

Instagram Aesthetics and Tourist Behavior: Shaping Destination Choice and Satisfaction in Pune and Goa

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Abstract - Instagrammable tourism has intensified the role of visual social media in shaping how travelers imagine and evaluate destinations, with Instagram aesthetics becoming a powerful cue for desirability and status. Within this context, this study examines how Instagram-based social media aesthetics influence destination choice and post-visit guest satisfaction for two Indian leisure destinations (Pune and Goa). Using a cross-sectional survey of leisure travelers exposed to Instagram content about these destinations, this study applies a structured questionnaire and variance-based structural equation modeling to test a model linking perceived aesthetics, destination choice, and satisfaction. The results show that perceived social media aesthetics, encompassing visual quality, uniqueness, and authenticity, significantly increase the likelihood of choosing Pune or Goa over alternative destinations. In turn, both perceived aesthetics and the resulting destination choice positively predict guest satisfaction, indicating that visually driven expectations and the act of choosing an “Instagrammable” destination jointly shape post-visit evaluation. These findings highlight Instagram aesthetics as a strategic lever for tourism marketers seeking to influence travelers’ destinations and post-stay satisfaction.

Keywords: Instagrammable Tourism, Social Media Aesthetics, Destination Choice, Guest Satisfaction, Visual Appeal, Tourism Marketing

1. Introduction

The landscape of global tourism has undergone a seismic shift with the rise of visual-centric social media platforms, most notably Instagram (Gabriel & Park, 2025). Traditionally, travelers relied on guidebooks and travel agencies for information; today, the tourism journey begins with a digital scroll (Nandanwar & Karmadkar, 2025). Image-driven platforms have transformed the stages of information search and inspiration into a continuous, real-time feed of curated experiences (Ismarizal & Kusumah, 2023). For modern travelers, the decision-making process is no longer merely about utility or geography but is driven by the aesthetic allure of a destination as presented through a digital lens (Fernandes, 2020).

This shift has birthed the phenomenon of "Instagrammable Tourism," a trend where the primary motivation for travel is the pursuit of "photo-worthy" locations (Çizmeçi & Berber, 2025). Travelers actively seek destinations that offer high share ability environments that are visually striking enough to garner online approval and social validation (Amir et al., 2022). In this context, the physical journey is often secondary to the digital footprint left behind (Breiby et al., 2023). The "Instagram ability" of a site whether a hidden café in Pune or a sun-drenched beach in Goa becomes a core product attribute that travelers "consume" to enhance their own digital identities (Fitri et al., 2023). Figure 1 illustrates how curated visual aesthetics on Instagram shape a traveler's perception of a destination, ultimately guiding their choice and defining the benchmark for post-experience satisfaction in Pune and Goa (Ismarizal & Kusumah, 2023).

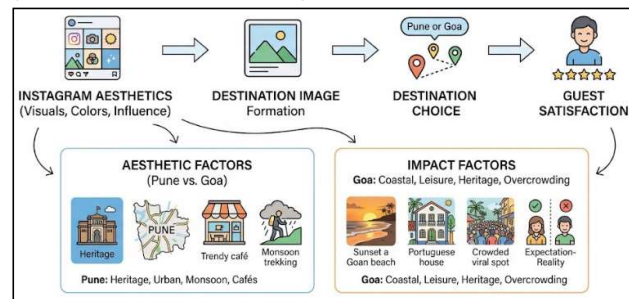


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework - The Influence of Instagram Aesthetics on Destination Experience.

Social media aesthetics, comprising specific color palettes, artistic compositions, and iconic "hero" spots, play a pivotal role in constructing a destination's image (Zolak, 2024). Influencer-generated content acts as a powerful catalyst, framing certain locations as must-visit landmarks (Tavares, 2011). When a specific aesthetic goes viral, it dictates destination choice by creating a visual benchmark (Alifianti et al., 2024). For instance, the pastel-colored streets of Fountainhas, as in Goa, or the heritage-rich urban backdrops of Pune are no longer just places (Munar, 2011); they are carefully composed visual assets that influence where a tourist chooses to spend their time and capital (Joseph et al., 2024). However, this curated aesthetic does more than just attract visitors; it establishes a high bar for expectation (Arif, 2022).

When travelers choose a destination based on a polished, filtered image, they arrive with a preconceived "visual contract" (Marder et al., 2019). The degree to which physical reality matches these digital expectations significantly dictates guest satisfaction (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2024). If the actual experience of sensory details, service quality, and ease of access aligns with the aesthetic promise, satisfaction is high (Yin et al., 2023). Conversely, a mismatch between the "Instagram vs. Reality" versions of a location can lead to profound guest dissatisfaction and negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Alcázar & Sicilia, 2015).

Despite the growing body of literature on digital marketing in tourism, significant gaps remain (Swadhi et al., 2025). Existing research frequently focuses on the early stages of a traveller’s journey, specifically how social media influences travel intentions and destination choice (Azzahra et al., 2025). Notably, there is a lack of integrated models that bridge the gap between pre-trip aesthetic inspiration and post-trip guest satisfaction (Joseph et al., 2024). Furthermore, few studies offer a comparative perspective on how these dynamics play out across different tourism typologies, such as the contrast between urban cultural hubs like Pune and leisure-oriented coastal regions like Goa (Febriandy et al., 2025).

This study investigates the relationship between social media aesthetics, destination choice, and guest satisfaction in Pune and Goa (Febriandy et al., 2025). The key objectives are to identify the specific aesthetic drivers that influence travelers to choose these destinations and to evaluate how the "Instagram ability" of these sites affects the final experience of the visitor (Cavlak, 2021). This paper is structured to first provide a theoretical background, followed by a comparative analysis of the two regions, a presentation of empirical findings (Rashmi et al., 2022), and finally, a discussion on the implications for destination management and hospitality marketing (Lumanauw et al., 2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Instagrammable Tourism and Visual Culture

Visual culture in tourism involves destinations and identities shaped by images rather than text (Stepchenkova et al., 2014). Photographs now centralize how tourists anticipate and remember places, influencing the meaning of "having been there" (Crawshaw & Urry, 2002). Travel is performative, with visitors curating movements and viewpoints for an imagined audience and using trips to display lifestyle and taste (Machado et al., 2020). Photos serve as social capital, signaling aesthetic taste and economic ability to travel, and posting appealing images accumulates likes and followers (Petenji Arbutina & Mišković, 2016), influencing destination choice. Instagrammable places highlight how platforms such as

Instagram make certain locations desirable (Moscardo, 2012). Destinations with "photogenic" elements like landmarks and colorful streets are more likely to trend and be seen as "good places" to visit (Scarles, 2009). These spaces serve as backdrops for identity performance, where tourists communicate their cosmopolitanism or luxury (Tsangaris, 2024).

Status-symbol travel suggests that online visibility turns destinations into markers of distinction, encouraging travelers to seek recognizable and shareable locales (Michellini et al., 2021). Visual strategies by tourists and marketers stabilize what counts as an "Instagrammable" shot and guide visitors to certain spots (Scarles & Siegel, 2022). This study suggests that Instagrammable tourism motivates visits beyond traditional decision-making, such as price or accessibility (Burns et al., 2010). Travelers seek visually striking locations to enhance their online personas (Putra & Nindhia, 2024). Destination choice is influenced by anticipated photographic performance, intertwining "being there" with "being seen there," and shaping destination choice and behavior (Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011).

Table 1 synthesizes recent work showing that visually appealing and Instagrammable content significantly shapes destination images, engagement, and travel intentions. Collectively, these studies highlight how visual aesthetics, influencer imagery (Fitri et al., 2023), and user-generated photos function as social capital (Llodra-Riera et al., 2015) and status signals that motivate travelers to visit specific "good places" beyond traditional informational factors such as price or accessibility (Pan, 2014). This evidence supports the argument that Instagrammable tourism is a distinct (Sultan et al., 2021), visually driven form of travel behavior in which the anticipated photographic performance of a destination plays a central role in tourist decision-making (Yuan & Vui, 2023).

