

The Role of Instagram in Promoting Indian Tourism: A Special Focus on Gujarat State

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of Instagram on promoting Indian tourism, with a specific focus on individuals from Gujarat. The study begins by providing an overview of India's diverse geography and the increasing influence of social media, particularly Instagram, in shaping travel preferences and decisions. A review of existing literature highlights Instagram's growing significance in tourism promotion. The findings reveal that Instagram is a popular platform among people in Gujarat for discovering travel destinations and planning trips. The study concludes by emphasizing the need to understand Instagram users' preferences and behaviour to develop more effective tourism marketing strategies. This research lays the foundation for future studies aimed at optimizing Instagram's role in enhancing Indian tourism and supporting the growth of the tourism sector in Gujarat.

Keywords – *Instagram, Indian tourism, Gujarat, social media, Tourism promotion*

1. Introduction

India is one of the world's oldest civilizations and has a rich mix of cultures. The Indian subcontinent spans approximately 3,200 km from north to south, featuring diverse landscapes that include the Himalayas, the Thar Desert, plateaus, rainforests, and home to nearly 800 languages (Bose, Parida et.al., 2021). The country offers a variety of traditions, festivals, foods, religions, arts, music, and adventure activities. Its cultural tapestry includes ancient temples, historic monuments, as well as ultra-modern malls, skyscrapers, and luxurious resorts. Tourism is once such crucial domain that can flaunt India's vibrant cultural diversity, rich history, and the geographical marvels. It offers a unique blend of spiritual, historical, and adventure experiences that captivate travellers from around the world in the most affordable manner.

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries globally and is very important for India's economy. It has been creating a significant impact on the Indian economic scenario since the past two decades and the future outlook is bright for the tourism sector (Saqib and Satar, 2018). Also, the growing awareness about travel among people has fostered a favourable environment for the expansion of India's tourism sector (Anoop & Lakshmi, 2024).

1.1. Evolution of Tourism Promotion: From Conventional to Digital

In today's digital age, social media—particularly Instagram—plays a pivotal role in promoting tourism worldwide by showcasing a country's potential through captivating visuals and information-rich content. Traditionally, tourism promotion relied heavily on conventional methods, such as newspaper ads, brochures, films, and collaborations with travel agencies. While these strategies helped place destinations on the map, their reach and

ability to spark interest were limited. However, the landscape has dramatically shifted with the rise of digital technology, as the internet and social media have revolutionized how destinations are discovered and explored.

1.2. Social Media & Instagram Revolution

As of 2024, social media has fundamentally transformed how we communicate, interact, and explore the world. It refers to websites and applications that allow users to create profiles, share content, and connect with others (Boyd, 2008; Kietzman, 2011). These platforms leverage internet-based technologies to facilitate networking and communication through text, video, images, and other multimedia.

Social media keeps people connected with friends, helps rediscover old connections, and enables meeting new individuals with similar interests. Users can join groups, share ideas, and build professional networks to find jobs or business opportunities. These platforms make communication more engaging and accessible to everyone.

"Social media is the relationships that exist between networks of people" (Walter & Riviera, 2004). Today, it is no longer just a nice-to-have; it's an essential tool for everyday life.

Among all social platforms, Instagram has evolved rapidly. Launched on October 6th, 2010, it has become one of the largest social media platforms, boasting 2 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2024). Its addictive features like filters, hashtags, and location tags keep users engaged. People share posts, comment on others' content, and follow accounts to stay updated (Blystone, 2024). Beyond entertainment, Instagram has revolutionized the influencer and content creation industries. Many users have transformed their presence on the app into full-time careers, proving that Instagram is not just for sharing photos—it's about creating opportunities (Dixon, 2024).

By 2023, Instagram had approximately 2 billion users globally, competing with Facebook and YouTube. India led the user base with 230 million users, followed by the U.S. with 143 million and Brazil with 113 million. Notably, 31% of Instagram users were aged 18 to 24, making it especially popular among Millennials and Gen Z (Statista, 2024), positioning it as a key driver for tourism promotion to a younger audience. Studies prove that Instagram users spend about 30 minutes daily on the app (Foundationinc.co, Ismarizal & Kusumah, 2023).

