

**Original Article**

# Impact of Influencer Authenticity on Destination Visit Intentions Among Metro City Travelers

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**ABSTRACT:** *Purpose:* This study aims to examine the impact of Instagram influencers' credibility comprising trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness on tourists' destination decision-making across major metropolitan cities in India. *Design/methodology/approach:* A quantitative research design was adopted using primary data collected from 397 respondents across Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai. A structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale was used. Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS (Version 26), employing descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). ANOVA was conducted to assess regional differences. *Findings:* Results indicate that all credibility dimensions significantly influence tourist decision-making: trustworthiness ( $\beta = 0.398$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), expertise ( $\beta = 0.331$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and attractiveness ( $\beta = 0.276$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The second-order construct of influencer credibility shows the strongest effect ( $\beta = 0.621$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), explaining 52.3% of variance ( $R^2 = 0.523$ ). ANOVA results ( $F = 4.782$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) confirm significant differences across cities. *Research limitations/implications:* The use of convenience sampling limits generalizability. Future studies may adopt longitudinal and probabilistic designs. *Practical implications:* Tourism marketers should prioritize credible influencers, emphasizing authenticity and expertise. *Originality/value:* This study integrates second-order SEM modeling and regional comparison, offering novel insights into influencer-driven tourism behavior in India.

**KEYWORDS:** Influencer Credibility, Instagram Marketing, Tourist Decision-Making, SEM, e-WOM, India.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the way consumers access information and make decisions, particularly in the tourism industry. Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as a highly influential visual medium that shapes perceptions of travel destinations through curated imagery, short-form videos, and user-generated content. With over a billion active users globally, Instagram has become a powerful marketing tool where influencers play a pivotal role in guiding consumer attitudes and behaviors (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Influencer marketing, defined as the strategic collaboration between brands and individuals with a substantial and engaged online following, has gained significant traction in recent years. In the context of tourism, Instagram influencers act as opinion leaders who provide travel inspiration, reviews, and recommendations, often blurring the line between authentic experiences and promotional content. The credibility of these influencers encompassing dimensions such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness has been identified as a critical factor influencing consumer decision-making processes (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Tourist destination decision-making is inherently complex and involves multiple stages, including information search, evaluation of alternatives, and final selection. Traditionally, tourists relied on travel agencies, brochures, and word-of-mouth recommendations. However, the digital era has shifted this paradigm toward electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), where social media influencers significantly impact travel intentions and destination choices. Instagram, in particular, facilitates immersive storytelling and visual persuasion, making it an effective platform for influencing tourists' perceptions of destinations (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018).

India, as one of the fastest-growing digital economies, presents a unique context for examining the influence of Instagram influencers on tourist behavior. Metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai represent diverse cultural, economic, and technological landscapes, with high internet penetration and active social media usage. Consumers in these urban centers are increasingly relying on digital platforms for travel-related information, making them an ideal demographic for studying influencer-driven decision-making processes.

Despite the growing importance of influencer marketing in tourism, there remains a need for empirical research that specifically examines how influencer credibility impacts tourist destination decisions within the Indian metropolitan context. Factors such as cultural diversity, varying levels of digital literacy, and differences in consumer preferences across cities may influence how credibility is perceived and acted upon. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for tourism marketers, policymakers, and digital strategists aiming to design effective promotional campaigns. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impact of Instagram influencers' credibility on tourists' destination decision-making, focusing on respondents from five major metropolitan cities in India: Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai. By exploring the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer behavior, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and tourism while offering practical insights for leveraging influencer strategies in a competitive market environment.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The emergence of social media has significantly transformed marketing communication, particularly in the tourism sector, where visual appeal and experiential narratives play a crucial role. Platforms such as Instagram have enabled the rise of influencer marketing, where individuals with substantial online followings shape consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing relies heavily on perceived authenticity and relatability, making it more persuasive in influencing consumer attitudes (Freberg et al., 2011; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In tourism, where intangible experiences dominate, consumers increasingly depend on digital content to evaluate destinations before making travel decisions. Studies have shown that Instagram's visual-centric nature enhances destination formation and stimulates travel intentions (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Casaló et al., 2018). Moreover, influencer-generated content often blends personal experience with promotional messaging, creating a hybrid form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) that significantly impacts consumer trust and engagement (Abidin, 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2019). As a result, influencer marketing has evolved into a strategic tool for tourism promotion, with marketers leveraging influencers to create aspirational and immersive travel narratives. However, the effectiveness of such strategies largely depends on the credibility of influencers, which determines how audiences perceive and act upon the shared content.