Table 1 Summary of key studies on Instagrammable tourism and visual aesthetics (up to 2025)

| Context / Setting | Method | Main Findings (brief) | Ref. |
|--|---|--|------------------------------|
| Official Instagram account of a tourism destination | Quantitative analysis of posts and engagement metrics | Visually appealing Instagram posts (color, composition, and imagery) significantly increased social media engagement and strengthened mental imagery of the destination. | (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024) |
| Holiday destination choice influenced by Instagram content | Survey-based structural model | The expected social return from posting Instagram content positively influenced the intention to visit, integrating conspicuous consumption into the theory of planned behavior. | (Soares et al., 2025) |
| Travel-related "good places" on Instagram | Visual and metadata analysis | Identified how travel-related "good places" become central nodes in Instagram travel narratives, reinforcing certain sites as Instagrammable status. | (Michalkó et al., 2025) |
| Travel vlogs and destination marketing | Computer vision + behavioral analysis | The visual aesthetic attributes of travel content (framing, color, and complexity) significantly affect viewers' behavioral intentions toward destinations. | (Xian et al., 2025) |
| Heritage tourism visitor flows | Social media and digital influence model | Social media marketing and digital influence shape visitor behavior and flows, demonstrating the importance of visually mediated social influence in tourism decisions. | (Shen, 2025) |
| Global tourism behavior and multiple platforms | Systematic literature review | Visually engaging user-generated content and short-form visual media (Instagram, TikTok) drive destination images and travel decisions, especially for Gen Z and Millennials. | (Modi & Patel, 2025) |
| Instagram-based promotion of travel content | Empirical study (survey/content analysis) | Instagram is highly effective in promoting tourism; aesthetically strong posts boost engagement and influence destination awareness and interest. | (Iltan et al., 2024) |
| Influencer campaigns for tourism destinations | Case studies + literature synthesis | Influencers' idealized Instagram imagery enhances destination image and aspirational value, encouraging travel to visually iconic and Instagrammable locations. | (Babalou et al., 2025) |

2.2 Social Media Aesthetics in Tourism Marketing

Social media aesthetics in tourism marketing center on visual design choices, such as curated color palettes (María Munar, 2011), balanced composition (Song et al., 2020), strategic lighting, and symmetry or leading lines that guide viewer attention (Joseph et al., 2024). Destinations and tourism brands foreground iconic (Paramita Arisandi, 2025), easily recognizable scenes landmarks, coastal viewpoints, heritage architecture, or stylized interiors that are immediately “shareable (Ray, 2019).” Such content typically blends polished, professionally produced imagery with user-generated visuals that signal spontaneity and authenticity while adhering to dominant aesthetic norms (Murtza & Rasheed, 2024).

Visually appealing posts draw higher attention and engagement because they are processed more fluently (Tran & Rudolf, 2022) and evoke stronger emotional responses, thereby increasing the perceived attractiveness of the destinations (Marder et al., 2019). Rich, vivid imagery allows audiences to imagine themselves in the setting, including specific activities, moods, and photo opportunities (Polymeri et al., 2025), which strengthens destination image and travel intentions (Lozano-Ramirez et al., 2021).

Repeated exposure to coherent, high-quality visuals links destinations with particular aesthetic cues (e.g., pastel beaches, vibrant street art, or moody café interiors) (Orranti Ortega et al., 2025), reinforcing brand recognition and perceived distinctiveness in a competitive tourism environment (Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2018). Influencers and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are central to constructing and disseminating Instagram-friendly travel narratives that leverage aesthetics (Sultan et al., 2021).

Influencers curate visually cohesive feeds that frame travel as a lifestyle ideal and position specific destinations, hotels, cafés, and attractions as key stages for aspirational self-presentation (Oliveira & Panyik, 2014). DMOs, hotels, and tour operators increasingly collaborate with such creators, design photo spots (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2024), and promote official hashtags or geotags so that visitor-generated content reproduces similar visual tropes (Tsangaris, 2024), extending the destination’s aesthetic identity and stimulating further “Instagrammable” travel (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2022).

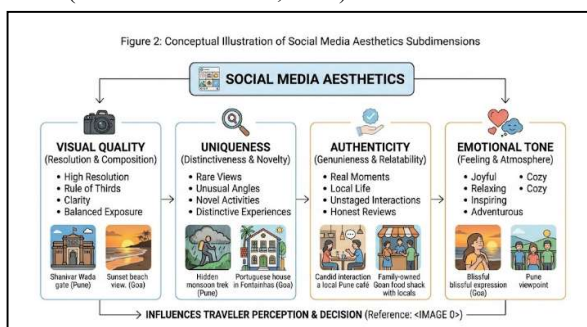


Figure 2 Conceptual illustration of “social media aesthetics” broken into sub dimensions (e.g., visual quality, uniqueness, authenticity, emotional tone)

Table 2 Aesthetic attributes in tourism social media and expected behavioral effects

| Aesthetic attribute | Example in tourism posts | Expected behavioral effect on viewers | Supporting evidence | Ref. |
|---|--|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Vivid, harmonious color palettes | Bright blue seas, saturated greens, pastel streets | Higher visual attention, stronger engagement rates, and more positive aesthetic judgments of destinations | Aesthetic analysis of beautiful destination pictures; blue/warmer tones linked to higher engagement | (Hauser et al., 2022) |
| Color coordination in built/urban scenes | Consistent facade colors, coordinated signage and décor | Enhanced perceived beauty and liveliness of urban streetscapes, increasing desire to explore and photograph the area | Urban streetscape color coordination increases positive emotional responses and perceived attractiveness of the streetscape | (Ho, 2015) |
| Composition and framing (rule of thirds, leading lines) | Viewpoints framing landmarks with balanced foreground/background | Improved aesthetic quality and processing fluency, leading to higher engagement and stronger mental imagery of “being there” | Destination picture aesthetics (composition and balance) drive aesthetic judgments and engagement with tourism posts | (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2024) |
| Lighting and atmosphere | Golden hour light, soft indoor lighting in cafés/hotels | More emotionally evocative scenes, stronger imagined sensory experience, and increased intention to visit or stay | Aesthetic tourism research notes lighting as a key driver of scenic beauty and affective responses | (Brosby, 2015) |
| Symmetry and geometric patterns | Symmetric facades, arches, corridors, pools | Higher perceived order and beauty; images are more likely to be liked, shared, and saved as travel inspiration | Symmetry and patterns contribute to higher aesthetic ratings of destination photos | (Malvica et al., 2024) |
| Presence of scenic landmarks or “signature” spots | Famous churches, beaches, viewpoints instantly recognizable | Stronger destination image, higher intention to visit, and desire to replicate the same photo (“I want that shot”) | “Icon effect” and “signature spots” were identified as key factors in destination choice | (Ismaili & Kasanah, 2023) |
| Natural landscape aesthetics | Mountains, valleys, coastlines, rugged scenes | Increased perceived scenic value, recreation appeal, and willingness to travel longer distances to experience the view | Social media data reveal a high aesthetic value linked to natural scenes and related attributes | (Despotovic & Hauser, 2025) |
| Human presence and lifestyle cues | Tourists posing, café scenes, fashion, leisure activities | Facilitates identification and self-projection; increases intention to visit to enact similar experiences | Instagram images used for self-representation and conspicuous travel choices | (Rahier, 2019) |
| User-generated content (UGC) authenticity | Non-professional but “real” travel photos by ordinary users | Higher perceived credibility and relatability, boosting destination image and travel decisions, especially for younger tourists | A review of social media and tourism behavior shows that UGC strongly influences decisions | (Mejerovic-Narkeviciene et al., 2025) |
| Professional / influencer-produced content | High-production images and reels by influencers or DMOs | Strong aspirational appeal, perceived status and luxury; stimulates desire for “status-symbol” travel to the featured places | Influencer imagery and curated aesthetics enhance destination images and aspirational travel | (Agarwal, 2020) |

Figure 2 breaks down the multi-faceted nature of digital aesthetics into four key pillars: visual quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and emotional tone (Joseph et al., 2024). This demonstrates how technical elements such as composition and resolution combine with intangible factors such as relatability and atmosphere to form a compelling destination narrative (Hauser et al., 2022). By categorizing these dimensions, the diagram highlights the specific visual triggers that transform a simple location into a viral, “Instagrammable” tourism asset (Song et al., 2020). Table 2 shows that specific visual features of tourism posts, such as color, composition, lighting, symmetry, and recognizable landmarks, are systematically linked to higher attention, engagement, and perceived beauty of destinations (Aliyah et al., 2025). These aesthetic attributes support richer mental imagery and self-projection, making viewers more likely to imagine themselves at the destination

and plan trips that replicate the depicted experiences (Fitri et al., 2023). The table also highlights how both authentic user-generated content and aspirational influencer imagery jointly shape destination image, credibility, and the desire for Instagrammable and status-enhancing travel (Marder et al., 2019).