Instagram has also proven to be a powerful advertising tool. In 2022, 80% of marketers globally used the platform for promotions, making it the second most popular marketing tool after Facebook, and ahead of LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok (Dixon, 2024). By January 2024, Instagram's user base in India had grown to 362 million, making it the largest audience globally (Dixon, 2024).

1.3. Instagram: Transforming Travel Experiences

Instagram is transforming the travel industry by connecting travel enthusiasts through hashtags and location tags, boosting tourism even in less-explored destinations. Influencers, who are often more trusted than traditional advertisements, play a significant role in this shift, particularly among Millennials. With its visual appeal and easy sharing options, Instagram has become a powerful platform for attracting tourists (TOI-Javaid Iqbal, 2019).

2. Review of Select Literature:

Various studies have explored and emphasized the role of social media, particularly Instagram, in promoting Indian tourism, both locally and globally.

Tourism organizations now use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to connect with potential travellers, showcase destinations, and engage with customers, making marketing more effective and accessible (Evangelos Christou, Marianna Sigala, and Ulrike Gretzel, 2012). Traditional advertising methods like TV and print were effective but costly and less accessible. The rise of social media and mobile technology has offered a more efficient platform for tourism marketing (Johnson & Kaye, 2016; Hew et al., 2018; Ngai et al., 2015).

A study by Digital Travel Summit (2024) suggests that social media is crucial for tourism, helping businesses increase awareness, engage with potential visitors, and streamline bookings. Social media enhances information

exchange and influences travel behavior and marketing strategies (Blackshaw, 2006; Sheldon, 1997; Werthner & Klein, 1999; Xiang et al., 2008). Influencer collaborations are key for targeting younger audiences and specific interests (Harsha Dubey & Saheel Roy, 2023). It significantly impacts travel plans and supports tourism when used by governments and organizations (Sobia Shahzad, Fakhta Zeib, 2024).

Media portrayal shapes tourists' views, balancing positive aspects with awareness of negative impacts like environmental harm (Dr. Deepak M. Shinde, 2016). Reviews on social media significantly affect destination perceptions, with detailed positive reviews improving views, while negative reviews with low ratings have a strong negative impact (Xinxin Guo & Juho Antti Pesonen, 2022).

A study in Madhya Pradesh found highly usefulness of social media for travel planning, though actual usage is lower, influenced by factors like gender and trust. Social media platforms are increasingly used for marketing and gathering information, driving tourism growth in India (Namrata Kishnani and Vivek Sharma, 2024). Gujarat's tourism marketing, including the successful "Khushboo Gujarat Ki" campaign, has played a key role in boosting tourist numbers. However, there is a need to update strategies to maintain visitor interest (Gujarat Tourism Policy for the State of Gujarat 2015-2020).

The use of celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan has had a positive effect on tourism. Still, challenges such as the reliability of official travel information, over-tourism, and misinformation remain concerns (Sushilkumar M., 2017; Milano, C., Cheer, J. M., & Novelli M., 2019; World Tourism Council report, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the tourism industry, causing a significant decline in global GDP and job losses, especially in India where 38 million jobs were lost (The Hindu, 2020). Unemployment in India peaked at 23.5% in April 2020 but improved to 9.1% by December (Sharma & Sharma, 2021). Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have become key in tourism marketing by attracting tourists and building back the brand loyalty (Islam & Boro, 2019).

While outbound travel has recovered, inbound tourism to India remains lower than pre-pandemic levels (Farooqui, 2023). To help the industry recover, the Indian government is improving safety measures and working to regain travellers trust. Before the pandemic, tourism contributed 6.8% to India's GDP, supporting millions of jobs. In 2021, this dropped to 5.8%, supporting 32.1 million jobs (Tourism.gov.in, WTTC). Research by Kale et al. (2023) and Gupta et al. (2022) highlights that social media, especially Instagram, plays a vital role in promoting Indian tourism, particularly post-pandemic. By using user-generated content and understanding customer behaviour, marketers can help boost tourism in India.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Methodology

This study explores Instagram's role in promoting Indian tourism, with a focus on Gujarat. It combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis. A Google Form survey was distributed to over 130 individuals in Gujarat, using both open-ended and closed-ended questions to identify patterns and correlations. Interviews with local tour agencies offered deeper insights into their Instagram strategies. This mixed-method approach enabled a thorough understanding of Instagram's impact on tourism promotion in Gujarat.

