Advertisements and commercials, both traditional and social, word-of-mouth was the most influential channel. Promotions, friends, and family were social channels in the travel industry for all generations. Millennials (85%), Generation X (79%), Baby Boomers (69%), and the Silent Generation (68%). Close friends and family were also an influential channel for Millennials (73%) in the travel industry and the retail industry (69%). Close friends and family were also an important resource for the Silent Generation (76%) in the healthcare industry.

People seek advice on social media

More than one-third of respondents (38%) said they were likely to seek travel advice on social media. Nearly one-quarter of respondents (27%) said they were likely to seek advice in decision-making related to financial services, healthcare (33%) and retail purchases (39%).

Age makes a difference

Across all categories, age played a role in how social media were used by survey respondents. The younger the respondents, the more likely they were to use social media, including the sources and channels, were influential.

Third-person effect plays a role

The third-person effect occurs when individuals believe others are more influenced by social media than they themselves are. This effect was just studied in the travel industry. But 53% of “others” believed they were being influenced by social media compared to the 22% of survey respondents who indicated that social media were influential in their own travel decisions.

Close friends and family are the most influential source

Across all generations, social media advice from close friends and family were the most influential source, but the degree of influence depended on the industry. Close friends and family were a social source in the travel industry for all generations: Millennials (85%), Generation X (79%), Baby Boomers (69%), and the Silent Generation (68%). Close friends and family were also an influential source for Millennials (73%) in the financial services industry and the retail industry (69%). Close friends and family were also an important resource for the Silent Generation (76%) in the healthcare industry.

Word-of-mouth reigns as the most influential channel

Consistently across most industries and across generations, word of mouth was the most influential channel. Promotions, forums, websites of companies, and online reviews were also deemed to be influential in the travel industry; promotions and forum reviews were more important than word-of-mouth. Advertisements and commercials, both traditional and social, were typically the least influential channels.