The concept of source credibility has been widely examined in marketing and communication literature, particularly through the foundational work of Ohanian (1990), who identified trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness as key dimensions influencing persuasion. Trustworthiness refers to the perceived honesty and integrity of the source, which plays a critical role in reducing skepticism and enhancing message acceptance (Erdogan, 1999; Sweeney & Swait, 2008). In the context of social media, trustworthiness becomes even more important due to the prevalence of sponsored content and the potential for misinformation. Research indicates that consumers are more likely to rely on influencers who demonstrate authenticity and transparency in their content (Audrezet et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2020). Expertise, on the other hand, reflects the knowledge and competence of the influencer in a specific domain, which enhances the informational value of content and supports informed decision-making (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Attractiveness encompasses not only physical appearance but also social appeal and content aesthetics, which influence attention and engagement levels (McGuire, 1985; Till & Busler, 2000). Recent studies suggest that while attractiveness can attract initial attention, trustworthiness and expertise are more critical in driving behavioral outcomes such as purchase or travel decisions (Ki et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Thus, influencer credibility is a multidimensional construct that significantly shapes consumer responses in digital environments.

Tourist destination decision-making is a complex and multi-stage process influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Traditionally, models of consumer behavior in tourism emphasized information search, evaluation of alternatives, and final selection based on personal preferences and external influences (Kotler et al., 2016). However, the rise of digital platforms has shifted this process toward a more interactive and socially influenced paradigm. Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has emerged as a critical determinant of travel behavior, with consumers increasingly relying on online reviews, ratings, and influencer content to guide their decisions (Litvin et al., 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Instagram, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping destination image through visually appealing content that evokes emotional responses and enhances perceived desirability (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Casaló et al., 2018). Research indicates that exposure to influencer content can significantly increase travel intention and destination preference by reducing perceived risk and uncertainty (Hajli, 2015; Leung et al., 2013). Furthermore, the integration of storytelling and personal experiences in influencer posts creates a sense of authenticity that resonates with audiences and influences their decision-making processes (Kumar et al., 2021). As a result, influencer marketing has become a key driver of tourist behavior in the digital age.

In the Indian context, the rapid growth of internet penetration and smartphone usage has accelerated the adoption of social media platforms, making influencer marketing an increasingly important tool for reaching urban consumers. Metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai represent diverse socio-economic and cultural environments, each with distinct consumer behaviors and preferences. Studies have shown that Indian consumers are highly responsive to social media content, particularly when it is perceived as authentic and relatable (Jin & Ryu, 2020; Gupta et al., 2022). The diversity of these urban markets also implies that the effectiveness of influencer marketing may vary across regions

due to differences in cultural values, digital literacy, and lifestyle patterns (Hofstede, 2011; Mishra et al., 2023). Additionally, the increasing popularity of travel blogging and vlogging in India has contributed to the growing influence of Instagram influencers in shaping travel trends and destination choices (Bansal & Srivastava, 2021). However, despite the widespread use of influencer marketing, there is limited empirical research examining how different dimensions of influencer credibility impact tourist decision-making across Indian metropolitan cities. Understanding these regional variations is essential for developing targeted and effective marketing strategies in a highly competitive tourism industry.

Recent advancements in research have emphasized the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the complex relationships between influencer credibility and consumer behavior. SEM allows for the examination of both direct and indirect effects, making it particularly suitable for studying multidimensional constructs such as credibility (Hair et al., 2019; Byrne, 2016). Studies employing SEM have consistently found that influencer credibility has a significant positive impact on consumer attitudes, trust, and behavioral intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Furthermore, the conceptualization of credibility as a second-order construct provides a more comprehensive understanding of how its dimensions interact to influence outcomes (Ohanian, 1990; Ki et al., 2020). Multi-group analysis has also been used to explore differences across demographic and geographic segments, highlighting the importance of contextual factors in shaping consumer responses (Sarstedt et al., 2011; Gupta et al., 2022). Despite these advancements, there remains a need for integrated models that examine both individual and combined effects of credibility dimensions in specific contexts such as tourism. This study addresses this gap by applying SEM to analyze the impact of Instagram influencer credibility on tourist destination decision-making across major metropolitan cities in India, thereby contributing to both theoretical and practical understanding of influencer marketing effectiveness.

### 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the impact of Instagram influencers' credibility on tourists' destination decision-making. It is developed based on the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and supporting literature.