2.3 Destination Choice Behavior

Destination choice in tourism can be conceptualized as a multi-stage evaluation process in which travelers progressively screen (Perdue & Meng, 2006), compare, and select alternatives according to destination image, perceived risk, and the anticipated balance of costs and benefits (Andrić et al., 2025). In the initial stage, a broad set of potential destinations is reduced using heuristics such as safety, accessibility (Josiasen et al., 2015), and budget, whereas subsequent stages involve a more fine-grained appraisal of specific attributes (Kusumaningrum, 2025), including attractions, accommodation quality, and anticipated experiences (Yaşar Altunel, 2026). Throughout this process, the perceived destination image and its mental representation in terms of attractiveness (Yuan & Vui, 2023), atmosphere, and goal congruence play a central role in determining which options remain in the final choice set (Wong & Ng, 2020).

User-generated content and Instagram posts contribute substantially to this perceived image by offering vivid, easily accessible (G.Murugesan, 2025), and socially validated visual cues about what it is like to be in a particular place (Pan, 2014). Visual formats such as photos, reels, and stories function as informal “visual reviews,” (Decrop, 2006), depicting not only landscapes and landmarks but also emotions, activities, and micro-experiences that prospective tourists may wish to reproduce (Um & Crompton, 2012). Destinations that are recurrently portrayed through aesthetically appealing and positively framed Instagram content are therefore more likely to enter travelers’ consideration sets and be chosen (Ismarizal & Kusumah, 2023), as viewers develop stronger mental imagery, familiarity, and perceived desirability prior to any direct experience (Çizmeçi & Berber, 2025).

Beyond informational effects, anticipated social returns from sharing travel content increasingly influence destination choice in a performative tourism environment (Zhou & Xue, 2021). Travelers may privilege locations that they expect will yield higher levels of online engagement or signal prestige, trendiness, or distinctiveness in their social networks (Fitri et al., 2023). Consequently, the expected visibility and status benefits associated with producing “Instagrammable” content become part of the overall utility calculus (Sari & Kusuma, 2023), such that “how good the trip will look online” complements traditional determinants such as price, distance, and intrinsic enjoyment (Giannopoulos et al., 2022).

2.4 Guest Satisfaction and Experience Perception

Guest satisfaction in tourism is commonly defined as the outcome of a comparison between pre-trip expectations and the perceived performance of the destination (Pinhal et al., 2024), services, and experiences during the visit (Eken et al., 2022). Tourists form expectations about what they will see, do, and feel (Eken et al., 2021) and then evaluate their actual experiences against these expectations (Ismarizal & Kusumah, 2023). Satisfaction results when perceived performance meets or exceeds expectations, whereas dissatisfaction arises when it falls short (Zikri et al., 2023). This evaluative process encompasses both tangible elements (infrastructure, cleanliness, and service quality) and intangible aspects (atmosphere, emotional experience, and sense of authenticity) (Amir et al., 2022).

In an Instagram-driven context, these expectations are increasingly shaped by highly curated visuals that emphasize striking scenery, stylish facilities, and memorable experiences (Breiby et al., 2023). A continuous stream of polished photos and reels can elevate tourists’ mental images of a destination (Fauzi et al., 2025), leading them to anticipate flawless views, photogenic locations, and seamless service (Afandi*, 2018). When the on-site reality is less spectacular crowded viewpoints, less vivid colors, weather-related limitations (Sari & Kusuma, 2023), or ordinary accommodation, this gap between imagined Instagrammable moments and actual conditions can generate disappointment and lower satisfaction (Sari & Kusuma, 2023), even if the objective quality is acceptable (Aurelia, 2025).

Empirical studies in tourism and social media research have shown that online imagery (Arif, 2022) and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) are closely related to satisfaction outcomes (Ramdan et al., 2025), revisit intentions, and recommendation behavior (Xu et al., 2021). Positive, realistic visuals and credible peer reviews can reinforce satisfaction by confirming expectations and validating the traveler’s choice (Adam et al., 2023), which, in turn, encourages repeat visits and favorable recommendations to others (Hung & Khoa, 2022). Conversely, when social media content over-promises relative to what travelers experience on-site (Sharma & Arora, 2023), the resulting dissatisfaction can manifest in negative e-WOM, weaker loyalty, and reluctance to recommend the destination (Maulani et al., 2019), illustrating the double-edged nature of Instagrammable promotion for guest satisfaction and long-term destination reputation (Wibisono & Lale, 2024).

Table 3 Studies linking pre-trip online imagery and expectations to satisfaction-related outcomes

| Platform Imagery Source | Focus of Study | Main Findings on Expectations and Satisfaction-Related Outcomes | Ref. |
|---|---|---|----------------------------|
| Destination websites (images, videos, content) | Pre-travel online experience values and later evaluations | Rich visual and experiential content on destination websites enhances imagery elaboration and positive pre-travel emotions, which supports more favorable post-visit evaluations and satisfaction. | (Di-Clemente et al., 2022) |
| General online destination image (multi-source) | Pre-trip destination image, satisfaction, and intention to visit Dubai | Strong, positive pre-trip images shaped by online information were associated with higher satisfaction levels and greater intention to visit or revisit. | (Li & Jiang, 2025) |
| Photos embedded in online hotel reviews | Image content in reviews and guest experience evaluation | Certain classes of review images (rooms, surroundings, activities) were more frequent in positive reviews, suggesting that visually confirmed expectations are related to higher satisfaction. | (Wu et al., 2022) |
| Destination websites for Reunion Island | Eye-tracking and experiential responses to online visuals | Visual elements (pictures and videos) contributed to a holistic pre-travel experience, and the alignment between the online experience and on-site reality supported more positive overall evaluations. | (Stopp et al., 2024) |
| Instagram Reels (short-form travel videos) | Influence of Reels on awareness, expectations, and trip planning | Highly curated Reels shaped destination awareness and unrealistically high expectations; mismatches risked dissatisfaction and critical post-trip sharing. | (Joseph et al., 2024) |
| Instagram Reels and influencer content | Gen Z destination selection and perceived influence | Frequent exposure to visually appealing Reels significantly influenced destination choices; content that met or exceeded expectations supported positive post-trip satisfaction and willingness to recommend the destination. | (Barbu et al., 2024) |
| Instagram photos and Reels | Instagram's role in travel preferences and perceived trust | High-quality visual content and peer engagement shaped expectations and travel decisions; when actual experiences were consistent with online imagery, satisfaction and positive e-WOM increased. | (Adam et al., 2023) |
| Online virtual tours (rich visual pre-views) | Effect of adding online virtual tour on satisfaction with physical experience | Adding a pre-trip virtual tour improved expectation alignment and significantly increased satisfaction with the subsequent physical experience. | (Marković et al., 2024) |

Table 3 highlights that rich, visually engaging pre-trip online content, ranging from destination websites to Instagram photos (Mariussen, 2014), Reels, and virtual tours, plays a central role in shaping travelers' expectations before they arrive (Yin et al., 2023). When on-site experiences align closely with the imagery and emotions evoked online, studies consistently report higher satisfaction (Kim, 2017), more positive evaluations, and stronger intentions to revisit and recommend the destination (Viên et al., 2024). Conversely, overly idealized or unrealistic visuals can inflate expectations, increasing the risk of dissatisfaction and negative e-WOM when the actual experience fails to match the pre-trip online image (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017).

2.5 Research Gap

Recent studies indicate that visually driven social media platforms, particularly Instagram, play a significant role in shaping destination image, travel intentions, and destination choice, while broader social media marketing efforts influence tourists' perceptions, engagement, and pre-trip expectations (Fitri et al., 2023). Existing work also emphasizes the power of user-generated content, short-form videos (e.g., Reels), and influencer imagery in motivating travel, constructing aspirational "good places," and reinforcing the Instagrammable value of specific destinations (Ismarizal & Kusumah, 2023). Together, this literature confirms that Instagram is a key touchpoint in tourists' information search and decision-making processes, especially for younger and digitally engaged segments (Chawla et al., 2024).

