



The Influence of Instagram on Travel Decisions and User Perception of Content Trustworthiness

**M.SRINISHA MANIMEGALAI*, RESEARCH SCHOLAR (FT) PG AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT
OF COMMERCE,**

CHIKKANNA GOVERNMENT ARTSCOLLEGE, TIRUPUR – 641 602

Dr.G.RAVINDRAN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, PG AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE,**

GOVERNMENT ARTS COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), COIMBATORE– 641 018

Abstract:

The emergence of social media has changed how tourists research destinations and make decisions. Instagram's visual appeal, influencer-driven promotions, and user-generated content have made it a dominant tool among other platforms. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Instagram affects users' travel preferences and intentions as well as how users view and trust the content shared on the platform. Data from active Instagram users will be gathered using a survey-based research methodology, with an emphasis on how they interact with travel-related content. The findings are expected to highlight Instagram's role in shaping travel behavior, while also revealing the challenges of content authenticity and trustworthiness. This study will provide valuable insights for tourism marketers, destination managers, and content creators on leveraging Instagram more effectively for credible and impactful promotion.

Keywords: Social Media, Travel Behaviour, User-generated content, Content creators.

1.Introduction:

Social media has really transformed how we communicate, market, and engage with consumers. In this digital age, Instagram stands out as a major player, especially for the tourism and hospitality sectors. Its visual appeal, combined with hashtags, geotags, reels, and influencer partnerships, lets destinations shine in ways that truly inspire and attract potential travelers. Gone are the days when travel choices were primarily influenced by traditional media or word-of-mouth. Nowadays, Instagram posts and stories play a huge role in shaping our travel preferences. People often look to influencers, dive into destination-specific hashtags, or interact with user-generated content to decide where to go next. Yet, while it's clear that Instagram has a significant impact on travel motivation, we can't ignore the question of authenticity. With sponsored posts, edited images, and promotional campaigns, there's a risk of misleading users, which raises important concerns about trust and credibility.

2.Statement of the problem:

In the current digital landscape, social media has emerged as a highly influential resource for travelers. Among these platforms, Instagram is particularly prominent due to its focus on visual storytelling, where images of destinations, reels, and influencer content motivate users to discover new locations. Although eye-catching posts may stimulate travel interest, they do not always accurately represent the realities of destinations, which can lead to misinformation, unrealistic expectations, and diminished trust in user-generated content. Additionally, the

promotional activities of influencers and sponsored collaborations can obscure the distinction between authentic experiences and marketing efforts. This issue creates uncertainty about how much Instagram genuinely influences travel decisions and how effectively users assess the credibility of travel-related content.

3.Objectives:

1. To Analyze how Instagram influences users' travel intentions and destination preferences.
2. To examine how users perceive and trust travel-related content shared on Instagram.

4.Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to analyze the influence of Instagram on travel decisions and users' trust in travel-related content. The design is suitable as it describes the characteristics of the respondents and explores the relationship between their demographic profiles and Instagram content.

4.2Sampling Method and Sample Size

A convenience sampling technique was employed to collect data from active Instagram users. A total of 153 respondents participated in the study. The respondents belonged to different age groups, educational backgrounds, occupations, and genders, as shown in Table

4.3 Data Collection Method

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed online. The questionnaire consisted of sections covering:

1. Demographic profile of respondents (age, gender, educational qualification, occupation).
2. Influence of Instagram content on travel decisions (photos, reels, stories, influencer posts, hashtags).
3. Trust in Instagram travel content (visual quality, captions/reviews, influencers, comments/likes, personal experiences).

Secondary data was collected through books, Journals, online website, etc.

4.4 Tools of Analysis

1. The collected data was coded and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Both descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage analysis) and inferential statistics were used.
2. Frequency and percentage analysis were applied to present the demographic details, influence of Instagram content, and trust levels (Tables 1–3).
3. Chi-square tests were performed to examine the association between the respondents' profile variables and their influence/trust in Instagram travel content (Tables 4–5).

5.Review of literature:

Irmayanti and Nendi Rohaendi (2024) “The Role of Instagram Social Media as a Promotional Platform for UNESCO Global Geopark Ijen” by explores Instagram's impact as a promotional tool for Geopark Ijen in Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, the study employs literature analysis and thematic data reduction techniques. The findings emphasize Instagram's ability to increase tourism visibility through engaging visual content, thereby highlighting Geopark Ijen's unique natural and cultural heritage. The study recommends strategic social media marketing to support sustainable tourism goals. In conclusion, the research underscores Instagram's effectiveness in promoting conservation and education.

Kinikar *et.al* (2024) “How social media content influences consumer behavior in India’s tourism sector” The study aims to assess the impact of platforms like Instagram and YouTube on travel decisions. Using surveys and interviews, the authors apply quantitative analysis to interpret traveler responses. Findings reveal that 43% of travelers rely on social media before choosing destinations, with influencers playing a major role. Recommendations include strategic collaborations with travel bloggers and enhancing visual content. The study concludes that social media significantly reshapes tourist behavior and marketing strategies.

