

LINKING INFLUENCER CONTENT TO FOREIGN TOURISTS' DESTINATION CHOICES IN INDIA: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEDIATOR

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<https://doie.org/10.65985/APER.2025547386>

ABSTRACT

Purpose/objective: The primary aim of this study is to investigate the mediating effect of social media platforms in the relationship of influencer-generated content and foreign tourists' destination choices.

Design/methodology: The present study used both descriptive and exploratory in nature. Exploratory factor analysis followed by confirmatory factor analysis, multiple regression with Process MACRO and bootstrapping approaches were used for data analysis.

Results/findings: The study found that Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) has positive effect on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC). The impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) on Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP), showing a very weak relationship Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP) has a significant effect on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC) SMIMC affects SMP first, and then SMP affects CDMDC. The relationship It can be concluded that there is no mediating effect Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP) in relationship of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) and Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC).

Practical implications: This study suggests that tourism boards should further use influencer content to attract tourists on platforms like Instagram, YouTube and Facebook where trust itself exists between influencers and their followers. The findings surely show how influencer marketing can be made different for various tourist groups by creating content that feels real and matches their dreams and experiences.

Originality: This study is to investigate the mediating effect of social media platforms in the relationship of influencer-generated content and foreign tourists' destination choices.

Keywords: Social Media Platforms, Social Media Influencer Marketing Content and Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices, India.

INTRODUCTION

In the past several years, social media has become a new force of influencing consumption behavior, especially in tourism. The effect of influencer in destination selection of tourist has become the center of interest both in academics and industry. From a social media perspective Instagram, YouTube, even Facebook is where the influencers (with their power of influencing the

huge and active followers) are directly influencing potential travelers on where they should go or not go. Foreign tourists' purchasing behaviour of travel destination choice has transformed following the increase in digital content, and influencer-generated content has played an important role as the intermediary in mindset setting and preference.

India, with its cultural and geographical richness, along with a booming tourism industry, has observed a significant rise in foreign vacationers in the last decade. With many international tourists using social media to seek inspiration and advice, influencers act as a relatable and accessible means of obtaining travel advice. In this regard, Influencers, and especially travel influencers, can beautifully highlight the beauty of several destinations in India and package it in a relatable way that will appeal to their followers. This is the kind of stuff, whether in the guise of a blog, Instagram post, YouTube video, or Facebook status, that goes on to seriously inform people about where people travel.

Social media, as an intermediary, intermediates between the content posted by the influencers and the foreign tourist's decision making, yielding the landscape of destinations which are presented online and the influence of these destinations on the intention of visiting them. When an influencer takes the trouble to share their very own travel experience, travel tips and throw in a few little known gems, followers will be sure to build a perception of the place – a perception that may influence their travel decisions. This content is everywhere and makes it easy to engage in real-time instant interaction with destination information and makes social media a very important tool to the marketers or potential tourists.

In addition, the credibility of influencers and the ability of influencers to produce authentic and engaging content have also been found to impact on decision making among tourists. It has been revealed that influencer marketing and the power of such a message in particular when it appeals to the dreams and desires of a potential tourist can lead to him or her being more interested in visiting a given destination. It equally serves as a miniature of the interaction that exists between social media influencers and foreigners who come to visit India, as the fusion of computer-generated information and cultural tourism becomes more and more significant in attracting international tourists.

In this paper, our objective is to investigate the influence of influencer content towards foreign tourists destination choice in India by taking social media platform as a mediating variable. Focusing on how influencers influence the tourist decision-making process, and therein in part, the complicated relationship between online content, consumer behaviour and destination marketing in the Indian tourism sector.

Tourists' Destination Choices in India

Tourism is increasingly becoming one of the fastest growing industries in India that has helped in generating foreign exchange, bringing employment opportunities and swift infrastructural development. With the status of being the second most populous and seventh largest country, India

is a somewhat amazing place to visit with a blend of culture, diversity, and vibrancy. The WTTC (2020) estimated that the tourism industry in India supported 9.2% of the GDP in 2019 and the volume of foreign tourist arrivals have been increasing steadily. India's unique geographical condition, rich and varied cultural heritage, and ancient monuments have made it a destination for tourists.