3.2 Aim of the Study

The study aims to examine Instagram's influence on tourism in India, specifically in Gujarat. It investigates how Instagram shapes travel decisions and behaviours, providing insights into how social media contributes to tourism promotion and destination selection in India.

3.3 Objectives

- To identify the role of Instagram in promoting Indian tourism in Gujarat.
- To examine the factors influencing decision-making regarding tourism in India among individuals in Gujarat.

- To evaluate the future potential of Instagram as a tool for promoting Indian tourism.

4. Data Interpretation and Analysis

The interpretation and analysis of the collected data explains outcomes and guides future research. This study uses quantitative methods for Google Form responses and qualitative insights from tour agency interviews. As C.R. Kothari (2004) states, interpretation adds meaning to research findings, advancing knowledge.

A researcher gathered opinions to understand how travellers engage with Instagram and their travel preferences.

4.1 Quantitative Data Interpretation

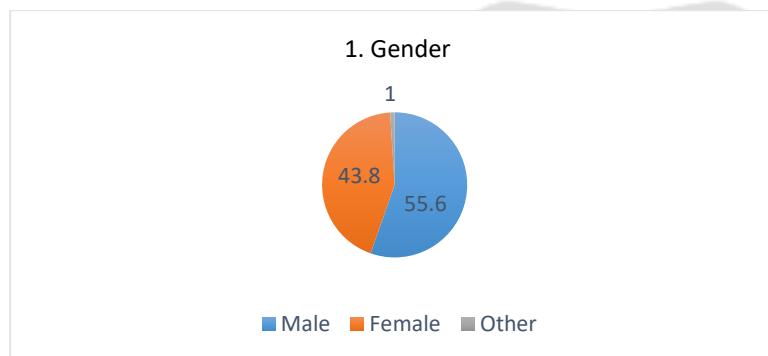


Figure 1 GENDER

The gender distribution shows Instagram's strong influence on travel preferences in Gujarat, with 43% males, 55.6% females, and 1% others.

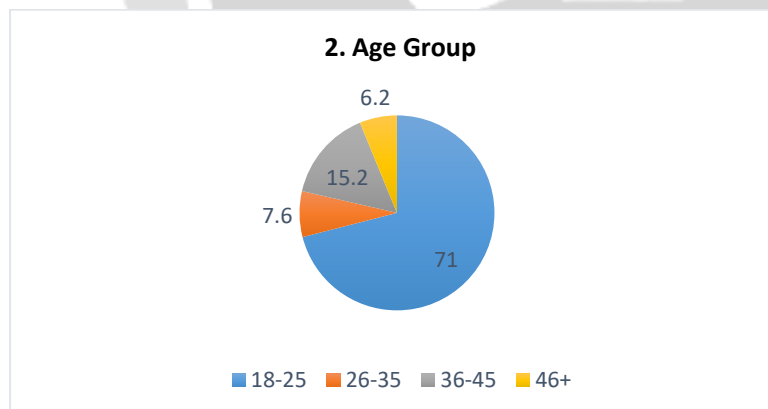


Figure 2 AGE GROUP

The age distribution shows that 71% of Instagram users influencing travel preferences in Gujarat are between 18-25, followed by 15.2% in the 36-45 age group, 7.6% in the 26-35 group, and 6.2% aged 46 and above. This highlights Instagram's strong appeal among younger users.

Data on common travel habits was collected to understand usual travel preferences:

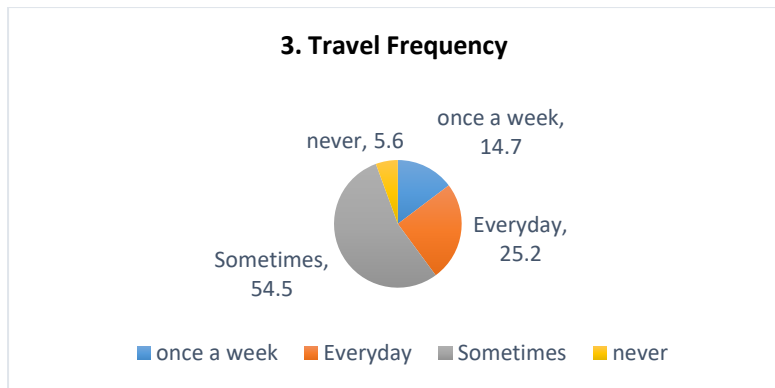


Figure 3 Talking about frequent travel habits.

