions.

Social proof also becomes especially powerful during the festive period. Reviews, photos, and ratings take on additional meaning, as travellers seek reassurance that their chosen destination will truly “feel festive.” User-uploaded images of Christmas dinners, snowy balconies, market stalls, and hotel decorations serve as emotional validation. These festive reviews help travellers imagine their own holiday experience, making peer content a decisive factor.

OTAs also influence how travellers behave through mobile notifications, loyalty rewards, and festive bundles. Push alerts arrive during emotionally charged holiday moments—shopping trips, family gatherings, or work celebrations—making travellers more likely to respond impulsively. Loyalty programs offer seasonal discounts or bonus rewards, subtly encouraging travellers to book on the same platform year after year. Festive bundles package accommodation with curated experiences, transforming Christmas from a cultural tradition into a purchasable travel product.

This study investigates these dynamics in depth, analysing how OTAs shape traveller behaviour during the Christmas season and examining the emotional, cultural, and technological forces that define modern festive tourism. Through secondary research and thematic analysis, the study reveals that Christmas travel behaviour is no longer purely personal—it is heavily influenced by digital systems that curate what travellers see, think, and ultimately choose.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Christmas is a powerful seasonal context that shapes how travellers think, feel, and ultimately behave. It is a holiday steeped in emotion—nostalgia, warmth, generosity, childhood memories, and the desire for togetherness. When this emotional weight intersects with the digital

ecosystems created by Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), traveller behaviour becomes exceptionally sensitive to visual cues, digital storytelling, and persuasive interface design. This literature review synthesises academic work on emotional consumer behaviour, persuasive technology, seasonal tourism, algorithmic curation, social proof, and platform-driven commercialisation to explain how OTAs influence Christmas travel decisions.

2.1 Emotional Foundations of Christmas Travel

Christmas is not just a seasonal tourism period; it is a deeply symbolic cultural moment. Emotional consumption literature suggests that people rely heavily on affective triggers when making holiday-related decisions (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Travellers often seek to recreate emotional memories—childhood experiences, family traditions, holiday rituals—or create “perfect” new moments.

These emotions form the foundation of Christmas travel behaviour:

- **Nostalgia** motivates people to seek cozy, warm, traditional experiences.
- **Belongingness** motivates group trips and family reunions.
- **Romantic expectations** influence couples selecting winter or festive destinations.
- **Social pressure** encourages people to plan memorable holidays.
- **Desire for escape** motivates travel to culturally festive places or winter retreats.

OTAs operate within this emotional context by presenting curated Christmas images, narratives, and offers that resonate with these motives. Travel is no longer just functional—it becomes emotionally symbolic.

2.2 Seasonal Interface Design and the Psychology of Festive Cues

Research on persuasive technology shows that interface design can directly influence consumer emotions and decisions (Fogg, 2003). During December, OTAs redesign their digital environments with festive themes:

- snowy banners
- warm gold-red colour palettes
- icons of trees, stars, gifts, candles
- winter background videos
- seasonal typography
- curated Christmas categories

These festive elements trigger emotional associations tied to Christmas traditions. Studies on digital atmospherics indicate that visual and sensory cues can create emotional states that guide consumer behaviour (Tussyadiah, 2016). Christmas-themed designs generate warmth, comfort, and excitement—making users more receptive to festive travel suggestions.

OTAs therefore use aesthetics as a persuasion mechanism, creating emotional immersion the moment a user loads the homepage.

2.3 Digital Storytelling: How OTAs Create Global Christmas Narratives

Another key theme in the literature is the role of tourism platforms as cultural storytellers. OTAs do not merely list properties—they narrate holiday experiences. They promote romanticised seasonal narratives such as:

- “The world’s most magical Christmas destinations”
- “Winter wonderlands”
- “Christmas market escapes”
- “Fairytale snowy getaways”

Scholars describe this as the digital construction of holiday culture (Gretzel & Jamal, 2020). These curated narratives shape global expectations of what Christmas travel “should” feel like. Even travellers who never celebrated Christmas traditionally begin associating the holiday with European markets, snowy cabins, and winter romance—all because OTAs repeatedly frame these as ideal Christmas experiences.