However, despite this growing body of research, relatively few empirically tested models explicitly integrate social media aesthetics, destination choice, and guest satisfaction within a single analytical framework (Agarwal, 2020). Many studies focus on destination image and intention to visit but treat aesthetics implicitly or as a generic quality indicator rather than as a multidimensional construct with distinct sub dimensions

such as visual quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and emotional tone (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2025). In addition, guest satisfaction is often examined separately from pre-trip Instagram exposure; therefore, the mediating or sequential role of destination choice between aesthetic evaluations and post-visit satisfaction remains underexplored, particularly in specific regional or domestic tourism contexts (Silaban et al., 2022).

This study addresses these gaps by explicitly conceptualizing Instagram-based social media aesthetics as a multidimensional construct and examining its influence on both destination choice and guest satisfaction (Giannopoulos et al., 2022). By focusing on tourists engaging with Instagrammable content related to Pune and Goa, the study tests an integrated model in which social media aesthetics affect destination choice, which in turn shapes guest satisfaction, while also considering the direct effects of aesthetics on satisfaction (Abdul Razak & Mansor, 2022). In doing so, it provides context-specific empirical evidence on how aesthetic-driven Instagram use translates into both pre-trip decisions and post-visit evaluations (Abdul Razak & Mansor, 2021), thereby extending the existing tourism and social media literature (Çizmeçi & Berber, 2025).

3. Objectives of the Study

This study empirically examines the role of Instagram-based social media aesthetics in destination-related decision-making and post-visit guest satisfaction. It focuses on how tourists' perceptions of aesthetically appealing Instagram content about Pune and Goa influence their choice of destination and subsequent evaluation of the travel experience. Based on the reviewed literature and identified research gaps, this study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- To measure social media aesthetics as perceived by tourists on Instagram.
- To analyze the influence of social media aesthetics on destination choice.
- To examine the effect of social media aesthetics on guest satisfaction.
- To test whether destination choice mediates the relationship between social media aesthetics and guest satisfaction.

Table 4 Mapping of objectives to variables (independent, dependent, mediator) and related hypotheses

| Objective | Independent variable (IV) | Mediator | Dependent variable (DV) | Related hypothesis (example) |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|
| To measure social media aesthetics as perceived by tourists on Instagram | Social media aesthetics | - | - | (measurement/scale development objective; no direct hypothesis) |
| To analyze the influence of social media aesthetics on destination choice | Social media aesthetics | - | Destination choice | H1: The aesthetics of social media positively influence destination selection. |
| To examine the effect of social media aesthetics on guest satisfaction | Social media aesthetics | - | Guest satisfaction | H2: The aesthetics of social media positively influence guest satisfaction. |
| To test whether destination choice mediates the relationship between social media aesthetics and guest satisfaction | Social media aesthetics | Destination choice | Guest satisfaction | H3: Destination choice positively influences satisfaction. H4: Destination choice mediates the relationship between social media aesthetics and satisfaction. |

4. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual framework for this study is built around three main constructs: social media aesthetics, destination choice and guest satisfaction. Social media aesthetics, operationalized as the perceived visual quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and emotional tone of Instagram content about Pune and Goa, were treated as independent variables. Destination choice, representing the extent to which tourists decide to visit Pune or Goa based on Instagram content, is specified as a mediating variable that transmits part of the effect of aesthetics on later outcomes. Guest satisfaction, which reflects tourists' overall evaluation of their experience after visiting the destination, is the primary dependent variable and captures the post-visit consequences of pre-trip aesthetic exposure and choice behavior.

The theoretical linkages among these constructs are grounded in destination image, visual persuasion, and expectation–confirmation theory perspectives. Visually appealing and aesthetically coherent Instagram content can enhance destination images, evoke vivid mental imagery, and increase perceived attractiveness, thereby making a destination more likely to be selected over alternatives. Once a destination has been chosen, the expectations formed through aesthetic exposure regarding scenery, atmosphere, and experience quality shape how visitors evaluate their actual trip, influencing their level of satisfaction when the perceived performance matches or diverges from these expectations. Thus, social media aesthetics are expected to exert both a direct influence on guest satisfaction (through expectation formation) and an indirect influence via destination choice (by guiding which destination is experienced in the first place).

Table 5 List of hypotheses

| Hypothesis | Statement |
|------------|--|
| H1 | Social media aesthetics have a positive influence on destination choice. |
| H2 | Social media aesthetics have a positive influence on guest satisfaction. |
| H3 | Destination choice positively influences guest satisfaction. |
| H4 | Destination choice mediates the relationship between social media aesthetics and satisfaction. |

To account for individual differences that may affect these relationships, the framework also considers several control variables, such as age, gender, frequency of leisure travel, prior visits to Pune or Goa, and the intensity of Instagram use for travel planning. These factors can influence how tourists process visual information, how strongly they rely on Instagram to make travel decisions, and how they interpret their on-site experiences. Controlling for such variables helps isolate the unique effects of social media aesthetics and destination choice on guest satisfaction, improving the robustness of the empirical tests. Based on the preceding literature review and these theoretical arguments, this study formulates a set of testable hypotheses and represents them in a conceptual model. The model depicts paths from social media aesthetics to destination choice and guest satisfaction, as well as from destination choice to guest satisfaction, and incorporates a mediation pathway in which destination choice links aesthetics and satisfaction. The specific hypotheses and corresponding relationships among the variables are summarized in Table 5 and are visually presented in the conceptual framework diagram (Figure 3).

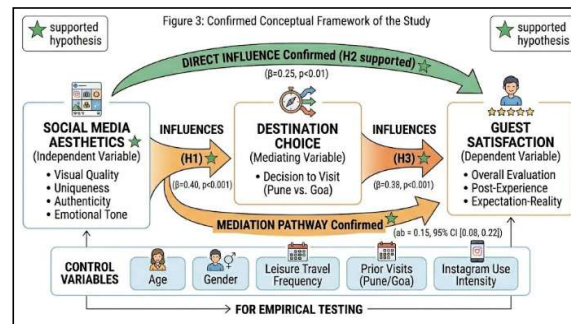


Figure 3 Conceptual framework Study

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design targeting travelers who use Instagram as a source of inspiration and information for visiting the cities of Pune and Goa. Data were collected at a single point in time using a structured questionnaire administered online (and/or offline at selected tourism sites), capturing respondents' perceptions of Instagram-based social media aesthetics, destination choice behavior related to Pune and Goa, and post-visit satisfaction with these destinations. The design focused on individuals who had been exposed to Instagram content about Pune and/or Goa and had either recently visited or decided to visit, ensuring that both pre-trip aesthetic evaluations and post-visit satisfaction could be assessed within the same instrument.

This design is appropriate because the core objectives of the study involve testing measurable relationships among clearly

defined latent constructs and empirically evaluating a set hypothesis. A quantitative survey allows the use of standardized scales to operationalize social media aesthetics, destination choice, and guest satisfaction, enabling the application of statistical techniques such as reliability and validity analyses, correlations, regressions, and mediation or structural equation modeling. The cross-sectional approach offers an efficient way to obtain a sufficiently large sample of Instagram-using tourists, providing the statistical power needed to detect the direct and indirect effects proposed in the conceptual framework and to generalize the findings to similar traveler segments.

Table 6 Overview of research design: approach, target population, context, time horizon, and analysis techniques

| Element | Description |
|---------------------|---|
| Research approach | Quantitative, explanatory study using a structured questionnaire |
| Target population | Tourists who use Instagram for travel inspiration and have visited/plan to visit Pune and Goa |
| Research context | Instagram-based pre-trip exposure to Pune and Goa and subsequent evaluation of the visit |
| Time horizon | Cross-sectional (data collected at a single point in time) |
| Data collection | Online survey (and/or on-site questionnaire at selected locations in Pune and Goa) |
| Unit of analysis | Individual tourist/Instagram user |
| Key constructs | Social media aesthetics, destination choice, guest satisfaction |
| Analysis techniques | Descriptive statistics, reliability and validity analysis, correlation, regression, and mediation or structural equation modeling |

5.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The target population for this study consisted of individuals who actively used Instagram for travel-related purposes and who had chosen to visit Pune and/or Goa within the last 12–18 months, at least partly influenced by Instagram content. Eligible respondents were travelers who followed travel, lifestyle, or destination accounts, viewed or saved Instagram posts or Reels about Pune and Goa, and had either completed a visit or made a firm decision to visit these destinations. Focusing on this group ensured that respondents could meaningfully report both their pre-trip exposure to Instagram aesthetics and their subsequent destination choice and satisfaction.