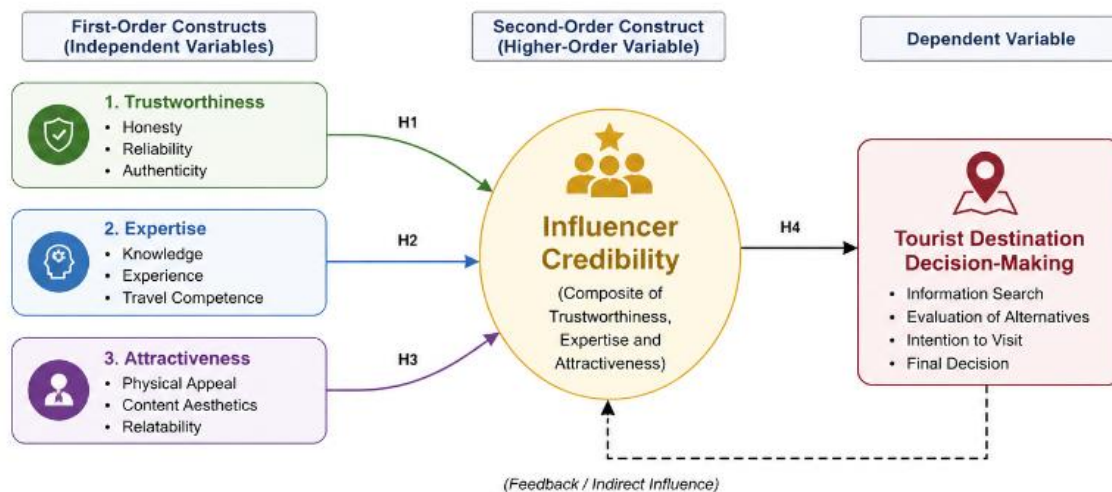


FIGURE 1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the Source Credibility Theory and examines how Instagram influencers' credibility shapes tourists' destination decision-making. Influencer credibility is operationalized as a second-order construct formed by three first-order dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Trustworthiness reflects the extent to which influencers are perceived as honest, reliable, and authentic in their travel-related content. Expertise captures the influencers' knowledge, experience, and competence in providing meaningful and accurate travel information. Attractiveness encompasses not only physical appeal but also content aesthetics and relatability, which enhance audience engagement. These three dimensions collectively contribute to building overall influencer credibility, which in turn influences tourists' cognitive and behavioral processes such as information search, evaluation of alternatives, and final destination choice.

### 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the impact of trust worthiness of Instagram influencers on tourists' destination decision-making.
- To analyze the influence of expertise of Instagram influencers on tourists' travel decisions.
- To evaluate the effect of attractiveness of Instagram influencers on destination choice.
- To assess the overall relationship between influencer credibility and tourist decision-making behavior.

- To compare the influence of Instagram influencer credibility across respondents from Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai.

**5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

- H<sub>1</sub>: Trust worthiness of Instagram influencers has a significant positive impact on tourist destination decision-making.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Expertise of Instagram influencers has a significant positive impact on tourist destination decision-making.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Attractiveness of Instagram influencers has a significant positive impact on tourist destination decision-making.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Influencer credibility (second-order construct comprising trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) has a significant positive effect on tourist decision-making.
- H<sub>5</sub>: The relationship between influencer credibility and tourist decision-making differs significantly across metropolitan cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai).

**6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a quantitative research design to analyze the impact of Instagram influencers’ credibility on tourists’ destination decision-making. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire from respondents across the five major metropolitan cities of India: Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai, representing diverse demographic and digital engagement profiles. A total sample of 397 respondents was considered for the study, distributed city-wise as follows: Delhi (75), Mumbai (55), Hyderabad (98), Bengaluru (102), and Chennai (67). This distribution ensures balanced representation and enhances the generalizability of the findings across urban populations. The study employed a convenience sampling technique due to accessibility and the widespread use of Instagram among urban users. All variables in the study trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and tourist destination decision-making were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. This scale facilitates the measurement of respondents’ perceptions and attitudes in a standardized manner.

For data analysis, both SPSS was utilized. SPSS was employed to conduct descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), reliability analysis (Cronbach’s alpha), and correlation analysis to examine the relationships among variables. Further, AMOS (Version 26) was used to perform Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to validate the measurement and structural models.