Ni Kadek Erma Anggara Wati *et.al* (2024) “The Influence of Instagram Social Media Promotion on Domestic Tourists’ Decision to Visit Pandawa Beach Tourist Attraction” examines how Instagram influences travel decisions. Using a quantitative survey method, the study collected data from 200 domestic tourists and applied correlation and regression analysis. Findings show that Instagram significantly impacts tourist decisions, with visual content and engagement playing key roles. The study recommends improving digital marketing strategies and influencer collaborations. It concludes that Instagram is an effective tool for tourism promotion.

Muhammad Ihsan *et.al* (2024) “Instagram as a Tourism Village Promotion Media: A Study of Sumber Urip Tourism Village” examines Instagram’s role in promoting rural tourism. Using a qualitative netnographic approach, the study analyzes Instagram content from December 2020 to September 2024. The researchers employed content analysis and engagement metrics. Findings reveal that inconsistent posting, limited hashtag use, and minimal interaction hinder Instagram’s effectiveness. The study recommends strategic content planning, influencer collaboration, and increased interactivity. It concludes that Instagram is valuable for tourism marketing but requires optimization

Chawla Sood and Chawla (2024) “Influence of Information Credibility of Instagram Posts on Tourist Decision-Making Behaviour” examine how Instagram content affects travel choices. Using a quantitative approach with stratified random sampling, they surveyed 511 respondents in Delhi NCR. Structural Equation Modelling via AMOS was employed to analyze relationships among variables like prior knowledge, information credibility, and authenticity. Findings reveal that credible Instagram posts significantly influence tourist decisions, moderated by authenticity. The authors recommend enhancing destination marketing through authentic, user-generated content. This study contributes to tourism literature by linking social media credibility with behavioral outcomes.

Aprih Santoso *et.al* (2022) “Instagram: Is It a Social Media Solution to Promote Sustainable Tourism?” explores Instagram’s role in tourism promotion in Semarang, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation from Instagram admins, users, and tourism stakeholders. Findings highlight Instagram’s effectiveness in promoting destinations but note challenges like the need for regular updates and authenticity concerns. The study recommends enhancing content strategies and engagement techniques. It concludes that Instagram is a vital yet evolving tool for sustainable tourism marketing.

Nur Taqwa Utami (2022) “The Role of Social Media Instagram Community to Tourism Promotion in Baubau City” examines how Instagram communities contribute to tourism promotion. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology, the study analyzes Instagram accounts and hashtags related to Baubau tourism. The study employs content and source triangulation analysis to ensure data validity. Findings show that Instagram enhances tourism promotion by providing accessible information through hashtags and community engagement. The study recommends leveraging social media for strategic tourism marketing. It concludes that Instagram plays a crucial role in modern tourism promotion.

6. Analysis and Interpretation:

In this study, an analysis was conducted to understand the relationship between the demographic profile of respondents and the influence of Instagram content on travel decisions as well as the level of trust in travel-related content. Frequency and percentage analysis were applied to describe the profile of respondents, the types of Instagram content influencing travel choices, and the elements that build trust. The analysis showed that reels/short

videos and destination photos are the most preferred forms of Instagram content influencing travel choices, while high-quality visuals and peer engagement (likes and comments) are the most trusted elements. This indicates that Instagram acts as a powerful medium of travel promotion, with authentic and visually engaging content shaping both decision-making and trust among users.

6.1 Profile of the respondents

Table 1: Profile of the respondents

Profile		Number of respondents	Percentage to total
Age	18-25	96	62.7
	26-35	51	33.4
	36-45	6	3.9
	Total	153	100.0
Gender	Male	87	56.9
	Female	66	43.1
	Total	153	100.0
Educational Qualification	Diploma	6	3.9
	Bachelor's Degree	66	43.1
	Master's Degree	30	19.6
	Phd or higher	30	19.6
	Others	21	13.7
	Total	153	100.0
Occupation	Student	48	31.4
	Private Employee	57	37.3
	Self Employee	21	13.7
	Home maker	27	17.6
	Total	153	100.0

Source: Primary data

Out of 153 Respondents the majority of Instagram users influencing travel decisions are 18-25 years (62.7%), followed by the 26-35 age group (33.4%). Only a small proportion (3.9%) belong to the 36-45 age category. This indicates that Instagram's travel-related impact is strongest among younger audiences. In terms of gender, males (56.9%) slightly outnumber females (43.1%). Most respondents hold a bachelor's degree (43.1%), with a notable share holding master's and Ph.D. qualifications (19.6% each), showing that educated users actively engage with travel content. Regarding occupation, private employees (37.3%) and students (31.4%) dominate, followed by homemakers (17.6%) and self-employed individuals (13.7%). This highlights that Instagram-based travel influence is more prominent among younger, educated, and working-class individuals.