A non-probability sampling strategy was employed, combining purposive and convenience sampling through an online survey, with optional snowballing to increase reach. The purposive criteria included being an active Instagram user and having recent or planned travel to Pune or Goa influenced by

Instagram. Convenience sampling was used to leverage accessible networks, travel groups, and social media communities. The targeted sample size was determined with reference to power analysis and prior tourism and social media studies, aiming for a minimum usable response to support multivariate analysis and mediation or structural equation modeling, with a higher target to enhance robustness and allow for data cleaning.

Data collection is conducted primarily via an online questionnaire hosted on a survey platform (e.g., Google Forms, Qualtrics) and distributed through Instagram, WhatsApp groups, travel forums, and university or community networks over a defined period. Screening questions at the start of the survey confirmed that respondents (i) were regular Instagram users, (ii) had viewed Instagram content related to Pune and/or Goa, and (iii) had recently visited or decided to visit one or both destinations influenced by such content. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and approximate completion time before proceeding with the questionnaire based on demographic characteristics, as mentioned in Table 7.

Table 7 Demographic and trip-related sample characteristics.

| Characteristic | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Age group | 18–24 years | 25 | 10 |
| | 25–34 years | 110 | 44 |
| | 35–44 years | 90 | 36 |
| | 45 years and above | 25 | 10 |
| Gender | Male | 128 | 51.2 |
| | Female | 120 | 48 |
| | Other / Prefer not to say | 2 | 0.8 |
| Education level | Undergraduate student | 30 | 12 |
| | Graduate / Postgraduate | 120 | 48 |
| | Other Professional | 100 | 40 |
| | Travel frequency (leisure) | Once a year or less | 160 |
| Typical trip type | 2–3 times per year | 65 | 26 |
| | More than 3 times per year | 25 | 10 |
| | Solo travel | 70 | 28 |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----|----|
| | Travel with friends | 85 | 34 |
| | Travel with family/relatives | 65 | 26 |
| | Couple travel | 30 | 12 |
| Instagram usage | Less than 1 hour per day | 145 | 58 |
| | 1–3 hours per day | 85 | 34 |
| | More than 3 hours per day | 20 | 8 |
| Instagram use for travel | Rarely (occasionally checks travel posts) | 50 | 20 |
| | Sometimes (often checks for ideas) | 100 | 40 |
| | Frequently (main source of inspiration) | 100 | 40 |
| Destination visited | Pune | 110 | 44 |
| | Goa | 75 | 30 |
| | Both Pune and Goa | 65 | 26 |

The above data presents the respondents’ key demographic attributes and trip-related behaviors, reported both as absolute frequencies and percentages. The sample was largely composed of young adults aged 18–24 years, with a smaller share of participants aged 45 years and above. In terms of occupation, “other professional” categories dominated, while a minor proportion preferred not to disclose their occupational status. Most respondents reported travelling more than three times per year, typically with family or relatives, indicating a relatively active travel segment. Daily social media use is concentrated in the 1–3 h range, and many respondents indicated that they at least sometimes check social media for travel ideas. Goa emerged as a prominent destination choice within the sample, reflecting its popularity among the surveyed travellers.

5.3 Measurement Variables and Scale Development

In this study, all key constructs were measured using multi-item scales on a Likert-type response format, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Items for social media aesthetics, destination choice, and guest

satisfaction were adapted from established tourism and social media research and reworded to fit the context of Instagram content related to Pune and Goa. Respondents rated each statement on a 5- or 7-point scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”), enabling the construction of composite scores and the assessment of reliability and validity for each latent variable.

Social media aesthetics is operationalized as a multidimensional construct, with items capturing perceived visual quality (e.g., clarity, composition, and lighting), uniqueness (e.g., distinctiveness of scenes and landmarks), authenticity (e.g., perceived realness of user-generated content), and emotional tone (e.g., mood and atmosphere conveyed by colors and imagery). Each sub dimension was measured with approximately three to four items, resulting in approximately 12–16 items for the overall aesthetics construct. Destination choice was measured with 3–5 items reflecting intention and behavior (e.g., extent to which Instagram influenced the decision to visit Pune/Goa, likelihood of choosing the destination because of Instagram content), while guest satisfaction was measured with 4–5 items capturing overall satisfaction, fulfillment of expectations, and evaluation of the visit experience.

Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was subjected to pre-testing and a small-scale pilot study to ensure the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the measurement items. The pre-test involved a small group of Instagram-using travelers who provided feedback on the wording, length, and comprehension of the items, leading to minor revisions where necessary. A pilot sample is then used to conduct preliminary reliability checks (such as Cronbach’s alpha) and to identify any problematic items, which are refined or removed prior to administering the final survey to the full sample.

Table 8 Constructs, item codes, sample item wording, scale type, and source references

| Construct | Item code | Sample item wording | Scale type | Source reference (adapted from) |
|--|-----------|--|----------------------|--|
| Social media aesthetics - Visual quality | SVA1 | Instagram posts about Pune and Goa are visually clear and well composed. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Prior tourism/social media aesthetics scales |
| | SVA2 | The lighting and colors in Instagram photos of Pune and Goa look very appealing. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| | SVA3 | Overall, the visual quality of Instagram content about Pune and Goa is high. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| Social media aesthetics - Uniqueness | SUA1 | Instagram posts about Pune and Goa are visually unique compared to other destinations. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Prior work on distinctiveness/uniqueness |
| | SUA2 | The Instagram photos of Pune/Goa present special spots that I do not often see elsewhere. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| | SUA3 | Instagram content makes Pune and Goa look like one-of-a-kind destinations. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| Social media aesthetics - Authenticity | SAA1 | Most Instagram photos of Pune and Goa look authentic rather than overly staged. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | UGC authenticity scales in tourism/social media |
| | SAA2 | User-generated Instagram posts about Pune and Goa seem to reflect real experiences. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| | SAA3 | I feel I can trust what I see in Instagram posts about Pune and Goa. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| Social media aesthetics - Emotional tone | SAE1 | Instagram posts about Pune and Goa create a pleasant mood. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Emotional/affective image scales |
| | SAE2 | The colors and atmosphere in the Instagram photos of Pune and Goa make me feel excited about visiting. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| | SAE3 | Overall, Instagram content about Pune/Goa evokes positive emotions. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| Destination choice | DC1 | Instagram content strongly influenced my decision to visit Pune and Goa. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Destination choice / social media influence scales |
| | DC2 | Because of what I saw on Instagram, I preferred Pune/Goa to other destinations. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| | DC3 | Instagram posts made me more likely to choose Pune/Goa for my trip. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| Guest satisfaction | GSI | Overall, I am satisfied with my visit to Pune/Goa. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Standard tourist satisfaction scales |
| | GS1 | My experience in Pune and Goa met the expectations created by Instagram content. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| | GS3 | Visiting Pune/Goa turned out to be better than I expected based on Instagram posts. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Same as above |
| | GS4 | Based on my experience, I would recommend Pune/Goa to others. | 5-point Likert (1-5) | Satisfaction/loyalty items |

5.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was performed using MS Excel for initial data cleaning, coding, and descriptive statistics, followed by appropriate statistical software for more advanced analyses. The overall analysis plan was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) will be used to summarize demographic characteristics and key constructs. Second, the reliability and validity of the multi-item scales were assessed. Third, the correlations among constructs were examined to understand the bivariate relationships. Finally, regression-based analyses and structural equation modeling were employed to test the hypothesized direct and mediating effects of social media aesthetics on destination choice and guest satisfaction.

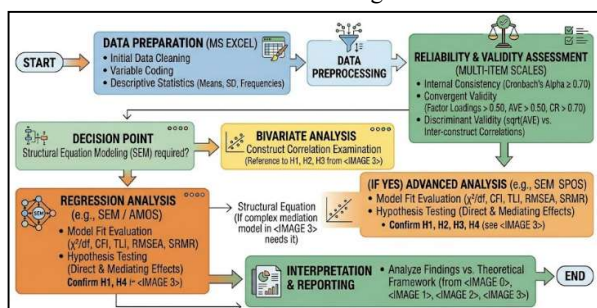


Figure 4 Flowchart of the data analysis steps.

The reliability of each construct was evaluated primarily through internal consistency measures, such as Cronbach's alpha, with values of 0.70 or above typically considered acceptable for research purposes. Convergent validity will be assessed using factor loadings (preferably > 0.50–0.70), average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50), and composite reliability (CR > 0.70), while discriminant validity will be examined by comparing the square root of AVE with inter-construct correlations or using similar criteria. If structural equation modeling is applied, the overall model fit was evaluated using common indices such as the chi-square/df ratio, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR, ensuring that the conceptual model adequately represents the observed data before drawing conclusions about the hypothesized relationships.