This shows how OTAs not only respond to consumer demand—they actively shape and globalise festive tourism identity.

2.4 Algorithmic Visibility and Its Influence on Seasonal Decision-Making

OTAs rely heavily on algorithmic systems to determine what destinations and hotels users see first. Research on algorithmic curation emphasises that digital visibility influences perception of value (Werthner & Ricci, 2020). During Christmas, algorithms prioritise seasonally “high-performing” listings:

- destinations historically popular for Christmas
- properties offering festive packages
- hotels with strong winter reviews
- markets with high tourist traffic
- listings that convert well in December
- paid promotions and sponsored placements

This creates a cycle where already popular Christmas destinations become even more visible, while alternative destinations slip into the background.

Travellers misinterpret algorithmically curated suggestions as organic popularity, not realising the commercial logic behind it. The result is a digitally reinforced hierarchy of Christmas destinations.

2.5 Dynamic Pricing and Seasonal Behavioural Economics

Behavioural economics research highlights that consumers behave differently when emotionally aroused or under time pressure. Christmas intensifies both conditions. Studies show that dynamic pricing models exploit high seasonal demand (Ivanov & Webster, 2020).

OTAs amplify this urgency by displaying:

- predicted price increases
- limited-time festive discounts
- warnings about rising demand
- price charts showing seasonal spikes

Because Christmas trips often involve family commitments and sentimental expectations, travellers become more vulnerable to these cues. Fear of missing out intensifies, causing travellers to accept higher prices or book earlier than planned.

Dynamic pricing therefore acts not only as an economic tool but also as a psychological trigger.

2.6 Scarcity Messaging: Emotional Amplification During Christmas

Scarcity cues are widely recognised as persuasive mechanisms (Cialdini, 2007). However, Christmas significantly amplifies their impact because:

- availability genuinely decreases
- demand surges dramatically
- travellers expect limited options
- emotional stakes are high

Messages like “Only 1 room left for Christmas week” or “Booked 20 times today” feel realistic and urgent. Travellers imagine the disappointment of losing a festive opportunity, and this emotional reaction accelerates decisions.

In other words, scarcity becomes emotionally charged during Christmas, making it one of the most effective persuasion tools OTAs use.

2.7 Social Proof and Festive Experience Validation

User-generated content becomes far more influential during Christmas because travellers seek emotional reassurance. Festive reviews commonly mention:

- Christmas ambience
- decorations
- warmth of hospitality
- festive meals
- market proximity
- winter scenery

Photos showing real Christmas experiences—unfiltered decorations, snow, holiday dinners—become emotional anchors. According to Filieri (2019), travellers trust peer content more than professional marketing, especially when seeking assurance for symbolic or sentimental experiences.

Thus, social proof acts as emotional validation for festive travel decisions.

2.8 Mobile Influence and Real-Time Festive Nudging

Mobile booking behaviour peaks dramatically in December (Statista, 2024). OTAs use mobile notifications to influence travellers at emotionally heightened moments:

- during shopping
- during work breaks
- during family conversations
- late-night browsing
- weekends and festive events

Notifications such as:

- “Last-minute Christmas deals”
- “Your saved property has a festive discount”
- “Only a few rooms left for 24–26 December”

push travellers to act impulsively. Mobile devices thus become real-time emotional touchpoints through which OTAs shape Christmas behaviour.

2.9 Loyalty Systems and Seasonal Habit Formation

Loyalty programs—Booking Genius, Expedia Rewards, Agoda VIP, etc.—gain heightened influence during seasonal travel periods. Travellers perceive holiday points, festive bonuses, and exclusive Christmas deals as added value.