**7. RESULTS**

**TABLE 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	218	54.9%
	Female	179	45.1%
Age	18–25	142	35.8%
	26–35	168	42.3%
	36–45	61	15.4%
	46+	26	6.5%
Education	Undergraduate	156	39.3%
	Postgraduate	189	47.6%
	Others	52	13.1%

The demographic profile indicates that the majority of respondents are young adults aged between 18 and 35 years, representing over 78% of the sample. This reflects the dominant user base of Instagram, which is largely composed of younger, digitally active individuals. The gender distribution is relatively balanced, enhancing the representativeness of the sample. In terms of education, a significant proportion of respondents possess undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, suggesting a well-informed group capable of evaluating influencer content critically. These characteristics align with prior studies highlighting that younger, educated consumers are more engaged with social media and influencer-driven content. To assess the potential impact of common method bias, Harman’s single-factor test was conducted. The results indicated that the first factor accounted for 38.6% of the total variance, which is below the recommended threshold of 50%, suggesting that common method bias is not a significant concern in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

**TABLE 2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach’s Alpha
Trustworthiness	4.08	0.621	0.891
Expertise	3.95	0.658	0.873
Attractiveness	3.78	0.702	0.852
Tourist Decision-Making	3.62	0.734	0.905

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents generally hold positive perceptions toward Instagram influencers, with trustworthiness recording the highest mean score (4.08), followed by expertise and attractiveness. This suggests that users place greater importance on authenticity and reliability when engaging with influencer content. The relatively lower mean for tourist decision-making (3.62) implies that while influencers play a role, decision-making remains a multifaceted process influenced by additional factors. The standard deviation values indicate moderate variability, suggesting consistency in responses across the sample. Reliability analysis shows that all constructs have Cronbach’s alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming strong internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). These findings align with prior studies emphasizing the importance of credibility dimensions in influencing consumer perceptions and behavior in digital environments (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

**TABLE 3 Factor Loadings and Convergent Validity**

Construct	Item	Factor Loading
Trustworthiness	TW1	0.812
	TW2	0.845
	TW3	0.861
	TW4	0.833
Expertise	EX1	0.798
	EX2	0.826
	EX3	0.854
	EX4	0.817
Attractiveness	AT1	0.774
	AT2	0.802
	AT3	0.835
	AT4	0.809
Decision-Making	DM1	0.821
	DM2	0.847
	DM3	0.869
	DM4	0.838

All factor loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong item reliability and adequate convergence of indicators on their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The high loadings suggest that the observed variables are good representations of the latent constructs. This confirms convergent validity at the indicator level, ensuring that each construct is measured accurately. These findings are consistent with prior studies on influencer credibility, which emphasize the importance of reliable measurement items in capturing perceptions of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

**TABLE 4 Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**

Construct	CR	AVE	Result
Trustworthiness	0.912	0.722	Valid
Expertise	0.898	0.689	Valid
Attractiveness	0.876	0.639	Valid
Decision-Making	0.921	0.745	Valid

The Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency beyond Cronbach’s alpha (Hair et al., 2019). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are all above 0.50, confirming that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators, thereby establishing convergent validity at the construct level (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Among the constructs, decision-making shows the highest AVE (0.745), indicating strong explanatory power. These results validate that the measurement model is both reliable and internally consistent, supporting its suitability for further structural analysis.

**TABLE 5 Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

Construct	TW	EX	AT	DM
Trustworthiness	0.850			
Expertise	0.612	0.830		
Attractiveness	0.584	0.601	0.799	
Decision-Making	0.648	0.629	0.587	0.863

The Fornell-Larcker criterion confirms discriminant validity, as the square root of AVE for each construct (diagonal values) is greater than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This indicates that each construct is distinct and

captures a unique aspect of influencer credibility and decision-making behavior. The results demonstrate that trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, although related, are empirically distinguishable constructs. This strengthens the conceptual validity of the model and ensures that multicollinearity is not a concern. The findings are consistent with prior research validating multidimensional constructs in influencer marketing studies (Ki et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

**TABLE 6 Discriminant Validity – HTMT Ratio**

Construct Pair	HTMT Value	Result
Trustworthiness – Expertise	0.721	Valid
Trustworthiness – Attractiveness	0.698	Valid
Expertise – Attractiveness	0.734	Valid
Trustworthiness – Decision-Making	0.756	Valid
Expertise – Decision-Making	0.741	Valid
Attractiveness – Decision-Making	0.709	Valid

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios are all below the threshold of 0.85, confirming adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). This indicates that the constructs are not excessively correlated and maintain conceptual distinctiveness. HTMT is considered a more stringent criterion compared to Fornell-Larcker, and satisfying this condition further strengthens the robustness of the measurement model. These results confirm that the constructs used in the study are both statistically and theoretically sound, supporting their inclusion in the structural model for hypothesis testing.