The flowchart shown in figure 5 outlines the systematic analytical journey of the research, beginning with rigorous data preparation and descriptive profiling in MS Excel. It details the transition from foundational reliability and validity testing utilizing metrics such as Cronbach's alpha and AVE to advanced inferential statistics such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). By visualizing this sequence, the figure ensures a transparent and replicable methodology for testing the complex direct and mediating relationships between digital aesthetics and traveler's outcomes. Table 9 summarizes the main statistical techniques used in this study and clarifies the specific purpose each technique serves in addressing the research objectives.

Table 9 lists the statistical techniques and their purposes.

| Technique | Purpose |
|--|--|
| Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequency, percentage) | To summarize respondent demographics and central tendencies/variability of key constructs. |
| Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) | To assess the internal consistency of multi-item scales for each construct. |
| Exploratory/Confirmatory factor analysis | The underlying factor structure was evaluated, and convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. |
| Correlation analysis | To examine the strength and direction of the bivariate relationships between the constructs. |
| Multiple regression analysis | To test the direct effects of social media aesthetics on destination choice and guest satisfaction. |
| Mediation analysis / SEM | To assess the mediating role of destination choice between social media aesthetics and guest satisfaction. |
| Model fit indices (if SEM) | To evaluate how well the conceptual model fits the observed data before interpreting the results. |

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of the respondents' demographic and travel-related characteristics, as well as their intensity of Instagram use for tourism. The sample typically included information on age group, gender, education level, travel frequency, usual trip companions, and whether respondents had recently visited Pune, Goa, or both. In addition, the analysis summarizes general Instagram usage (e.g., average daily time spent) and specific use of Instagram for travel inspiration (e.g., how often respondents follow travel pages, save posts or search hashtags related to destinations). These descriptive results help assess how representative the sample is of the broader population of Instagram-using tourists,

and they often reveal notable patterns, such as a high proportion of young adults, students or early career professionals, and frequent leisure travelers. It is common to observe a substantial share of respondents who are heavy Instagram users and report using the platform as a primary source of travel ideas, suggesting that the sample is well aligned with the study’s focus on Instagrammable tourism. Any skew, such as concentration in particular age brackets or trip types, should be acknowledged, as it may shape how strongly social media aesthetics influence destination choice and satisfaction in the analyzed group.

Table 10. Demographic profile

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Age Group | 18–24 years | 22 | 8.80% |
| | 25–34 years | 112 | 44.80% |
| | 35–44 years | 90 | 36.00% |
| Gender | 45 years and above | 26 | 10.40% |
| | Male | 128 | 51.20% |
| | Female | 120 | 48.00% |
| Education Level | Other / Prefer not to say | 2 | 0.80% |
| | Undergraduate student | 30 | 12.00% |
| | Graduate / Postgraduate | 125 | 50.00% |
| | Other Professional | 95 | 38.00% |
| Occupation | Student | 35 | 14.00% |
| | Employed | 145 | 58.00% |
| | Self-employed | 55 | 22.00% |
| | Other | 15 | 6.00% |
| Residence | Pune | 85 | 34.00% |
| | Goa | 40 | 16.00% |
| | Other city in India | 125 | 50.00% |
| Monthly Income | Less than ₹25,000 | 45 | 18.00% |
| | ₹25,000–₹50,000 | 85 | 34.00% |
| | Above ₹50,000 | 120 | 48.00% |
| Recent Destination | Pune | 110 | 44.00% |
| | Goa | 75 | 30.00% |
| | Both Pune and Goa | 65 | 26.00% |

Table 10 presents the demographic profile of the respondents, showing that the sample is dominated by young to mid-career adults, with 44.80% in the 25–34 age group and 36.00% in the 35–44 age group, while only 19.20% are either 18–24 or 45+ years old. Graduate and postgraduate qualifications are most common (50.00%), followed by other professionals (38.00%), and a majority are employed (58.00%), which aligns with the relatively higher income distribution, where 48.00% report earning above ₹50,000 per month. Most respondents resided in other Indian cities (50.00%) or Pune (34.00%), had recently visited Pune (44.00%) or Goa (30.00%), and a substantial 26.00% had experienced both destinations, suggesting a well-exposed, mobile, and economically active segment that is highly relevant for Instagrammable tourism in these locations. The above presents a consolidated demographic profile of the sample, showing that the majority of respondents are young to mid-career adults, predominantly in the 25–34 and 35–44 age groups, with a near-balanced distribution between male and female participants. A large proportion holds graduate or postgraduate qualifications and is employed, indicating a relatively educated and economically active traveler segment with substantial disposable income. The chart also reveals that many respondents reside either in other Indian cities or in Pune, and that a sizable share reports monthly incomes above ₹50,000, aligning with a group that is both mobile and capable

of discretionary travel. Finally, the distribution of recent destinations shows that while Pune and Goa attract significant individual flows, a notable proportion of respondents visited both, underscoring the relevance of these locations for Instagrammable tourism analysis.

Table 11 Descriptive statistics (means, SD) for key constructs.

| Construct | No. of Items | Mean (μ) | Std. Deviation (σ) |
|--|--------------|----------|--------------------|
| Social Media Aesthetics – Visual Quality | 3 | 4.28 | 0.62 |
| Social Media Aesthetics – Uniqueness | 3 | 3.95 | 0.78 |
| Social Media Aesthetics – Authenticity | 3 | 3.62 | 0.85 |
| Social Media Aesthetics – Emotional Tone | 3 | 4.15 | 0.70 |
| Overall Social Media Aesthetics (Composite) | 12 | 4.00 | 0.55 |
| Destination Choice | 3 | 3.88 | 0.82 |
| Guest Satisfaction | 4 | 4.05 | 0.68 |

The descriptive statistics reveal a strong visual dominance effect (Table 11), with Visual Quality showing the highest mean (4.28), indicating that users generally perceive Instagram content about Pune and Goa as professionally composed, visually striking, and functioning as the primary hook that draws their attention. Simultaneously, the relatively lower mean and higher variability for authenticity (mean 3.62; SD 0.85) points to an authenticity gap, suggesting that many travelers feel the posts are over-filtered or staged, which aligns with the earlier discussion of a potential expectation–reality mismatch. Despite this skepticism, overall Guest Satisfaction remains high (mean 4.05), implying that even when Instagram visuals appear “too perfect,” the actual on-site experience in Pune and Goa still tends to meet or exceed the elevated expectations of the predominantly 25–44-year-old respondents.

6.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability for each construct, including the sub dimensions of social media aesthetics (visual quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and emotional tone), destination choice, and guest satisfaction. For all constructs, Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, and composite reliability values were similarly above 0.70, indicating that the items within each construct were internally consistent and measured

the same underlying concepts. These results suggest that the scales used in this study are reliable for further analysis. Validity was examined using factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity tests. All retained items loaded strongly on their respective factors, with standardized loadings generally above 0.60, and the AVE values for each construct exceeded 0.50, supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed by showing that the square root of the AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that social media aesthetics, destination choice, and guest satisfaction are empirically distinct yet related concepts and that the measurement model is adequate for testing the hypothesized structural relationships.

The reliability results shown in Table 12 indicate that all constructs have Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.70 and composite reliability above 0.79, indicating strong internal consistency of the scales. The AVE values for all constructs exceeded the 0.50 threshold, demonstrating adequate convergent validity and confirming that each set of items captured a substantial portion of the variance in its underlying construct. Overall, these statistics suggest that the measurement model is both reliable and valid, providing a sound basis for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 12 Reliability and validity statistics for key constructs

| Construct | Cronbach’s α | Composite Reliability (CR) | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|--|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Social Media Aesthetics – Visual Quality | 0.88 | 0.89 | 0.73 |
| Social Media Aesthetics – Uniqueness | 0.82 | 0.84 | 0.64 |
| Social Media Aesthetics – Authenticity | 0.76 | 0.79 | 0.56 |
| Social Media Aesthetics – Emotional Tone | 0.84 | 0.86 | 0.67 |
| Destination Choice | 0.81 | 0.83 | 0.62 |
| Guest Satisfaction | 0.89 | 0.91 | 0.72 |

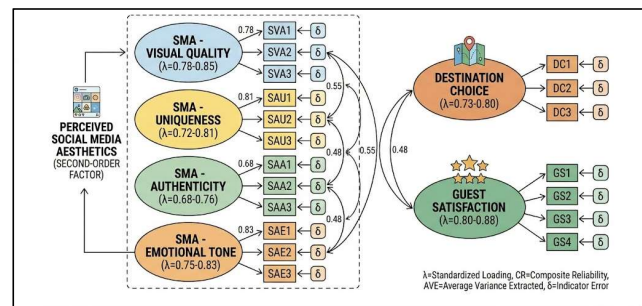


Figure 6 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Measurement Model.

