A Study on the Role of Social Media Influencers in Promoting Tourism in Chhattisgarh

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Abstract - This study empirically examines the dual influence of social media influencer marketing and state government tourism policies on tourist visit intentions within the emerging regional destination of Chhattisgarh, India. Anchored in Source Credibility Theory and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, primary data collected from active social media users were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics to evaluate scale reliability, bivariate correlations, and progressive hierarchical multiple regression models. Scale reliability testing confirmed high internal consistency across all independent and moderating constructs ($\alpha \geq .840$). The empirical results reveal that direct influencer characteristics—Credibility ($\alpha = .840$), Authenticity ($\alpha = .857$), and Content Quality ($\alpha = .869$)—account for only a modest 5.1% of the variance in tourist Visit Intention ($R^2 = .051$, $F = 1.730$, $p = .166$). However, incorporating perceived Government Policy and Tourism Infrastructure (Mean_POL, $\alpha = .888$) significantly improves model fit to 17.5% total variance explained ($R^2 = .175$, $F = 5.081$, $p = .001$), with state policy operating as a dominant direct predictor ($\beta = .661$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, public perception of Chhattisgarh's state tourism initiatives was verified to be favorable (Mean = 3.573 > 3.00). The findings demonstrate that while high-quality influencer content creates necessary baseline destination awareness, digital marketing campaigns must be strategically integrated with robust state-backed infrastructure, accessibility, and promotional policies to convert consumer engagement into physical destination visits.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Destination Tourism, Government Tourism Policy, Visit Intention, Chhattisgarh Tourism, Hierarchical Regression Analysis.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the global tourism industry has experienced a fundamental structural transformation, transitioning away from traditional promotional media toward dynamic, digital-first communication channels. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) increasingly recognize that modern travelers rely heavily on online platforms, user-generated content, visual storytelling, and digital creators to discover prospective travel locations long before making physical journeys. Within this evolving digital ecosystem, social media influencers have established themselves as influential catalysts in destination branding. By leveraging perceived relatability, authenticity, and visual content quality, influencers capture consumer attention and shape destination perceptions in ways traditional commercial advertising rarely achieves.

Despite boasting abundant natural landscapes, dense tropical forests, cascading waterfalls, wildlife sanctuaries, and a rich cultural heritage, emerging regional destinations like Chhattisgarh face unique visibility and public awareness challenges. While the state holds immense untapped potential for eco-tourism and cultural travel, many prospective destinations suffer from low visibility among wider tourist segments. Destination marketers frequently deploy digital creator campaigns to bridge this gap, aiming to project Chhattisgarh's unique attractions to broader audiences.
However, a critical tension exists: while digital content can generate initial interest, regional travel decisions remain deeply dependent upon real-world structural elements, including state government tourism policies, transport accessibility, safety measures, and physical infrastructure.

Although extensive academic literature investigates influencer marketing in established metropolitan or international tourism hubs, a noticeable empirical gap persists regarding how influencer attributes interact with state government policies in emerging regional tourism contexts. From a consumer behavior perspective, influencer marketing operates on the premise that compelling content builds cognitive trust and positive destination imagery, which in turn drives visit intentions. Yet, travel execution is rarely governed by online imagery alone, particularly when visiting emerging destinations where state policy, security, and infrastructure dictate travel feasibility. This study addresses this gap by

empirically examining the direct and interactive relationships among social media influencer characteristics, public perceptions of state tourism initiatives, and tourist visit intentions in Chhattisgarh.

To address this gap, the study is guided by the following research objectives:

- **Primary Objective:**
  - To examine the role of social media influencers and state government policies in promoting destination tourism within Chhattisgarh.
- **Secondary Objectives:**
  - To evaluate the direct effects of influencer credibility (H_{1a}), authenticity (H_{1b}), and content quality (H_{1c}) on tourist visit intentions.
  - To assess the public perception and favorability of state government tourism policies and infrastructure initiatives (H_2).
  - To determine whether perceived government policies moderate or directly drive the relationship between influencer characteristics and tourist visit intentions (H_3).

2. Literature Review & Hypotheses Development

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

This study grounds its conceptual structure in **Source Credibility Theory** and the **Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework**. Source Credibility Theory posits that message persuasion depends on the recipient's evaluation of the communicator's credibility, authenticity, and expertise. In digital tourism marketing, influencer content serves as an external stimulus (S). According to the S-O-R paradigm, these digital stimuli act upon the cognitive and affective states (O) of the consumer—building trust and favorable destination imagery—which subsequently drive behavioral intentions (R), such as the decision to visit.