It is of academic and practitioner interest to know what affects a tourist in a country like India when he/she decides the destination. Previous researches indicate that the socio-economic status, understanding of the language of both the host and foreign country, accessibility and safety of the place has a major say in decision toward destination of tourists (Agarwal 2017). For example, tourists from industrialized countries favor destinations that offer cultural exposure and exotic environments, while the domestic tourists have lower cost, infrastructure and nearness in their agenda (Batra & Kaur, 2015). In addition, in the digital age, the online reviews and the social media becomes increasingly important in forming the potential tourist perspectives and in affecting their destination decisions (Gautam & Pandey, 2020).

The Indian government has been active in fostering tourism by socio-cultural and economical means and utilizing tourism to boost the economy (Singh & Verma, 2018) include 'Incredible India' and efforts aimed at the development of infrastructure in tourist circuits. These resorts have not only drawn foreign tourists, but they've also encouraged domestic tourism, especially in city and non-touristy rural areas. Further, there is developing interest in niche tourism market in India, in the form of eco-tourism, adventure tourism and wellness tourism which are becoming increasingly popular with more tourists looking for unique experiences (Saxena & Sahu, 2020).

This study is, therefore, an attempt to understand tourist destination choice attributes in India which attempt to underline the tourist destination choice making process in the country basing it on India by exploring choice preferences of domestic and outbound tourists. The study will seek to explore political, economic and technological influences upon the decision-making process and their implications on increase of tourism trend in India.

Influencer Content

With the rapidly growing digital trend, influencer marketing has become a phenomenon, influencing both the behavior of consumers and the strategies of brands. Influencers message--those with big social media followings--have become prominent players in the marketing game, with countless Instagram users, YouTubers, and TikTokers using the platforms to promote goods, services, and even world views. Such shift is based on the dominance of the social media as a primary venue of interaction, entertainment, and consumption (Freberg et al., 2011).

The personal relationship that the influencers have with their audiences is what makes them appealing and gives them trust and authenticity. This form of interdependence is known as parasocial interaction and enables the influencers to establish a personal relationship with their followers that subsequently causes their content to be persuasive (Tiggemann et al., 2014). This

influence has been taken advantage of by the brands by the act of brand and influencer collaboration which is leveraged to sell brand awareness, destination, and customer loyalty (Elliott and Mccracken, 2017).

As influencer marketing is still being positively received, sponsored content has an ethical side. Critics argue that this type of marketing, which is reflected in the work by Kylie Jenner, is marketing or advertising entertainment with no clear disclosure, manipulation, and authenticity (Marwick, 2015). As the influencer content has continued to take over the marketing segment, it is essential to analyze how it affects consumer and brands, as well as the challenges involved in its use in terms of regulation and ethical use.

It is a novel research, exploring how the influencer content is evolving and its effect on the consumer behaviour, as well as, the ethical concerns that such usage could have led to. Using the good and bad aspects of influencer marketing, this study intends to understand more about influencer marketing in terms of existing marketing efforts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Influencers, the individuals who could impact the buying decisions of others due to their control, expertise, role, or connection to their clients, have come to the markets with the most impact in digital marketing. This type of content is believed to be genuine and attractive and may be very instrumental in influencing the choice of potential travelers.

The Saini (2023) study highlighted the content by social media influencers as one of the reasons tourists make a decision to travel. The selected destination of their resolution largely depends on the content that an influencer shares like destination review and experience travel. It is particularly after the younger age group that is far more proximate to invoking different kinds of social media. To be more specific, Srivastava and Pandiya (2020) engaged the young Indian minds and found out that the impact of the influencer content on shaping their choice of the travel destination on the Internet is rather notable, both on Instagram and YouTube. According to the research, the appeal and life experiences that the influencers post, serve to create the urge of the followers to travel to the destinations being advertised.

The social media platforms can serve as a mediating platform between the influencers and the potential tourists in terms of knowledge exchange and social interaction that lead to the travel-decision making processes. Moreover, the interactivity of social media makes it possible to engage, receive feedback, and communicate, making the content of influencers more alive in the life of a foreign traveler according to a study on foreign travelers by the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (2017), social media is actively used in the collection of information about possible destinations. This report highlights the topicality, within the decision-making process of tourists, of user generated content (user-generated content) such as reviews or experiences of influencers.