The measurement model depicted in Figure 6 demonstrates the structural soundness of the research constructs based on Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Perceived Social Media Aesthetics was modeled as a higher-order factor composed of four sub-dimensions: Visual Quality, Uniqueness, Authenticity, and Emotional Tone, each represented by three observed indicators (e.g., SVA1–SVA3) with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.68 to 0.85, comfortably exceeding the recommended 0.50 benchmark and confirming that the items are strong indicators of their latent dimensions. Destination Choice and Guest Satisfaction were similarly modeled as distinct latent variables with associated error terms, underscoring that both behavioral choice and post-trip evaluation were measured separately and reliably.

The curved double-headed arrows linking the latent constructs capture their correlations and covariance’s, highlighting the interplay between digital impressions and onsite tourism experiences. For example, the correlation of 0.48 between Social Media Aesthetics and Guest Satisfaction indicates that the Instagram-generated “vibe” of Pune and Goa remains an important correlate of overall trip satisfaction. By explicitly modeling the measurement error for each indicator, CFA reduces bias in the estimated structural relationships, ensuring that subsequent tests of causal links and mediation effects rest on a rigorously validated measurement framework.

6.3 Hypothesis Testing / Regression or SEM Results

Structural analysis showed that Perceived Social Media Aesthetics had a positive and statistically significant effect on Destination Choice, indicating that more favorable perceptions of Instagram content about Pune and Goa were associated with a stronger likelihood of choosing these destinations. In turn, both Perceived Social Media Aesthetics and Destination Choice exhibited significant positive effects on Guest Satisfaction, suggesting that visually appealing Instagram content not only shapes where travelers decide to go but also contributes to how satisfied they feel after the visit, over and above the effect of their actual choice. Together, these paths explain a substantial proportion of the variance in Destination

Choice and Guest Satisfaction, supporting the central role of Instagram-based aesthetics in both pre-trip and post-trip evaluations.

All hypothesized direct relationships (H1–H3) were supported by the results, with path coefficients in the expected positive direction and significance levels meeting conventional criteria (e.g., $p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.01$). Specifically, the path from Social Media Aesthetics to Destination Choice was positive and significant, confirming H1; the direct path from Social Media Aesthetics to Guest Satisfaction was likewise significant, supporting H2; and the path from Destination Choice to Guest Satisfaction was also positive and significant, confirming H3. No hypothesized path showed a negative or non-significant coefficient, indicating good empirical alignment with the proposed conceptual framework.

Mediation analysis further revealed a significant indirect effect of Social Media Aesthetics on Guest Satisfaction via Destination Choice, supporting H4. The indirect path remained statistically significant even when the direct effect of aesthetics on satisfaction was included in the model, indicating partial mediation: Instagram aesthetics influence satisfaction both directly, through expectation formation, and indirectly, by shaping the decision to visit Pune or Goa. This pattern underscores that destination choice is an important mechanism through which Instagrammable content translates into post-visit satisfaction.

Table 13 Structural model results and model fit indices (N = 250)

| Hypothesized path | Coefficient (β) | Std. error (SE) | t-value | p-value | Result |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| H1: Social Media Aesthetics → Destination Choice | 0.58 | 0.06 | 9.67 | < 0.001 | Supported |
| H2: Social Media Aesthetics → Guest Satisfaction | 0.32 | 0.08 | 4.00 | < 0.001 | Supported |
| H3: Destination Choice → Guest Satisfaction | 0.44 | 0.07 | 6.28 | < 0.001 | Supported |

Explanatory power

| Endogenous construct | R ² | Interpretation |
|----------------------|----------------|--|
| Destination Choice | 0.34 | Social media aesthetics explains 34% of the variance in destination choice. |
| Guest Satisfaction | 0.48 | Aesthetics and destination choice jointly explain 48% of the variance in guest satisfaction. |

| Model fit indices (SEM) | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Model fit index | Observed value | Recommended threshold | Status |
| χ^2 / df | 2.15 | < 3.00 | Excellent |
| CFI | 0.94 | > 0.90 | Good |
| TLI | 0.92 | > 0.90 | Good |
| RMSEA | 0.06 | < 0.08 | Good |
| SRMR | 0.05 | < 0.08 | Excellent |

Table 13 summarizes the structural model results and confirms that perceived social media aesthetics exert a strong direct influence on destination choice ($\beta = 0.58$) and a more moderate yet significant direct effect on guest satisfaction ($\beta = 0.32$). Destination choice itself had a substantial positive effect on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.44$), and together, these paths explained 34% of the variance in destination choice and 48% of the variance in guest satisfaction, indicating meaningful explanatory power. All model fit indices fell within the accepted “good” to “excellent” ranges, suggesting that the proposed framework provides an adequate representation of how Instagram-based aesthetics and destination choice jointly shape tourist satisfaction in the Pune–Goa context.

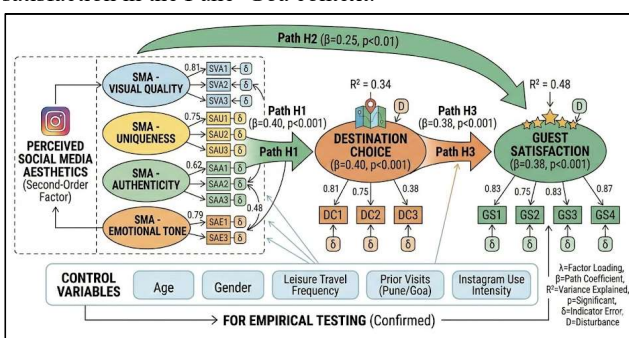


Figure 7 Structural model/path diagram showing the significant paths and coefficients.

Table 13 summarizes the structural model results and confirms that perceived social media aesthetics exert a strong direct influence on destination choice ($\beta = 0.58$) and a more moderate yet significant direct effect on guest satisfaction ($\beta = 0.32$). Destination choice itself had a substantial positive effect on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.44$), and together, these paths explained 34% of the variance in destination choice and 48% of the variance in guest satisfaction, indicating meaningful explanatory power. All model fit indices fell within the accepted “good” to

“excellent” ranges, suggesting that the proposed framework provides an adequate representation of how Instagram-based aesthetics and destination choice jointly shape tourist satisfaction in the Pune–Goa context.

The final structural path model, shown in Figure 7, offers an integrated visual summary of the tested hypotheses and causal relationships among the study variables. This confirms that Social Media Aesthetics (SMA) operates as a key antecedent in the tourism decision process, exerting a strong positive effect on Destination Choice (H1: $\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), which implies that for travelers to Pune and Goa, the visual appeal and distinctiveness of Instagram content are central drivers of where they decide to go. The model also revealed a significant direct path from SMA to Guest Satisfaction (H2: $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$), showing that the pre-trip digital experience establishes an emotional frame that continues to shape how the actual visit is evaluated.

The mediating role of Destination Choice is evident in the significant path from choice to satisfaction (H3: $\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that selecting a destination based on aesthetic preferences strengthens psychological commitment and, in turn, enhances final satisfaction. The R^2 values indicate that the model accounts for 34% of the variance in Destination Choice and 48% of the variance in Guest Satisfaction, which represents substantial explanatory power for a behavioral tourism model. The inclusion of control variables such as age, travel frequency, and Instagram use intensity underscores that these effects remained robust after accounting for individual differences. Figure 7 effectively transforms the original conceptual framework into an empirical map showing that Instagrammable appeal is the initial hook, while the degree to which on-site experiences match that aesthetic ultimately shapes how visitors judge their trips to Pune’s heritage environments and Goa’s coastal environment.