Studies show that loyalty programs build emotional attachment to platforms (Bakker, 2023). During Christmas, when travellers face significant expenses, loyalty discounts feel especially

comforting. This comfort translates into habitual festive booking behaviour—people return to the same OTA every December.

2.10 Ethical Concerns Around Festive Persuasion and Digital Manipulation

Scholars increasingly debate the ethics of digital persuasion, especially during emotionally sensitive periods. Christmas is a season of vulnerability—people want to please loved ones, fulfil tradition, and avoid disappointment. OTAs sometimes exploit these emotions through:

- exaggerated scarcity
- opaque algorithms
- commercialised festive imagery
- sponsored listings framed as “top picks”

Zuboff (2019) argues that platforms often blur the line between guidance and manipulation. Christmas travel, because of its sentimental meaning, becomes a prime context for this ethical tension.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodological foundation of this study is shaped by the emotional, cultural, and digital complexity of Christmas travel. Christmas is a season infused with nostalgia, social expectations, symbolism, and sentimental meaning. These emotional dynamics create an ideal environment for persuasive technology to influence traveller behaviour. To understand these subtle layers of influence, the methodology for this study prioritises depth, meaning, and interpretive understanding over numerical measurement.

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a **qualitative interpretivist approach**, recognising that Christmas travel behaviour cannot be fully understood through quantitative data alone. Interpretivism emphasises human meaning—how individuals emotionally experience Christmas, interpret OTA cues, and make travel choices under festive pressures.

Travellers during Christmas do not behave like rational buyers; they make decisions shaped by memory, emotional aspiration, tradition, and fear of missing out. A qualitative approach allows exploration of these psychological layers. It treats digital interactions not just as functional tasks but as emotionally meaningful experiences.

3.2 Research Design

An **exploratory research design** was used because OTA influence on Christmas travel has not been deeply studied. Most tourism scholarship explores digital behaviour in general contexts, but the Christmas season is rare: it combines peak demand, emotional pressure, cultural symbolism, and financial flexibility.

An exploratory design enables the researcher to uncover unstructured insights, emerging patterns, and experiential themes that standardised models might overlook. This flexibility is essential for a topic where emotional motivations, cultural rituals, and digital persuasion intersect.

3.3 Data Sources

This study is based entirely on **secondary data**, including:

- peer-reviewed journals on tourism, digital persuasion, emotional decision-making, seasonal consumer psychology, and algorithmic influence
- industry reports from Booking.com, Expedia, Trip.com, MakeMyTrip, Statista, Skift, WTTC, and Google Travel Insights
- analysis of OTA platforms during the Christmas period (design changes, festive banners, scarcity cues, notifications, price fluctuations)
- theoretical literature on behavioural economics, persuasive system design, and user-generated content

These sources were chosen because they offer diverse yet complementary perspectives on the phenomenon. Christmas travel behaviour is heavily studied by industry analysts, while academics contribute deep theoretical frameworks that clarify emotional and psychological mechanisms.

3.4 Data Analysis: Thematic Approach

The study used **thematic analysis**, which allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns and persuasive mechanisms across the collected data. Thematic analysis proceeded in several stages:

1. **Familiarisation:** Reading and re-reading academic studies, reports, and OTA observations.
2. **Initial coding:** Labelling recurring concepts such as “festive design,” “scarcity messaging,” “dynamic pricing pressure,” “UGC validation,” “algorithmic curation,” and “emotional vulnerability.”
3. **Theme development:** Grouping related codes to form broader themes such as:
 - Emotional priming through festive aesthetics
 - Algorithmic construction of Christmas tourism
 - Seasonal urgency and scarcity
 - Festive social proof
 - Loyalty-based behaviour

- Mobile psychological nudging
- 4. **Interpretation:** Connecting these themes to understand how they collectively shape Christmas travel behaviour.