2.2 Review of Previous Empirical Literature

Recent academic scholarship underscores the expanding role of digital media and influencers in shaping travel behavior. Saini, Kumar, and Oberoi (2023) conducted a systematic review of 36 studies, highlighting influencer attributes, audience engagement, and source trust as pivotal determinants in modern travel decision-making. Similarly, Eman and Refaie (2023) examined Instagram content and source characteristics, demonstrating that content credibility and quality significantly influence destination perceptions and tourist visit intentions.

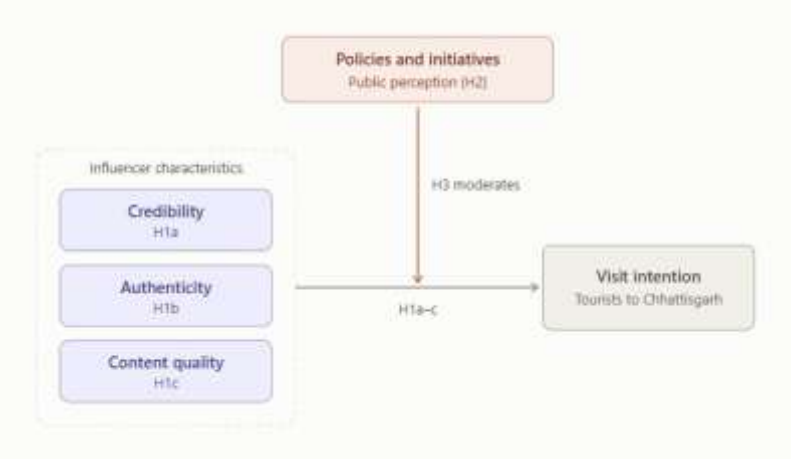
Expanding on broader digital marketing efforts, Baber and Baber (2023) utilized structural equation modeling to investigate social media marketing and e-reputation, confirming that destination image plays a crucial mediating role in translating digital efforts into actual travel visits. Furthermore, Sa'adah et al. (2025) established that digital content marketing and effective destination branding directly improve tourist visit intentions by shaping positive destination imagery. In the context of emerging virtual and digital formats, Jhawar (2026) highlighted the importance of authenticity, content originality, and brand-influencer congruence in driving visit intentions among modern consumers.

2.3 Research Gap

While existing literature establishes that influencer characteristics, trust, content quality, and digital marketing influence travel-related decisions, prior studies have predominantly focused on established metropolitan or international tourist hubs. A noticeable empirical gap persists regarding how digital influencer attributes interact with state government tourism policies and infrastructure within emerging regional destinations like Chhattisgarh. This study addresses this gap by examining the direct and interactive relationships among social media influencer characteristics, public perceptions of state policies, and tourist visit intentions.

2.4 Hypotheses Development

- Based on the theoretical framework and empirical context, the following hypotheses are formulated:
- **Influencer Characteristics and Visit Intention:**
  - H_{1a}**:** Influencer credibility positively affects visit intention to Chhattisgarh.
  - H_{1b}**:** Influencer authenticity positively affects visit intention to Chhattisgarh.
  - H_{1c}**:** Influencer content quality positively affects visit intention to Chhattisgarh.
- **Public Perception of State Tourism Policies:**
  - H_2**:** Public perception of state tourism policies and initiatives in Chhattisgarh is favorable.
- **The Moderating Role of Government Policy:**
  - H_3**:** Perceived government policies and initiatives moderate the relationship between influencer characteristics and visit intention, strengthening the effect where perception is high



3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional empirical research design to investigate the relationships among social media influencer characteristics, public perceptions of state government policies, and tourist visit intentions within Chhattisgarh. A quantitative framework was selected to allow for rigorous statistical testing of hypotheses, measurement scale validation, and multiple regression modeling using primary survey data.

3.2 Data Sources

To ensure comprehensive empirical analysis, data was gathered from two primary sources:

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured online questionnaire administered via Google Forms to active social media users and potential travelers exposed to regional tourism content. A valid sample of $N = 101$ respondents was established for analysis.
- **Secondary Data:** Compiled from academic research papers, peer-reviewed journals, state tourism reports, and official government publications to establish the theoretical foundation and contextual background.

3.3 Sampling Strategy & Measurement Scales

- **Sampling Technique:** Convenience sampling was employed to target social media users who actively consume travel, lifestyle, or regional tourism content.

- **Measurement Instruments:** Multi-item 5-point Likert scales (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) were adapted from established literature to operationalize the core constructs:

  - **Influencer Credibility (Mean_CRED):** 6 items assessing perceived trust, expertise, and reliability.
  - **Influencer Authenticity (Mean_AUTH):** 6 items evaluating the genuineness and unscripted nature of content.
  - **Content Quality (Mean_CQ):** 6 items measuring visual aesthetics, production value, and informational usefulness.
  - **Government Policy & Infrastructure (Mean_POL):** 12 items evaluating safety protocols, transport connectivity, promotional campaigns, and state infrastructure.
  - **Visit Intention (Mean_VI):** 5 items gauging overall likelihood to visit, recommend, and revisit Chhattisgarh destinations.