In Gujarat, travel frequency varies: 50% travel once or twice a year, 31.3% travel once a month or more, 17.4% travel rarely, and 1.4% never travel. Instagram can cater to each group by offering trip ideas, deals, and budget tips, inspiring travellers of all frequencies. For frequent travellers, it provides updates and spontaneous trip suggestions, while for less frequent travellers, it shares virtual tours and budget-friendly options. Even those who don't travel can enjoy travel content, sparking interest in exploring destinations.

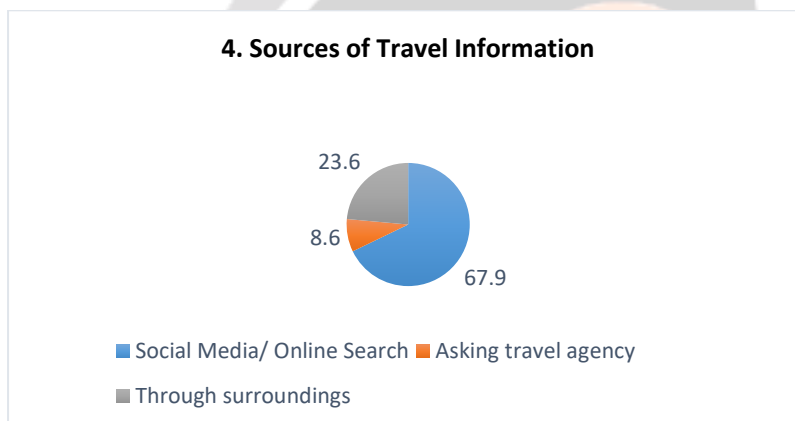


Figure 4. Factors influencing travel decisions and where to find trip information.

In Gujarat, most people (67.9%) use social media and online search engines like Google to gather travel information, highlighting Instagram's key role in influencing travel decisions. A smaller group (8.6%) consults travel agencies, while 23.6% rely on personal recommendations from friends, family, or their local environment.

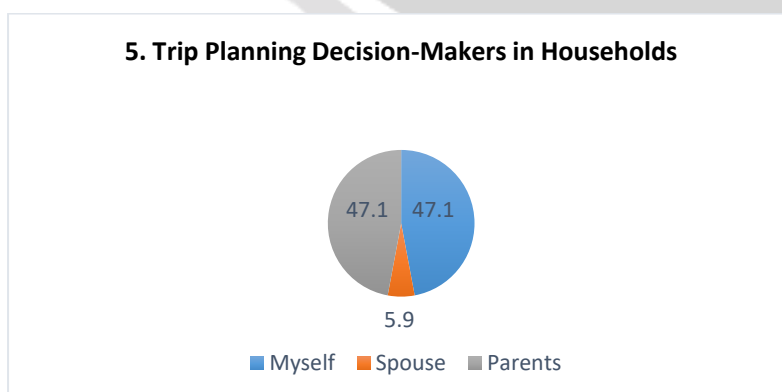


Figure 5. Lead decision-maker for trip planning within households.

Nearly half of the respondents (47.1%) take the lead in organizing their own trips, potentially influenced by personal preferences and social media platforms like Instagram. The same percentage (47.1%) reported that their parents are responsible for planning, reflecting a more traditional approach in family travel decisions. A smaller group (5.9%) indicated that their spouse takes the lead, suggesting joint decision-making.