**TABLE 7 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – Model Fit**

Fit Index	Value	Recommended	Result
CMIN/df	2.51	< 3.00	Good Fit
CFI	0.957	≥ 0.90	Excellent
TLI	0.946	≥ 0.90	Good Fit
GFI	0.918	≥ 0.90	Good Fit
RMSEA	0.062	≤ 0.08	Good Fit

The CFA results demonstrate that the measurement model exhibits a strong fit with the observed data. The CMIN/df value of 2.51 falls within acceptable limits, indicating a reasonable model fit. Incremental fit indices such as CFI (0.957) and TLI (0.946) exceed the recommended threshold of 0.90, confirming excellent model adequacy. Similarly, the RMSEA value of 0.062 indicates a good approximation of the population covariance matrix. These results validate the construct structure comprising trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and tourist decision-making. According to Hair et al. (2019), achieving these thresholds confirms both reliability and validity of the measurement model. The findings are also consistent with source credibility theory, which conceptualizes credibility as a multidimensional construct (Ohanian, 1990).

**TABLE 8 Second-Order Construct Loadings**

Path	Standardized Loading	Result
Trustworthiness → Credibility	0.842	Significant
Expertise → Credibility	0.814	Significant
Attractiveness → Credibility	0.786	Significant

The second-order CFA results confirm that all first-order constructs trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness load significantly onto the higher-order construct of influencer credibility. Trustworthiness exhibits the strongest loading (0.842), indicating that it is the most influential dimension contributing to overall credibility. Expertise and attractiveness also demonstrate substantial loadings, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of credibility. These findings validate the hierarchical structure of the construct and are consistent with source credibility theory (Ohanian, 1990; Hair et al., 2019).

Both first-order and second-order structural relationships were examined in this study to compare the individual effects of credibility dimensions (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) and the overall influence of the higher-order construct (influencer credibility) on tourist decision-making. This dual approach enhances the robustness of the analysis and provides deeper insights into the relative importance of each dimension.

**TABLE 9 Structural Model Fit (SEM)**

Fit Index	Value	Recommended	Result
CMIN/df	2.55	< 3.00	Good Fit
CFI	0.952	≥ 0.90	Excellent
RMSEA	0.064	≤ 0.08	Good Fit

The structural model also demonstrates a satisfactory fit, indicating that the hypothesized relationships among constructs are well supported by the data. The CFI value of 0.952 and RMSEA of 0.064 fall within acceptable limits, confirming that the

model has strong explanatory power. This suggests that influencer credibility and its dimensions effectively explain variations in tourist decision-making behavior. SEM is particularly suitable in this context, as it allows the simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships, thereby enhancing analytical robustness (Byrne, 2016). The results support the theoretical premise that credibility plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions in digital marketing contexts (Casaló et al., 2018). The structural model explains a substantial proportion of variance in the dependent variable. The R<sup>2</sup> value for tourist decision-making is 0.523, indicating that 52.3% of the variance is explained by influencer credibility and its dimensions. This suggests moderate to strong explanatory power, confirming the model’s effectiveness in predicting tourist behavior (Hair et al., 2019).

**TABLE 10 Structural Path Analysis**

Path	$\beta$ Value	p-value	Result
Trustworthiness → Decision-Making	0.398	0.000	Supported
Expertise → Decision-Making	0.331	0.000	Supported
Attractiveness → Decision-Making	0.276	0.000	Supported
Credibility → Decision-Making	0.621	0.000	Supported

The path analysis confirms that all three dimensions of influencer credibility significantly and positively influence tourist decision-making. Trustworthiness has the strongest impact ( $\beta = 0.398$ ), indicating that authenticity and honesty are critical determinants in shaping travel decisions. Expertise also plays a significant role, highlighting the importance of knowledge and informational value in influencer content. Attractiveness, while significant, has a comparatively weaker influence, suggesting that visual appeal alone is insufficient to drive decisions. The second-order construct of credibility exhibits the highest influence ( $\beta = 0.621$ ), reinforcing the idea that a combination of credibility dimensions provides a more comprehensive explanation of consumer behavior. These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of influencer credibility in shaping consumer trust and behavioral intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Casaló et al., 2018).