Also, a study conducted by Hussaini et al. (2023) to the North India that received international tourists in their destination has social media as the source of abundant and motivational information that shapes the destination selection of the tourists. According to the research, the presence of images of destination features on the social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook is a significant motivator to tourists as they make decisions on places to visit. Influencers are seen as peers, and their audience can trust in their authenticity; as a result, their audience's mental processes and subsequent behavior are swayed by them. In a study conducted by Hussaini et al. (2023), social networking sites provide interesting visual content which encourages potential tourists to undertake trips to places such as North India. The research reveals that entertainment and airline information are the most influential factors accounting tourists to use the social media application for travelling.

Continuing studies of Srivastava and Pandiya (2020) also draw attention to the significant role of social media influencers on the travel destination selection of the youth of India. Their results indicate that influencers, as content creators who produce authentic and relatable content that resonates with this particular demographic, significantly affect the travel preferences of youth. Social network media-specific features create the use for different types of pre-trip decision-making. The Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (2017) surveyed and found that 42.5 per cent of foreign tourists came to know about India as a tourist destination by means of social media, and 89.3 per cent looked for more information about India for tourism reasons. It was also discovered that 44.54% of the social media users searched for tourism spot while 31.88% of them searched the place to stay.

Furthermore, an International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (2024) report states that as many as 80% of the respondents had knowledge of influencer content on travel and 73.3% were engaged with the content in terms of likes, comments and shares. In addition, 60% of those surveyed revealed that influencer marketing impacted their booking or purchasing decisions demonstrating the powerful influence of social media influencers when it comes to travel behaviour. Social media platforms, Instagram in particular, have influenced (if not, still hasten to do so) in luring potential travellers. A study by Joseph et al. (2024) points out that (UGC), particularly the high resolution still and video image based content can help stimulate wanderlust and make the destination more appealing. Site narratives can aid in generating emotional connection helping to create a sense of place in the tourist's mind.

The effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns within the travel and tourism industry can be heavily influenced by an influencer's authenticity, trustworthiness and ability to engage his or her audience. The International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (2024) reveals that these are the significant factors that influence social media influencer marketing campaigns successful in providing exposure for tourism destinations in India. The research shows that trustworthiness of the influencer and authenticity of the content are very relevant to the success of the campaign with 73.3% and 70% of the respondents that have mentioned these aspects as significant factors. Influencer marketing has a magnitude of benefits, however it also has its challenges and ethical

considerations. This of course assumes nothing changes, or that there are no other drastic changes this part of the world could hope to see, and without a doubt, there are many reasons why the overtourism on Instagram (not the Instagram tourism) is sure to continue into 2019 and 2020. A study by Bassolas et al. (2016) argues that social media as represented by platforms such as Twitter can influence the perception of tourists' attractiveness of sites, thereby also resulting in overcrowding and depletion of local resources.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the mediating effect of social media platforms in the relationship of influencer-generated content and foreign tourists' destination preferences.

Hypotheses of the Study

H_{a1}: Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) has positive effect on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC).

H_{a2}: Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) has positive effect on Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP).

H_{a3}: Usage of Social Media Platforms (SMP) has a significant effect on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC).

H_{a4}: There is positive effect of Usage of Social Media Platforms (SMP) in relationship of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) and Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC).

The current research is descriptive and exploratory, as it intends to acquire a full picture of the research problem and determine the relationship between key variables. Primary sources of information were used in the study and were gathered when the respondents were directly interviewed with the help of a structured questionnaire. Indian and foreign tourists will make up the target population in this study as it will capture different views on the cultural and demographic backgrounds. The area of sampling was restricted to the north of India and it was chosen due to its popularity as one of the tourist destinations. The convenient sampling method was taken as a simple and convenient method of collecting responses of the available respondents in this region. The final sample consisted of 520 respondents, which is a big sample to undertake a statistical analysis and empirical validation. A mix of the descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze the collected data. Initially, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify underlying dimensions and validate the structure of the measurement scales. This was followed by a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the model fit and confirm the factor structure derived from the exploratory stage. Further, multiple regression analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro and bootstrapping approach to test hypothesized relationships and determine the mediating and moderating effects among variables.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Social Media