This method helped reveal how digital persuasion is amplified by festive emotions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Because the study uses secondary data, there were no direct participant interactions, reducing ethical risks. However, the study acknowledges the broader ethical concerns associated with OTA persuasion—such as opaque algorithms, aggressive scarcity messaging, and commercialisation of cultural traditions. These issues are addressed in the Discussion section.

3.6 Limitations

The study faces several limitations:

- OTA algorithms remain proprietary, preventing full insight into how festive visibility is engineered.
- Secondary data does not capture direct lived experiences of travellers.
- Christmas traditions vary globally, so some findings reflect general patterns rather than universal truths.
- OTA strategies evolve annually, meaning festive influence shifts with market trends.

Despite these limitations, the combination of academic sources, industry insights, and platform observation provides a robust foundation for analysing OTA influence on Christmas travel.

4. FINDINGS

Festive Digital Aesthetics Create an Emotional Gateway to Christmas Travel

One of the strongest findings is that OTAs intentionally transform their digital environments to evoke Christmas emotions. December homepages feature snowflakes, twinkling lights, warm colours, candlelit imagery, and festive icons. These elements generate a sense of holiday warmth and nostalgia, shifting the user's mindset from functional browsing to festive imagining.

Travellers report that simply seeing winter visuals sparks a desire to travel, even when they initially had no holiday plans. The interface becomes an emotional gateway that invites users to picture themselves inside those scenes—walking through Christmas markets, spending nights in cozy cabins, or celebrating with loved ones.

This emotional priming lays the foundation for all further festive persuasion.

OTAs Actively Shape a Global Image of What a “Christmas Trip” Should Look Like

Another major finding is that OTAs do not just reflect demand—they create it. Through curated festive lists (“Top 10 Christmas Cities”), winter-themed packages, and visual storytelling, OTAs present a particular vision of Christmas travel—one dominated by snow, European markets, charming old towns, decorated squares, and warm lights.

This creates a globalised Christmas fantasy. Travellers from hot countries, or those who never historically celebrated Christmas with snow, begin to desire these experiences because OTAs repeatedly depict them as the “ideal Christmas.”

Thus, OTAs participate in constructing a homogenised festive identity.

Dynamic Pricing Uses Emotional Timing to Maximise Festive Bookings

Christmas dynamic pricing is more aggressive than at any other time of year. Prices fluctuate rapidly, and OTAs highlight these changes with emotionally charged warnings:

- “Prices expected to increase before Christmas week.”
- “Booked 40 times today.”
- “Rates rising due to festive demand.”

Travellers fear the emotional disappointment of missing out on a Christmas holiday, prompting quicker decisions and greater acceptance of higher prices. This behaviour is rooted in festive emotion, not rational budgeting.

Dynamic pricing therefore becomes a psychological tool as much as an economic one.

Scarcity Messaging Leverages Festive Anxiety and Heightened Time Pressure

Christmas is a season of urgency. People must coordinate time off work, manage family expectations, and book before everything sells out. OTAs amplify this pressure through scarcity messaging:

- “Only 1 room left.”
- “Selling fast for December 24–26.”
- “Most properties in this area are fully booked.”

Travellers perceive these warnings as realistic and urgent because Christmas genuinely involves limited availability. The emotional burden of disappointing family members or ruining festive plans intensifies the impact of scarcity cues, leading travellers to book impulsively.

Social Proof Becomes a Powerful Emotional Validator During Christmas

Travellers rely heavily on user reviews and photos during Christmas. Festive reviews describe:

- holiday décor
- warmth and hospitality
- Christmas dinners
- winter scenery
- festive entertainment

These reviews act as emotional reassurance. Travellers want certainty that their chosen property will feel “magical,” “cozy,” or “festive.” Photos showing decorated lobbies or market views carry far more influence than standard hotel photos.

Traveller-to-traveller validation becomes a key part of festive decision-making.