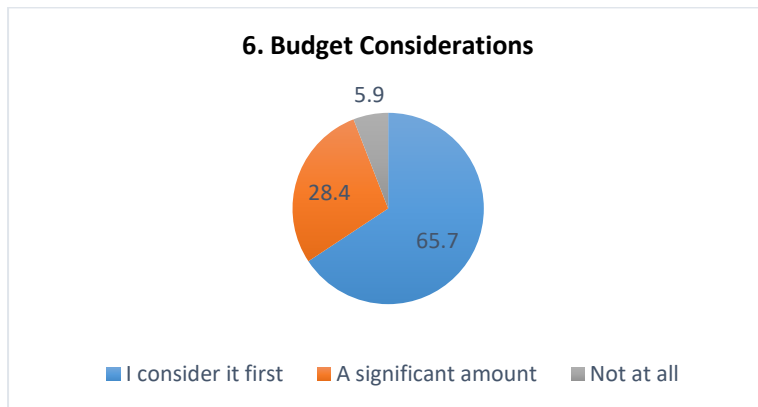


Figure 6. Considering budget when exploring travel content on Instagram.

A majority (65.7%) prioritize budget when browsing travel-related posts, indicating that cost is a key factor in their decision-making process. A smaller group (28.4%) also considers budget as important, though it is not their top priority. Only 5.9% of respondents do not focus on budget

Data on Instagram's role in shaping travel preferences and influencing usual travel habits:

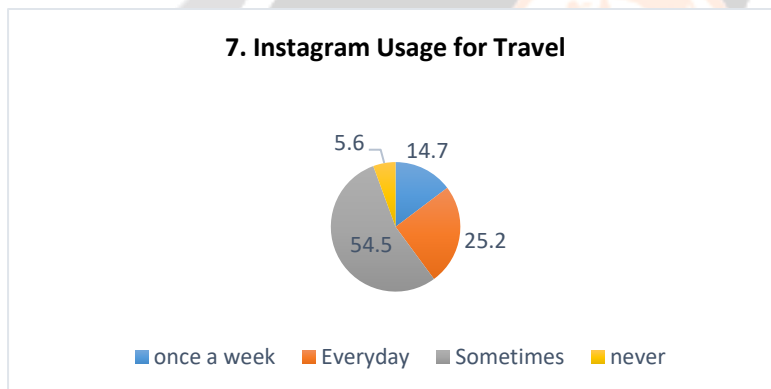


Figure 7. Exploring travel content on Instagram

In Gujarat, most people (54.5%) use Instagram occasionally for travel inspiration, while 25.2% use it daily. About 14.7% engage weekly, and 5.6% never use it for travel.

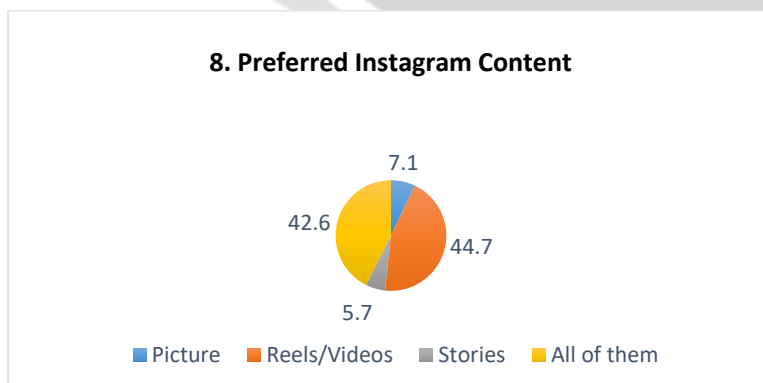


Figure 8. Engaging Instagram content for promoting tourism.

The data reveals varied preferences among individuals from Gujarat regarding Instagram content for promoting Indian tourism. A significant portion (44.7%) prefers reels and videos, appreciating their dynamic, immersive nature that showcases India's vibrant culture and landscapes. Pictures, though less popular (7.1%), still resonate with some for their ability to evoke emotions and inspire travel. A small group (5.7%) favours Instagram Stories

for their real-time, behind-the-scenes insights. Interestingly, 42.6% of respondents enjoy a mix of all content types.