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) provides details regarding key variables involved in the social media use of tourists. This table provides the initial eigenvalues of the factors that contribute to the sum of the percentage of variance explained in both pre- and post-rotation in PCA. The numbers represent how variables relate to each other and contribute to the new, broader and more interpretable factors. At the time of the analysis, we can see that the variables grouped in Factor 1, here labelled as Tourist Contentment, can explain the greatest amount of variance - 39.571 per cent. This means that some level of satisfaction on the emotional level is an essential component that encourages tourists to use social media.

The next factor, labelled as Availability of Tourism Information, can explain an additional 32.452 per cent of the total variance. This shows clearly that having easy access to time-saving, credible, and user-friendly information is most important for travelling. We see in survey results that tourists are 'often' using social media to source reviews, recommendations, instructions, and updates therefore, the finding suggests that access to information is a decision factor for stress-free use of social media as a tourist navigation tool. Besides, the rotation sums of squared loadings and the total variance captured by the collected data were 72.024 percent.

CFA

The modest positive relationship of 0.53 between TC and ATI from the EFA suggests that these two features are connected, and there may be a more general, unknown factor, such as overall digital readiness or social media influence, that impacts them. This overlap in variance provides justification for a second-order CFA, which not only helps to visualise the model more clearly and verify whether TC and ATI are merely characteristics of an upper-level construct, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of how the different competences interact to influence digital behaviour (Figure 1).

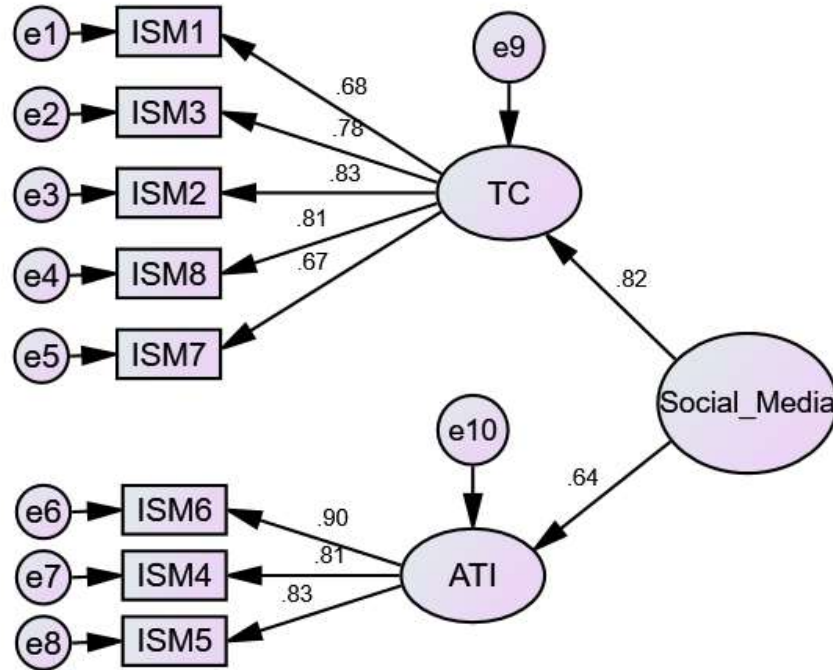


Figure 1: Second Order CFA

Relationship between two important factors -Technology Competence (TC) and Attitude Toward Innovation (ATI) which together influence a broader concept called social media. Since we can't measure someone's tech confidence or their willingness to try new ideas directly, we use related questions (labelled ISM1 to ISM8) to estimate them. The arrows illustrate which questions are associated with which idea. For example, ISM1, ISM2, ISM3, ISM7, and ISM8 give us an idea of how comfortable someone feels with technology. On the other hand, ISM4, ISM5, and ISM6 show the degree of a person's receptiveness to the new and innovative. The numbers on the arrows are loadings which means that these digits indicate the degree of each question's affiliation with the relevant main issue. The higher the linkage value, the stronger the association. For instance, ISM2 indicates that the question is closely related to Technology Competence (0.83), while ISM6 has an extremely close relation (0.90) with Attitude Toward Innovation. These significant figures show that a great majority of the questions are asking the two main concepts we intend to comprehend reliably.