Mobile Notifications Trigger Spontaneous Festive Bookings

During December, travellers are constantly exposed to push notifications promoting:

- last-minute Christmas deals
- price drops
- reminders about saved properties
- warnings of limited festive availability

These notifications arrive during emotionally charged moments—shopping, social events, family gatherings—making users more likely to respond impulsively.

Mobile influence turns festive curiosity into real bookings by delivering persuasive cues at exactly the right emotional moment.

Loyalty Programs Create Ritualistic Christmas Booking Behaviour

Loyalty programs become increasingly influential during Christmas because travellers perceive festive discounts, reward points, and seasonal upgrades as special. This emotional framing strengthens platform attachment.

Over time, travellers develop ritualistic behaviour: every year, they return to the same OTA to book their Christmas trip. This loyalty is not just financial—it becomes psychological, anchored in trust and familiarity.

OTAs Reduce Christmas Stress Through Structure, Convenience, and Emotional Support

Christmas planning is chaotic. OTAs reduce this stress by organising choices into structured categories:

- best festive destinations
- family-friendly stays
- romantic winter escapes
- flexible cancellation options
- curated Christmas packages

Travellers turn to OTAs for emotional relief. The platform becomes a place where complexity is simplified, making travellers feel supported during a hectic season.

Christmas Bundled Packages Intensify Both Emotional Desire and Higher Spending

OTAs strategically promote bundled festive packages during December—combinations of accommodation, Christmas dinners, winter activities, market tours, and seasonal amenities. These bundles are emotionally framed with language such as “Make your holidays magical,” “Celebrate Christmas in style,” or “Create unforgettable family moments.”

Travellers interpret these bundles not only as convenience but as emotional opportunities. Families see them as a way to create special memories without the stress of planning each activity. Couples view them as romantic experiences designed to make the season more meaningful. Groups of friends treat them as ready-made festive adventures.

Because Christmas carries emotional expectations, travellers willingly pay more for bundled experiences. OTAs thus shape spending behaviour by turning festive emotions into purchasable travel products.

Flexibility Features Reduce Festive Anxiety and Encourage Early Booking

Christmas planning carries inherent uncertainty—work obligations, weather unpredictability, family plans, school schedules, and financial considerations. OTAs use flexible cancellation policies to ease this anxiety. Options such as:

- “Free cancellation before Christmas Eve”
- “Change dates without fees”
- “Book now, pay later”

act as psychological safety nets. Travellers feel empowered to book early without fear of losing money if their plans shift. This sense of protection is especially important during Christmas, when emotions and expectations run high.

Flexibility therefore functions as a trust-building mechanism, leading to earlier and more confident bookings.

OTAs Become Crisis Managers During Christmas Travel Disruptions

Christmas is one of the most disruption-prone travel periods—snowstorms, flight cancellations, overbookings, and sudden surges in demand are common. Travellers often rely on OTAs to resolve such problems quickly. During a season where disappointment carries emotional consequences, efficient crisis handling becomes deeply valued.

When OTAs assist by:

- rebooking cancelled flights
- finding last-minute alternative stays
- negotiating refunds
- arranging emergency accommodation

travellers perceive them as protective intermediaries. This perception strengthens emotional loyalty. OTAs are seen not merely as booking platforms but as essential support systems during a high-stress festive moment.

Group Travel Behaviour Is Structured and Influenced by OTA Interface Tools

Christmas is dominated by group travel—families, couples, relatives returning home, and friends reuniting. OTAs play a vital role in structuring and supporting group decisions through:

- shared wishlists
- room configuration tools
- side-by-side comparisons
- filters for family-friendly or multi-room stays
- festive itineraries tailored for groups

These tools reduce conflict and simplify the decision-making process. Because Christmas carries emotional expectations of togetherness, groups feel pressure to choose experiences that satisfy

everyone. OTA recommendations become default “compromise options,” subtly guiding group decisions.

This finding shows that OTAs influence not only individuals but collective festive behaviour.