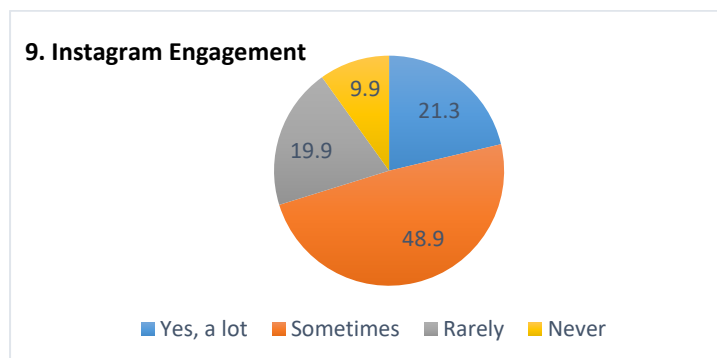


Figure 9. Engagement with Instagram content.

The data shows that people in Gujarat engage with Instagram posts about Indian tourism in different ways. About 49% interact sometimes, showing a moderate interest. Around 21% engage frequently, indicating strong interest. However, 20% engage rarely, and 10% never interact, meaning some users are less interested. To promote Indian tourism effectively

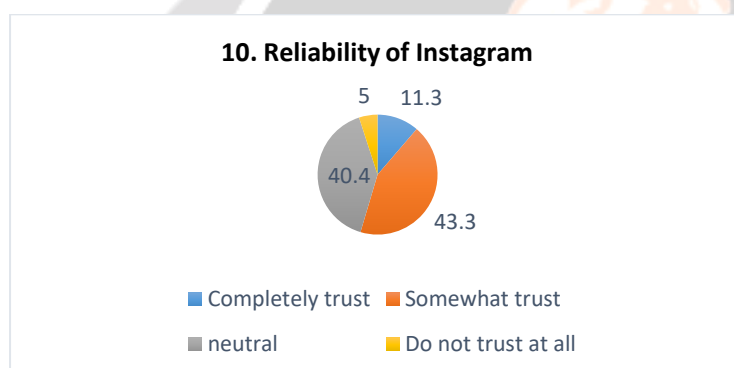


Figure 10. Reliability of tourism information from Instagram.

Around 43% of respondents have moderate trust on using Instagram for inspiration while 40% remain neutral considering the Instagram as one of several sources. About 11% completely trust the platform and agreed that they relying heavily on its content for travel decisions. A small group (5%) does not trust Instagram, preferring other sources for travel information.

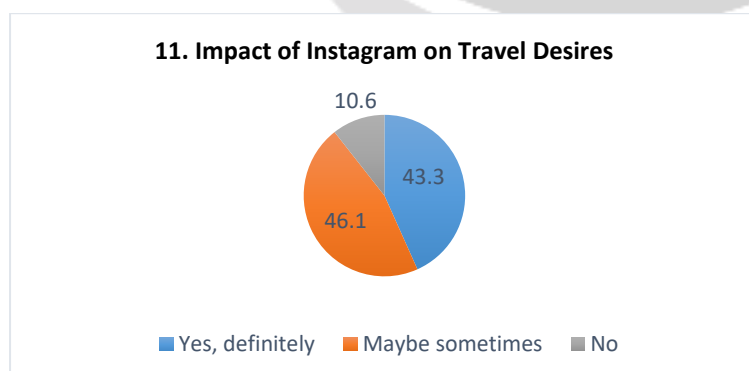


Figure 11. Instagram influence on visiting specific places in India.

The data shows that Instagram plays a significant role in sparking travel desires to specific places in India. About 43% of respondents are strongly influenced by Instagram, finding it a powerful source of travel inspiration. Another 46% acknowledge Instagram's occasional impact on their travel aspirations, though it varies depending

on content and personal preferences. A small group (10.6%) reports no influence from Instagram, citing other factors like personal interests and budget as more important.

4.2 Qualitative Data Interpretation:

This section involves deriving insights from interviews conducted with founders and management of tour agencies.