The two features that TC and ATI represent are reaching out to the Social Media circle as these two characteristics are drawing social media usage. TC leads a very strong (0.82) impact, whereas ATI has a considerable impact (0.64), but slightly less. This means that the people who are more tech-savvy and more startup-minded will be most likely to use social networks actively and in a right way. To put it simply, if a person is good at technology and also likes new things, the digital media activity of that person will be high. This is especially so in workplaces, classrooms, or digital learning environments, where the boosting of the tech confidence and innovative thinking can result in the more efficient and thorough utilisation of online tools and platforms.

Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC)

The main features of the destination (Destination Highlights), the *highlights* of the tourist place that attracted tourists' interest and pictorial attractiveness are the first factor. The factor is composed of eight items that have high factor loadings ranging from 0.736 to 0.856 and their communalities reveal that a large portion of the variance in these items is due to this factor. With a single eigenvalue of 5.941, this factor is responsible for 26.54% of the total variance, thus reflecting the most substantial effect on tourist perception. A very good internal consistency is evident from the high value of Cronbach's Alpha 0.936, which means that the items under this factor are all strongly related to each other and measure one theme.

The *second factor, Authenticity (AT)*, basically describes the honesty of the culture and local products that tourists think of. The factor comprises four items, all of which have high loadings over 0.74 and communalities greater than 0.79. It accounts for 15.43% of the total variance and a high Cronbach Alpha of 0.921 signifies that tourists give great importance to authenticity and the items used to detect this feeling are consistent. This factor is focused on the involvement of real, unmasked get-together with the local culture and traditions in the decision of the destination's appeal.

The *third factor, Accommodation Insights (AI)*, displays the tourists' judgments of accommodation services and facilities. The factor comprises four items with factor loadings ranging from 0.538 to 0.599 which are moderate to strong. Even if the initial two features have greater loadings, communalities also indicate that these features are a significant contribution. This feature explains 14.26% of the variance and is associated with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.843, which shows the good trustworthiness of the findings. Such information points to the fact that visitors' general feeling of the place would be influenced to a great extent by the nice and well-rated lodging giving them comfort.

The *fourth factor, Travel Style Alignment (TSA)*, refers to three elements and accounts for 10.86% of the total variance in a study. A factor loading within 0.718 to 0.758 range and Cronbach Alpha of 0.818 of 0.818 suggest that this factor deals with a tourist's personal travel preferences matching a destination's offerings, which include such aspects of a trip as adventure, relaxation, or cultural immersion. It underscores the complementarity of a destination to different travel styles, as staying true to the personal preferences is a highly impactful factor of satisfaction and the overall experience.

The last factor, the *Budget Considerations* issue includes two variables, with factor loadings 0.810 and 0.793 respectively that are very strong, and commonalities that are around 0.80 if we look at the table. Although there are only two elements in this factor, it explains 7.69% of the total variance and still holds a good reliability score based on Cronbach's alpha of 0.742. This factor reveals that affordability and money issues related to tourism are considered to be of utmost importance to tourists and they constitute a significant part of their decision-making and satisfaction with the destination.

A second-order CFA model and its fifth-order factors determining how they come together to construct one holistic factor which is the social media influencer marketing content (SMIMC). This figure illustrates the relationship between the observed variables (ESMI1 to ESMI21) and five latent variables which are Destination Highlights (DH), Authenticity (AT), Accommodation Insights (AI), Travel Style Alignment (TSA), and Budget Considerations (BC). All of these latent variables also have connections with a broader second-order construct SMIMC signifying that individually they define how social media collectively has an overarching influence on tourists' perception (Figure 2).