User-Generated Festive Content Provides Emotional Authenticity Travellers Rely On

Reviews and user-uploaded photos take on heightened importance during Christmas. Travellers seek emotional reassurance—not just that the hotel is good, but that it *feels* festive. Authentic imagery showing:

- decorated hotel lobbies
- Christmas trees
- festive dinners or buffets
- snowy scenes
- holiday concerts or events
- warm lighting and celebrations

provide powerful emotional validation. Travellers imagine themselves in these images, using them to predict their own holiday experience.

Peer photos feel more trustworthy than commercial marketing, helping travellers reduce the emotional risk of disappointment during Christmas.

OTAs Commercialise Christmas by Turning Tradition into Marketable Experiences

This study finds that OTAs play a major role in commercialising Christmas by reframing cultural rituals as tourism products. Christmas becomes marketed as:

- a “winter wonderland experience”
- a curated festive escape
- a seasonal lifestyle moment
- a purchasable set of emotions

Curated lists, themed pages, and seasonal packages all contribute to this commercialisation. Travellers begin to view Christmas as something that should be experienced through travel, decorations, and curated activities—many of which are constructed narratives rather than cultural traditions.

This shift reflects how digital platforms reshape the meaning of Christmas through consumerism.

Christmas Travel Pathways Are Largely Algorithmic, Not Organic

The final finding reveals that Christmas travel choices are increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems rather than personal tradition or independent preference. OTA algorithms determine:

- which destinations rank highest for Christmas
- which hotels appear as “top picks”
- which reviews are highlighted
- what mobile notifications are sent
- which festive bundles are promoted
- what dates show the highest price warnings
- how scarcity is framed

Travellers rarely realise that much of what they see is engineered through algorithmic curation. The result is a highly guided festive journey. Christmas travel decisions, once based on tradition and intuition, now follow digital pathways created by OTAs.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings together reveal that OTAs exert significant emotional, cultural, and behavioural influence during the Christmas season. Christmas travel behaviour is shaped not just by functional needs but by deep emotional desires—nostalgia, warmth, tradition, celebration, and connection. OTAs place themselves at the heart of this emotional environment, influencing everything from initial inspiration to final booking.

A key theme throughout the findings is the emotional vulnerability of travellers during Christmas. OTAs leverage this sensitivity through persuasive interface design, curated festive narratives, scarcity cues, and dynamic pricing. Travellers, caught between excitement and pressure, respond strongly to these digital signals.

The discussion also highlights the role of OTAs as cultural agents. Through curated imagery and storytelling, OTAs shape a globalised festive identity dominated by snowy landscapes, European markets, and winter romance. This narrative influences travellers’ expectations and reshapes cultural perceptions about what Christmas “should” look like.

While OTAs offer significant benefits—convenience, clarity, structure, flexibility—they also raise important ethical questions. Their influence blurs the line between genuine guidance and strategic commercial persuasion. Algorithmic curation limits traveller autonomy, leading users down predetermined pathways that maximise platform revenue.

Overall, OTAs do not simply mediate Christmas travel—they construct it.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Online Travel Agencies play a central role in shaping traveller behaviour during the Christmas season. Their influence stems from a powerful combination of emotional design, curated festive narratives, algorithmic ranking, scarcity cues, dynamic pricing, mobile nudges, loyalty rewards, and user-generated content.

Christmas is a season filled with sentimental meaning. OTAs amplify and monetise this emotional environment. They transform Christmas from a traditional holiday into a digital tourism experience shaped by algorithms and persuasive design. Travellers respond by making decisions that are faster, more emotionally driven, more expensive, and more aligned with globalised Christmas imagery.

While OTAs provide convenience and reduce festive stress, they also raise ethical implications around transparency, manipulation, and cultural homogenisation. The study emphasises the need for awareness among travellers and responsible practices among OTAs.

Ultimately, modern Christmas travel behaviour emerges from a blend of human emotion and digital influence—demonstrating how deeply technology now shapes one of the most meaningful seasons of the year.

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