1. **Invincible NGO - The largest trekking organization in India:** - Founder of invincible NGO Rushiraj Mori highlighted effectiveness in reaching a wide audience. The NGO creates engaging reels and vibrant posters showcasing destinations, with clear details about camp fees, offers, and other important information. They boost posts and reels for wider reach and share customer feedback to build trust. Posts are strategically scheduled for high engagement times, mainly on Friday and Saturday evenings. Instagram plays a crucial role in promoting Invincible NGO's offerings through a well-coordinated social media strategy.
2. **Venture Adventure - Tour and Trekking Agency:** - Arpita Joshi from the management department highlights the agency's focus on Instagram as the ideal platform for promoting Indian tourism. They boost posts and create engaging reels using trending content and popular audio to attract travel enthusiasts. The agency schedules promotions around vacation times and festivals when people are more likely to plan trips. They emphasize transparency, ensuring the content shared on social media accurately represents the destinations and services they offer, avoiding misleading images and ensuring consistency with the actual travel experiences provided.
3. **Navkar Tours and Travel:** - Deep Shah, the founder of Navkar Tours and Travel, shared their Instagram marketing strategy, highlighting the use of relevant travel hashtags to boost visibility. They create visually appealing templates and maintain a consistent posting schedule to effectively showcase their services, offers, and customer feedback. Collaborating with influencers who use their services and encouraging regular customers to share authentic experiences about food, accommodations, and destinations further enhance their credibility. As an example, the agency offered exclusive Dubai tours after the inauguration of the Ayodhya Mandir, ensuring premium services for clients. They also modify their seasonal tours, such as showcasing Kashmir in winters and Kerala during the monsoons, ensuring their content resonates with audience preferences.

Instagram is a key platform for promoting Indian tourism, as shown by insights from Gujarat's audience and travel agencies. This analysis offers valuable guidance for enhancing tourism marketing strategies and future research.

5. Conclusion

The research on the influence of Instagram in promoting Indian tourism, with a specific focus on individuals from Gujarat, provides valuable insights into the transformative role of social media in shaping travel decisions and destination choices. Based on data collected through mixed methods, the study underscores the growing importance of platforms like Instagram in revolutionizing tourism promotion strategies.

The findings demonstrate that Instagram is incredibly popular among people in Gujarat for discovering travel ideas and making travel decisions. This highlights a powerful opportunity for tourism agencies to leverage Instagram effectively. To maximize its impact, agencies should create engaging content tailored to diverse age groups and genders, foster interaction, diversify post types, build trust, showcase affordable options, and post at strategic times with targeted hashtags. By adopting these strategies, tourism agencies and the government can effectively showcase India's rich culture, diverse nature, and unique attractions, fuelling the growth of Gujarat's tourism sector. This will not only drive sustainable tourism but also significantly boost the economy. Instagram has the potential to play a pivotal role in positioning India as a premier global travel destination.

6. Key Recommendations for Strengthening Tourism Promotion Strategies

Based on the findings from our data analysis and interpretation, here are some recommendations to improve tourism promotion strategies on Instagram for individuals from Gujarat:

- Future research could focus on tailoring Instagram travel content for both men and women by showcasing activities they enjoy. For example, men may prefer adventure sports, while women may gravitate toward wellness and cultural experiences.
- It's essential to study how Instagram appeals to different age groups. Younger users (18-25) may favor modern, trendy content, while older age groups might be more interested in cultural and historical travel experiences.
- Encouraging infrequent travellers to explore new destinations can be effective. Since 44% of users enjoy watching reels and videos, and 42% engage with both photos and stories, creating diverse content can appeal to a wide audience.
- Trust is critical, as 40% of people fully trust travel content on Instagram. Research could explore ways to increase likes, comments, and shares while maintaining honest and authentic content.
- Budget is a key consideration for 65% of users who follow travel content on Instagram. Sharing affordable travel ideas can attract more budget-conscious travellers.
- Posting visually appealing photos, reels, and posters of unique destinations can capture attention. Including customer reviews and boosting posts can help build trust and attract new visitors.
- Posting at optimal times, such as Friday and Saturday evenings, and using effective hashtags can increase content visibility and engagement.
- Authenticity is crucial. Ensuring Instagram content reflects real images of places and services helps build trust and credibility.
- Focusing on seasonal travel trends, such as summer trips to Kashmir or monsoon visits to Kerala, can align content with users' current interests.
- Implementing these strategies can enhance Instagram as a powerful tool for promoting Indian tourism and inspire more travellers from Gujarat to explore new destinations.

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