**TABLE 11 ANOVA with Group Means**

City	Mean Score
Delhi	3.48
Mumbai	3.71
Hyderabad	3.65
Bengaluru	3.82
Chennai	3.51

Source	F-value	p-value	Result
Between Groups	4.782	0.001	Significant

The ANOVA results indicate significant differences in tourist decision-making across metropolitan cities ( $F = 4.782, p < 0.01$ ). Among the cities, Bengaluru and Mumbai report higher mean scores, suggesting stronger reliance on influencer credibility, whereas Delhi and Chennai exhibit comparatively lower influence levels. Post-hoc analysis using Tukey’s HSD test confirms that these differences are statistically significant, particularly between Bengaluru and Chennai, and Mumbai and Delhi. These findings highlight the role of regional and cultural variations in shaping consumer responses to influencer marketing. Consistent with Hofstede’s (2011) cultural dimensions theory, such differences may be attributed to variations in digital engagement, lifestyle, and openness to social media influence.

**TABLE 12 Hypothesis Testing Results**

Hypothesis	Statistical Evidence	Test Used	Threshold	Result
H1	$\beta = 0.398, p = 0.000$	SEM	$p < 0.05$	Supported
H2	$\beta = 0.331, p = 0.000$	SEM	$p < 0.05$	Supported
H3	$\beta = 0.276, p = 0.000$	SEM	$p < 0.05$	Supported
H4	$\beta = 0.621, p = 0.000$	SEM	$p < 0.05$	Supported
H5	$F = 4.782, p = 0.001$	ANOVA	$p < 0.05$	Supported

The hypothesis testing results indicate that all proposed hypotheses are supported. Trustworthiness (H1), expertise (H2), and attractiveness (H3) have significant positive effects on tourist decision-making, confirming the importance of individual credibility dimensions. The second-order construct of influencer credibility (H4) demonstrates the strongest impact, highlighting the combined effect of these dimensions. Additionally, H5 is supported by ANOVA results, which indicate significant differences in the influence of credibility across metropolitan cities. These findings validate the conceptual model and reinforce the applicability of Source Credibility Theory in the context of influencer-driven tourism behavior.

## 8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this study contributes significantly to understanding influencer credibility, several avenues remain open for future exploration. First, the use of convenience sampling and cross-sectional data limits causal inference; future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine changes in consumer behavior over time. Expanding the sample to include rural or semi-urban populations could enhance generalizability and provide a more comprehensive view of digital influence across diverse demographics.

Second, future research can incorporate additional variables, such as perceived risk, brand image, emotional engagement, and trust-mediated effects, to develop more complex models. The integration of moderating variables such as age, income, and digital literacy may also reveal nuanced behavioral patterns. Third, comparative studies across countries or cultures could provide deeper insights into global influencer marketing dynamics. Advanced analytical techniques such as multi-group SEM or machine learning models can further enhance predictive accuracy.

Additionally, platform-specific comparisons (e.g., Instagram vs. YouTube vs. TikTok) could uncover differences in content effectiveness. Finally, qualitative approaches, such as interviews or sentiment analysis, may complement quantitative findings by capturing deeper psychological and emotional drivers. These directions will strengthen theoretical development and provide actionable insights for academia and industry alike.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence supporting the significant role of Instagram influencer credibility in shaping tourist destination decision-making. Among the individual dimensions, trustworthiness ( $\beta = 0.398$ ) emerged as the most influential factor, indicating that authenticity and perceived honesty are critical in influencing consumer behavior. Expertise ( $\beta = 0.331$ ) also demonstrated a substantial effect, reinforcing the importance of informational value and domain knowledge in travel-related content. While attractiveness ( $\beta = 0.276$ ) contributes positively, its comparatively lower impact suggests that visual appeal alone is insufficient to drive decisions without underlying credibility.

Notably, the second-order construct of influencer credibility exhibited the highest influence ( $\beta = 0.621$ ), confirming that a holistic combination of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness provides a stronger explanatory framework. The model's explanatory power ( $R^2 = 0.523$ ) indicates moderate-to-strong predictive capability. Furthermore, significant regional differences ( $F = 4.782$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) highlight the importance of contextual and cultural variations, with Bengaluru and Mumbai showing higher responsiveness. Overall, the study validates Source Credibility Theory in the context of digital tourism and underscores the strategic importance of credible influencers in marketing. These insights are particularly relevant for designing targeted, data-driven influencer campaigns in competitive tourism markets.

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