The loadings assigned to each observed variable and first-order factor are significantly strong with values from 0.64- 0.94 suggesting that the survey items were indeed capturing their dimension accurately. Take for instance, the DH factor captured by ESMI4, ESMI7, and ESMI8 whose loadings peak at 0.89 demonstrating strong representation as to the appeal of the destinations. Also, AT is executed by measuring tourist's desires using ESMI6 and ESMI18 which showcase their craving towards authentic experiences. The measurement well captures their constructs due to consistency on all loadings provided evidenced.

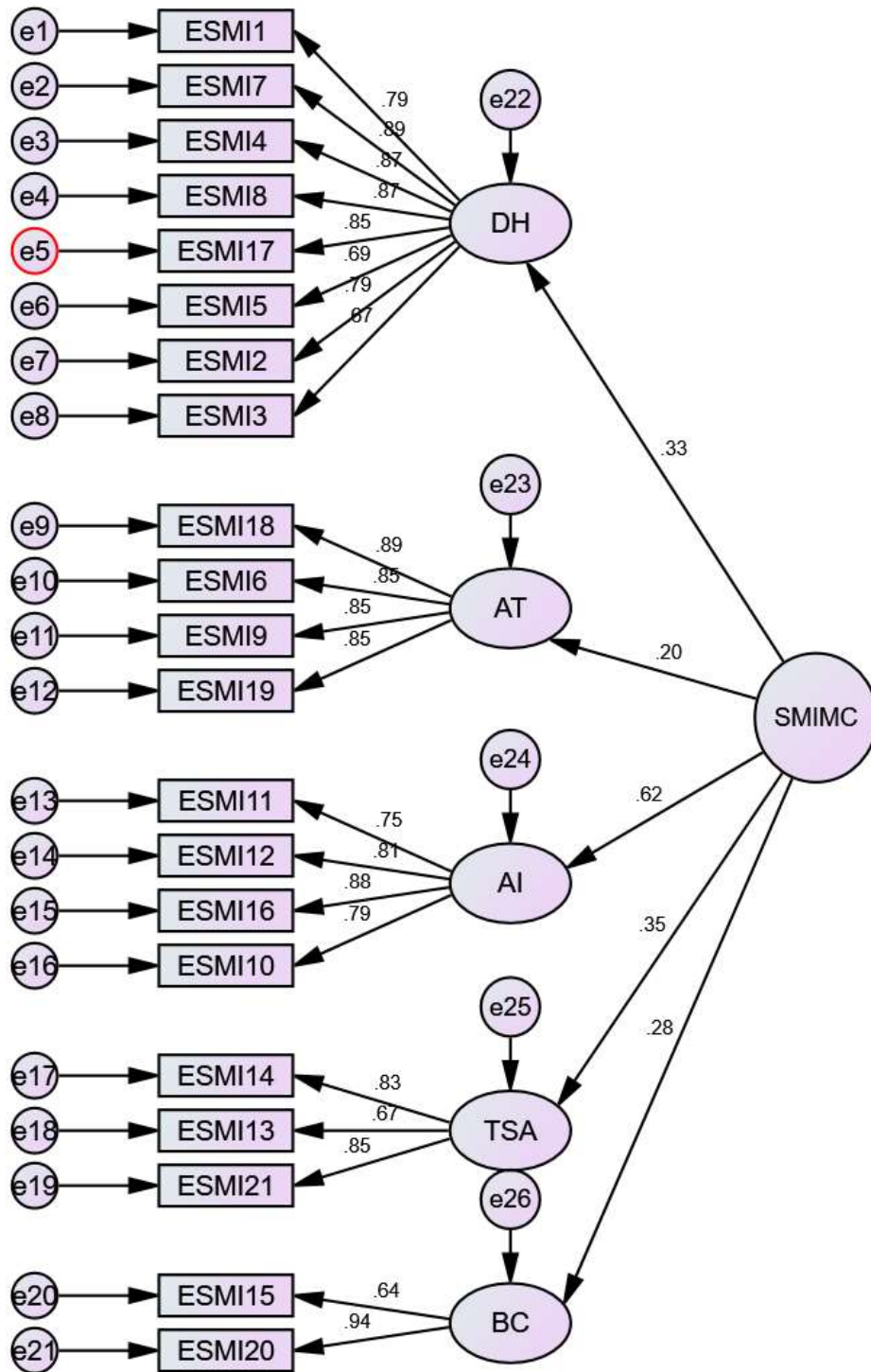


Figure 2: Second Order CFA

On to the second order level, it is apparent that all the five first order factors have a significant contribution to make ESMI. Among them the Accommodation Insights (AI) is loaded with the highest weight of 0.62 that the impressions of tourists towards their accommodation has a significant part in determining how they perceive destinations on social media. Additionally, Destination Highlights (0.33) and Budget considerations (0.35) also have some value effect whereas Travel Style Alignment (0.28) and Authenticity (0.20) enhance the complexity of the five components by indicating that all of them are connected and play a role in the overall experience.

One of the characteristics of this secondary composition is its ability to represent many neighboring things as one ultimate idea which makes the complex ties of various elements to be expressed by a single phrase. Beyond the thought of considering all factors as independent entities, it enables us to discover relationships between large notions of perception such as, e.g., the effects of social media, and these may be the result of an interdependence and independent manifestation of these two travel aspects. In addition, it proves to be beneficial to the tourism researchers and marketers because the focus of the latter shifts away not only on the separate aspects but on considering the potential interplay of factors influencing tourist preferences and behaviors.

Figure 2 in a nutshell, illustrates the conceptual clarity and the sound structural design of the ESMI model. The figure indicates that the sentiments of the travelers, who are biased by social media, are changed by a bundle of factors, such as affordability, comfort, authenticity, personal alignment and destination appeal. Such an in-depth comprehension of needs is especially beneficial for developing targeted marketing activities and for enhancing the visit experience through the selection of the proper engaging content.

Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC).

Mediating effect Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP) in relationship of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) and Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC).