6.2 Influence of Instagram content on travel decision

Table 2 : Instagram content on Travel Decision

S.No	Instagram contents	Frequency	Percentage
1	Photos of destination	30	19.6
2	Reels/shorts video	78	51.0
3	Travel stories	21	13.7
4	Posts by influencers	15	9.8
5	Travel-related hashtags	9	5.9
	Total	153	100.0

Source: Primary data

The table shows that reels and short videos (51%) exert the greatest influence on travel decision-making, followed by destination photos (19.6%). Travel stories (13.7%) also play a role, while posts by influencers (9.8%) and travel-related hashtags (5.9%) have comparatively less impact. This demonstrates that visually dynamic and engaging short-form content is more powerful in shaping users' travel choices than static posts, hashtags, or influencer-driven content.

6.3 Trust in Instagram Travel Content

Table 3 : Trust in Instagram Travel content

S.No	Travel content	Frequency	Percentage
1	High quality visuals	51	33.3
2	Honest captions/reviews	18	11.8
3	Verified or popular influencers	15	9.8
4	Comments and like from others	45	29.4
5	Personal experience of the creator	24	15.7
	Total	153	100.0

Source: Primary data

The above table shows that respondents place the highest trust in high-quality visuals (33.3%) and comments and likes from other users (29.4%) as indicators of reliability. Personal experiences of the creator (15.7%) and honest captions/reviews (11.8%) also contribute to trust-building. However, verified or popular influencers (9.8%) are the least trusted sources of travel content. This implies that authenticity, peer engagement, and visual appeal outweigh influencer reputation in building trust among Instagram users.

6.4 Association between profile and influence of Instagram content, Trust in Instagram Travel content

6.4.1 Profile of respondents and influenced Instagram content

Table 4 Result of Chi square analysis

Profile and Instagram content to travel decision	Calculated Value	Table Value	Degrees of Freedom	Null Hypothesis Accepted or Rejected	Interence
Age and Instagram content to travel decision	13.869	9.488	4	Rejected	Significant
Gender and Instagram content to travel decision	12.840	15.507	8	Accepted	Not Significant
Education Qualification and Instagram content to travel decision	43.648	26.296	16	Rejected	Significant

Occupation and Instagram content to travel decision	24.566	21.026	12	Rejected	Significant
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Source: Computed data

The Chi-square analysis shows a significant association between age ($\chi^2 = 13.869$, $p < 0.05$), educational qualification ($\chi^2 = 43.648$, $p < 0.05$), and occupation ($\chi^2 = 24.566$, $p < 0.05$) with the influence of Instagram content on travel decisions. However, no significant relationship is observed with gender ($\chi^2 = 12.840$, $p > 0.05$). This implies that younger individuals, those with higher educational backgrounds, and people from certain occupational groups are more likely to be influenced by Instagram in their travel decision-making, whereas male and female users show similar levels of influence.

6.4.2 Profile of respondent and Trust in Instagram Travel Content

Table 5 Result of Chi square Analysis

Profile and Trust in Instagram Travel Content	Calculated Value	Table Value	Degrees of Freedom	Null Hypothesis Accepted or Rejected	Interence
Age and Trust in Instagram Travel Content	20.250	15.507	8	Rejected	Significant
Gender and Trust in Instagram Travel Content	3.903	9.488	4	Accepted	Not Significant
Educational Qualification and Trust in Instagram Travel Content	29.468	26.296	16	Rejected	Significant
Occupation and Trust in Instagram Travel Content	54.117	21.026	12	Rejected	Significant

Source: Computed data

The table demonstrates that age ($\chi^2 = 20.250$, $p < 0.05$), educational qualification ($\chi^2 = 29.468$, $p < 0.05$), and occupation ($\chi^2 = 54.117$, $p < 0.05$) significantly affect the level of trust in Instagram travel content. In contrast, gender ($\chi^2 = 3.903$, $p > 0.05$) does not show a significant association. This means that trust in Instagram travel content is shaped by users' age, educational background, and occupational status, while it remains unaffected by gender differences.

7. Suggestions

1. For Tourism Marketers:
 - Focus on creating engaging short videos (reels) and high-quality visuals to attract potential travelers.
 - Encourage user-generated content and highlight real travel experiences, since users trust authenticity more than influencer promotions.
2. For Influencers & Content Creators:
 - Shift from purely promotional content to storytelling with personal experiences and genuine reviews.
 - Engage audiences through comments, likes, and interactions, as peer validation increases trust.
3. For Travel Agencies & Destinations:
 - Use Instagram reels and visually appealing photos to showcase destinations.
 - Collaborate with micro-influencers or local travelers instead of only relying on celebrity influencers, as trust is higher when content feels authentic.

8. Conclusion

The study highlights the Instagram plays a significant role in shaping travel decisions, especially among younger and educated users. Reels/short videos and destination photos are the most influential forms of content, while trust is largely built through high-quality visuals, peer engagement, and personal experiences rather than influencer status. Instagram is not only a platform for social interaction but also a powerful tool that shapes travel behavior and destination choices. For marketers and content creators, authenticity, engagement, and visual storytelling are the keys to building trust and influencing travel decisions.

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