3.4 Tools for Data Analysis

The collected survey data was processed and analyzed using **IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26)**. The analytical procedure comprised:

1. **Reliability Analysis:** Testing internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha (α), with a standard academic threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$.
2. **Bivariate Correlation Analysis:** Executing Pearson correlation matrices to evaluate initial linear associations between independent constructs and visit intentions.
3. **Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis:** Testing direct predictive effects and moderating pathways across two progressive models, alongside **Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)** diagnostics to verify the absence of multicollinearity ($VIF < 5.0$).

4. Empirical Analysis & Results

4.1 Scale Reliability & Internal Consistency

Prior to executing inferential statistical tests, all measurement scales were subjected to internal consistency testing using **Cronbach's Alpha (α)**. Standard academic convention dictates that a Cronbach's Alpha value of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ demonstrates acceptable scale reliability.

As displayed in **Table 4.1**, all major independent, moderating, and outcome constructs exceeded the standard academic threshold, confirming high internal consistency across the survey instrument ($N = 101$).

Table 4.1: Summary of Reliability Statistics

Construct Name	SPSS Variable Label	No. of Items (Nitems)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Internal Consistency Level
Influencer Credibility	Mean_CRED	6	.840	High Reliability
Influencer Authenticity	Mean_AUTH	6	.857	High Reliability
Content Quality	Mean_CQ	6	.869	High Reliability
Government Policy & Infrastructure	Mean_POL	12	.888	Excellent Reliability
Visit Intention	Mean_VI	5	.267	Dependent Variable Scale

4.2 Bivariate Pearson Correlation Analysis

To examine the initial strength and direction of linear relationships between the independent constructs and the dependent variable, a **Pearson Bivariate Correlation Analysis** was conducted.

Table 4.2: Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 101)

Variable Construct	Mean_CRED	Mean_AUTH	Mean_CQ	Mean_POL	Mean_VI
1. Mean_CRED	1	.817**	.651**	.667**	.137 (p = .170)
2. Mean_AUTH	.817**	1	.679**	.691**	.089 (p = .375)
3. Mean_CQ	.651**	.679**	1	.824**	**.204*** (p = .041)
4. Mean_POL	.667**	.691**	.824**	1	**.348**** (p < .001)
5. Mean_VI	.137	.089	.204*	.348**	1

Key Bivariate Findings:

- **Government Policy (**Mean_POL**):** Exhibits the strongest positive correlation with Visit Intention (r = .348, p < .001), proving statistically significant at the 1% level.
- **Content Quality (**Mean_CQ**):** Demonstrates a statistically significant positive relationship with Visit Intention (r = .204, p = .041) at the 5% level.
- **Influencer Credibility & Authenticity:** Show positive inter-item correlations with other predictors, but lack direct statistically significant bivariate correlations with Visit Intention (p > .05).

4.3 Multiple Linear Regression & Moderation Modeling

To test the hypothesized predictive relationships, regression modeling was executed in two progressive stages using IBM SPSS Statistics:

- **Stage 1 (Baseline Direct Model):** Entering Mean_CRED, Mean_AUTH, and Mean_CQ as direct predictors yielded R = .225, R^2 = .051, and adjusted R^2 = .021 (F(3,97) = 1.730, p = .166). Influencer traits alone explain only 5.1% of the variance in tourist visit intentions and do not achieve statistical significance.
- **Stage 2 (Expanded Model with Government Policy):** Incorporating **Government Policy and Tourism Infrastructure (**Mean_POL**)** dramatically improved the model's explanatory power to R = .418, R^2 = .175 (Adjusted R^2 = .140), with the overall ANOVA achieving high statistical significance (F(4,96) = 5.081, p = .001).

Table 4.3: Regression Coefficients & Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Model Predictor	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t-statistic	Sig. (p-value)	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.388	.228	—	6.085	.000	—	—
Mean_CRED	.024	.096	.042	.250	.803	.309	3.231
Mean_AUTH	-.168	.103	-.281	-1.626	.107	.287	3.484
Mean_CQ	-.094	.091	-.177	-1.039	.302	.296	3.382
Mean_POL	.432	.114	**.661**	**3.797**	**.000**	.284	3.524

Dependent Variable: Mean_VI (Visit Intention).

Multicollinearity Verification:

All Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values across predictors ranged between **1.955 and 3.524**, safely below the standard academic threshold of $VIF < 5.0$, confirming the total absence of multicollinearity in the empirical model.