The linear relationships between the constructs were investigated through multiple regression analysis by using process MACRO.

Table 1: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Model s	Relationship	R	R²	Adjusted R²	β-value	p-value	Hypothesis
1	SMIMC → CDMDC	.208	.043	.041	.141	.000	H _{a1} , Accepted
2	SMIMC →SMP	.027	.001	-.001	.036	.536	H _{a2} , Rejected
3	SMP→CDMDC	.214	.046	.044	.191	.000	H _{a3} , Accepted
4	SMIMC → SMP → CDMDC	.213	.045	.043	.191	.000	H _{a4} , Rejected

Source: Primary data

Table 1 shows four models to examine relationships between variables, where each model represents a different hypothesis. Further, each model itself focuses on specific variable connections. As per Model 1 testing, Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) and Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC) show positive relationship ($R = 0.208$) with small effect size ($R^2 = 0.043$). Regarding the p-value being 0.000, H_{a1} : Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) has positive effect on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC) is accepted as the result is significant. Model 2 examines effect of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) on Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP), showing a very weak relationship ($R = 0.027$) and $R^2 = 0.001$. Moreover, the p-value of 0.536 leads to rejecting H_{a2} : Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) has positive effect on Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP). Model 3 shows that Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP) has a significant effect on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC) with $R = 0.214$ and $R^2 = 0.046$. Moreover, the significant p-value of 0.000 leads to accepting H_{a3} : Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP) has a significant effect on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC). Model 4 actually tests if SMIMC affects SMP first, and then SMP affects CDMDC. The relationship ($R = 0.213$, $R^2 = 0.045$) with p-value 0.000, so H_{a4} : there is positive effect of Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP) in relationship of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) and Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC) is rejected. It can be concluded that there is no mediating effect Usage of Social Media Platforms(SMP) in relationship of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) and Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices (CDMDC).

Bootstrapping

Bootstrapping is applied to estimate the sampling distribution of a statistic by repeatedly drawing a sample with replacement from the original (combined) data.

Table 2: Indirect effect of Social Media Influencer Marketing Content (SMIMC) on Consumer Decision-Making for Destination Choices

Indirect effect	Effect	Standard error	BootLLCI	BootULCI
SMIMC → SMP → CDMDC	.1434	.0298	-.0157	.2019

Source: Primary data

Table 2, the bootstrapping method reveals an indirect effect of SMIMC on CDMDC via SMP. The indirect effect of this association is 0.1434, demonstrating a moderate positive effect. The standard error of the estimate is 0.0298, which gives an indication of the variability of the effect. The BootLLCI (Bootstrap Lower Confidence Interval), which is -0.0157, and BootULCI (Bootstrap Upper Confidence Interval), which is 0.2019 present the interval in-between the true indirect effect falls. Since the confidence interval does not contain zero (i.e., it ranges from one value to another), we may conclude that the indirect effect is statistically significant and unlikely

to be produced by random chance. This means that there is a significant cross-mediated effect of SMIMC in CDMDC to SMP in the current dataset (Figure 3).

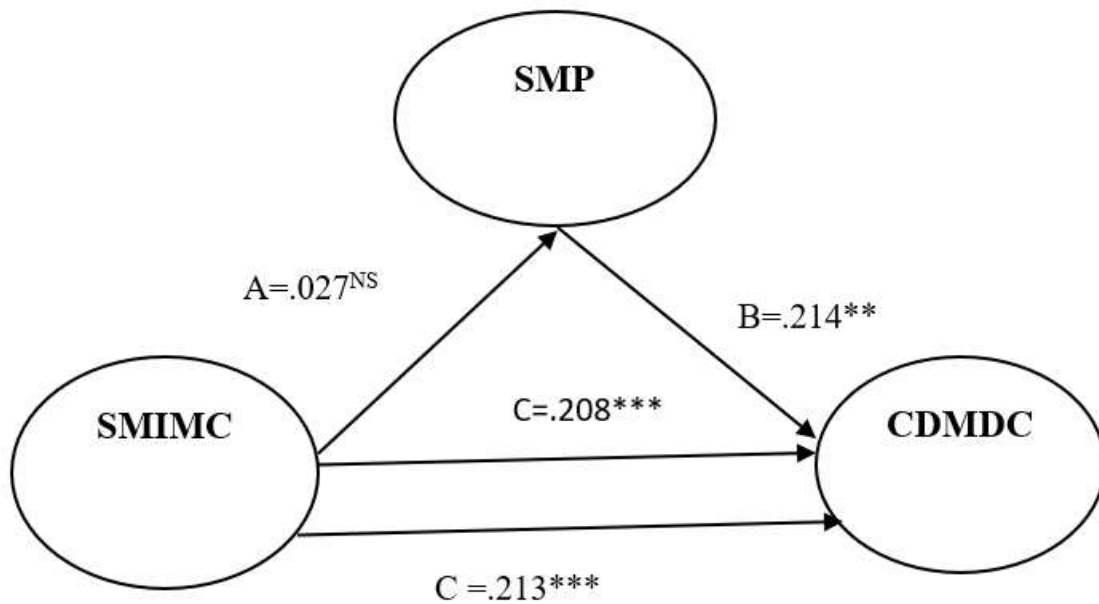


Figure 3 estimated paths

Conclusion and Practical Implications

This study shows that social media influencers have important impact on foreign tourists' choices of travel destinations in India, and social media itself works as a middle step in decision making. Further, this proves that influencers directly affect how tourists select their travel places. This study suggests that tourism boards should further use influencer content to attract tourists on platforms like Instagram, YouTube and Facebook where trust itself exists between influencers and their followers. The findings surely show how influencer marketing can be made different for various tourist groups by creating content that feels real and matches their dreams and experiences. In addition, the method assists marketers to target the targeted demographics more efficiently. Such an initiative is bound to create more interests and make more tourists visit Indian states.

Further, these interventions will be effective in promoting the general tourism industry in various areas. Essentially, when the tourism brands collaborate with the influencers who share the same values as those of the target customers, it creates more trust and credibility, which in turn directly affects the decision of tourists making a booking. The study certainly demonstrates that social media managers and content creators have to consider the ethical issues in influencer marketing. Besides, authentic and sincere alliances are required to ensure that viewers do not lose confidence in them. Based on these results, destinations must shift their marketing strategy in the digital age

in terms of the employment of social media influencers as the tourism drivers. The practical implications imply that there should be significant change as far as tourism marketing is concerned.

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