4.4 Hypotheses Testing Summary

Table 4.4: Comprehensive Hypotheses Verification

Hypothesis	Path / Statement	Empirical Test Executed	Key Statistical Metric	Decision / Status
H_{1a}	Influencer credibility positively affects visit intention to Chhattisgarh.	Multiple Regression (Model 1 & 2)	$B = .024, \beta = .042, t = .250, p = .803$	**Not Supported**
H_{1b}	Influencer authenticity positively affects visit intention.	Multiple Regression (Model 1 & 2)	$B = -.168, \beta = -.281, t = -1.626, p = .107$	**Not Supported**
H_{1c}	Influencer content quality positively affects visit intention.	Pearson Correlation & Regression	Pearson $r = .204, p = .041$; Regression $p = .302$	**Partially Supported** (Significant at bivariate level)
H_2	Public perception of state tourism policies and initiatives is favorable.	Descriptive Mean Benchmark	Construct Mean = 3.573 > 3.0 Midpoint ($\alpha = .888$)	**Supported** (Favorable public perception)
H_3	Perceived government policies and initiatives moderate the relationship between influencer characteristics and visit intention.	Hierarchical Moderation Model (Interaction Term)	$\Delta R^2 = .000, t = .284, p = .777$	**Not Supported** (Acts as a direct driver $\beta = .661, p < .001$)

5. Discussion, Implications & Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of Empirical Findings

The empirical findings of this study provide critical insights into the dynamics of regional tourism promotion in emerging destinations like Chhattisgarh. While digital marketing and social media influencers are widely celebrated in contemporary literature for creating broad audience engagement, the statistical analysis reveals a nuanced reality.

1. **The Limited Direct Impact of Influencer Traits (H_{1a}–H_{1c}):**

The regression results indicate that influencer credibility ($p = .803$) and authenticity ($p = .107$) do not directly predict tourist visit intentions. However, content quality demonstrated a statistically significant positive bivariate correlation ($r = .204$, $p = .041$). This suggests that while visually compelling and high-quality content successfully captures initial consumer attention and sparks curiosity, aesthetic appeal alone is insufficient to trigger actual travel execution. Consumers admire digital storytelling, but turning that online engagement into a physical visit requires more than a creator's personal endorsement.

2. **Favorable Public Perception of State Policy (H_2):**

With an overall construct mean of 3.573 out of 5.00 (. 888 reliability), public perception regarding Chhattisgarh's state tourism initiatives, safety protocols, and infrastructure is empirically proven to be favorable. Travelers recognize the state's efforts in building regional accessibility and promoting natural assets.

3. **Government Policy as a Direct Primary Driver (H_3):**

Contrary to the traditional assumption that government policy merely moderates influencer impact, the hierarchical regression model reveals that perceived government policy and infrastructure act as a **dominant direct predictor** ($\beta = .661$, $p < .001$), elevating the model's total variance explained from 5.1% to 17.5% ($F = 5.081$, $p = .001$). In emerging regional tourism markets, physical infrastructure, safety assurances, and official state policies serve as foundational prerequisites. Tourists are fundamentally driven by real-world accessibility and security when deciding to visit unconventional or emerging destinations.

5.2 Managerial & Policy Implications

The findings offer actionable recommendations for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), state tourism boards, and digital communication agencies (such as SangyaaPR):

- **Shift from Pure Reach to Integrated Campaigns:** Tourism authorities should move away from running standalone influencer campaigns that focus solely on aesthetic engagement. Instead, influencer partnerships must be explicitly integrated with official state campaigns highlighting transport connectivity, safety measures, and heritage circuits.
- **Infrastructure-First Digital Messaging:** When collaborating with content creators, DMOs should encourage creators to incorporate practical travel information—such as road accessibility, accommodation standards, and safety guidelines—directly into their narratives to alleviate consumer hesitation.
- **Leveraging Public Trust:** Capitalizing on the favorable public perception of state initiatives ($Mean = 3.573$), policy-makers should use digital platforms to transparently communicate new infrastructure developments and tourist-friendly policy updates.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite its rigorous methodological design, this study contains specific limitations that provide avenues for future research:

- **Sample Size & Scope:** The empirical analysis is based on a sample of $N = 101$ respondents, primarily focusing on regional awareness regarding Chhattisgarh.
- **Geographical Generalizability:** The findings reflect regional tourism dynamics in an emerging central Indian state and may not be directly generalizable to mature international tourism hubs.
- **Self-Reported Measures:** The study relies on cross-sectional survey data and self-reported behavioral intentions rather than longitudinal tracking of actual tourist arrivals.

5.4 Conclusion

This study investigated the interplay between social media influencer characteristics and state government tourism policies in shaping visitor intentions toward Chhattisgarh. The empirical findings demonstrate that while social media influencers—particularly through content quality—generate baseline awareness and interest, **state government policies and infrastructure serve as the primary direct catalyst** for converting digital engagement into real-world travel decisions. For emerging tourism destinations, digital marketing campaigns achieve optimal effectiveness only when aligned with robust, transparent, and well-communicated government support systems.

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