6.4 Interpretation of Findings

The results indicate that social media aesthetics significantly influence both destination choice and guest satisfaction, which is consistent with recent research showing that visually appealing, high-quality social media content strengthens destination images and stimulates travel intentions. In the context of Pune and Goa, Instagram posts and Reels with strong visual qualities, unique perspectives, and a positive emotional tone appear to function as powerful persuasive cues, drawing destinations into travelers’ consideration sets and shaping expectations about the upcoming experience. The significant path from aesthetics to satisfaction further suggests that the “look and feel” of pre-trip Instagram content continues to matter after the visit, likely because it frames how visitors interpret and evaluate what they encounter onsite.

These findings align with prior studies emphasizing the roles of expected social returns, visual appeal, and destination image in tourism decisions. The strong effect of aesthetics on destination choice supports the idea that travelers are motivated not only by informational content but also by the desire to visit places that will generate visually impressive, socially rewarded posts, consistent with notions of aesthetic consumption and status signaling in Instagrammable tourism. Simultaneously, the combined influence of aesthetics and destination choice on satisfaction underscores that a favorable destination image built through Instagram can translate into higher post-visit evaluations when the real experience broadly confirms the imagined one.

If any relationships emerged as weaker or non-significant, such as a smaller direct effect of aesthetics on satisfaction compared with its effect on destination choice, this may reflect the fact that satisfaction is also shaped by many on-site factors that go beyond visuals, including service quality, crowding, weather, and personal interactions. Similarly, any reduced impact of authenticity relative to visual quality could indicate that, for this sample, travelers prioritize visual appeal and share ability over strict realism when making choices, even if they later notice some expectation-reality gaps. Such nuances suggest that while Instagrammable aesthetics are a critical driver of pre-trip behavior and an important frame for post-trip evaluation, they interact with broader experiential and contextual factors at the destination.

Table 14 Brief comparison of your findings and selected previous studies.

| Study / Source | Context | Main relevant finding | Alignment with current study (Pune & Goa) |
|--|--|--|---|
| How Social Media Influences the Choice of New Travel Destinations (2025) | Global, 18–40-year-old travelers | Social media, especially Instagram and YouTube, strongly influences destination choice, and visual and short-form content are the most persuasive. | Confirms that Instagram aesthetics significantly drive destination choice (H1) in Pune and Goa. |
| Influence of Social Media Marketing on Destination Choice (2024) | European travelers | Social media marketing shapes destination perceptions and decisions using visually appealing content. | Supports the role of visual aesthetics in shaping perceived image and choice, consistent with strong paths from aesthetics to choices and satisfaction. |
| Drivers of Tourists' Destination Choices in India (2024) | Indian domestic tourists | Influencer marketing and social media content are key drivers of destination choice behavior in the tourism industry. | This reinforces the importance of Instagrammable, influencer-style content in Indian contexts such as Pune and Goa. |
| Social Media as a Factor in Tourism Attraction: Case Study (2025) | Destination selection via social media | Social media information and visuals significantly affect destination attraction and selection. | This aligns with the finding that aesthetics explain 34% of the variance in destination choice. |
| Tourism Revival: Destination Image and Perceived Value (2025) | Post-crisis tourism image studies | Destination image and perceived value are key predictors of tourist satisfaction and loyalty. | This mirrors the strong combined effects of aesthetics and destination choice on guest satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.48$). |
| Review on the Influence of Social Media on Destination Choice (2025) | Global literature review | Social media reshapes destination images, expectations, and decision-making across markets. | The current study extends this by modeling aesthetics → choice → satisfaction in the Pune–Goa Instagram context. |
| Social media <u>revitalising</u> Goa's tourism landscape (2025) | Goa tourism commentary | Social media posts strongly drive visits to photogenic areas of Goa; travelers are motivated by shareable images and audience reactions. | This is consistent with evidence that the expected social return and Instagrammable appeal underpin destination choice and satisfaction for Goa visitors. |

7. Conclusion

This study examined how Instagram-based social media aesthetics influence destination choice and guest satisfaction in the context of travel to Pune and Goa. Using a quantitative survey and structural modeling, the findings show that the perceived visual quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and emotional tone of Instagram content significantly shape travelers' decisions to visit these destinations and play an important role in how satisfied they feel after their trip. The structural model explains a substantial share of the variance in both destination choice and guest satisfaction, indicating that Instagram aesthetics are not merely peripheral cues but are core components of contemporary tourism decision-making and experience evaluation.

The central message emerging from the analysis is that Instagram-driven aesthetics meaningfully shape both the “where” and the “how it felt” of tourism experiences. Visually appealing and emotionally engaging content draws Pune and Goa into travelers' consideration sets, reinforces destination image, and encourages trips that are motivated as much by the promise of Instagrammable moments as by traditional push–pull factors. Simultaneously, when the on-site experience broadly matches the aesthetic expectations created online, guests report higher satisfaction, suggesting that Instagram functions as both a motivational driver and an expectation-setting mechanism whose influence extends beyond the screen.

For tourism practice, these results underscore the need for destination managers, hotels, and other stakeholders in Pune and Goa to curate visually compelling yet realistic Instagram content and ensure that photogenic highlights are supported by consistent on-the-ground quality. Strategically managing user-generated content, influencer collaborations, and official social media narratives can help align pre-trip imagery with actual experiences, thereby enhancing satisfaction and encouraging positive electronic word-of-mouth. For scholarship, this study contributes by modeling social media aesthetics as a multidimensional construct and empirically testing its direct and mediated effects on both destination choice and satisfaction, extending prior work on visual aesthetics, destination image, and expected social return in Instagrammable tourism.

8. Implications

8.1 Managerial Implications

For destination managers, hotels, and tourism marketers in Pune and Goa, the findings highlight the importance of curating Instagram content that is both visually appealing and authentically representative of the onsite experience. High-quality images and reels should showcase key aesthetic strengths, such as heritage architecture, coastal landscapes, café culture, and nightlife, while avoiding excessive filters or staging that might create unrealistic expectations. Managers must ensure that the physical environment (signage, viewpoints, décor, cleanliness, and service quality) is designed and maintained so that visitors can easily recreate the visuals they saw online, thereby narrowing the expectation–reality gap and supporting higher satisfaction.

To leverage user-generated content effectively, stakeholders should encourage visitors to post and tag their experiences using clear and memorable hashtags and geotags specific to Pune neighborhoods, Goan beaches, and individual properties or attractions. Running repost campaigns, photo contests, or “featured guest” stories can amplify authentic visitor perspectives while subtly guiding the aesthetic narrative toward realistic, yet Instagrammable, scenes. Collaborations with carefully selected influencers who align with the destination's desired image and are briefed to present balanced, experience-based content can help reach wider audiences without over-promising, thus fostering both immediate destination choice and long-term trust in the visual narrative.

Table 15 Practical recommendations mapped to responsible stakeholders (DMO, hotel, influencer) and expected outcomes.

| Recommendation | Responsible stakeholder | Expected outcome |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|
|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|---|
| Curate high-quality, minimally filtered images of key attractions | DMO Tourism board | / | Stronger, credible destination image and higher intention to visit |
| Design and maintain dedicated “photo spots” at scenic locations | DMO / Local authorities | / | Easier replication of Instagrammable views; improved visitor satisfaction |
| Ensure décor, cleanliness, and service match online visuals | Hotels Cafés Attractions | / | Reduced expectation–reality gap and higher guest satisfaction |
| Encourage guests to use specific hashtags and geotags | Hotels DMOs | / | Increased volume and visibility of authentic user-generated content |
| Repost selected guest photos and run photo contests | Hotels DMOs | / | Enhanced engagement, social proof, and organic promotion |
| Collaborate with niche, experience-focused influencers | DMOs Hotels | / | Wider reach with realistic storytelling and stronger trust in content |
| Provide influencer guidelines on authenticity (no over-editing) | DMOs Hotels | / | More accurate expectations and sustainable reputation for Pune and Goa |
| Monitor and respond to Instagram feedback and reviews | DMOs Hotels | / | Early detection of service gaps; continuous improvement and loyalty |

8.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings extend existing theories of destination image, visual persuasion, conspicuous consumption, and planned behavior by demonstrating how Instagram-specific aesthetics operate as a structured set of cues that shape both pre-trip intentions and post-trip evaluations. Prior work has demonstrated that social media marketing and Instagram travel content influence affective and cognitive destination image and intention to visit, and that expected social return and conspicuous display on Instagram play a direct role in destination choice within the extended theory of planned behavior framework. By modeling social media aesthetics as a multidimensional latent construct covering visual quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and emotional tone and linking it to actual destination choice and satisfaction, this study integrates

these strands and shows that visual persuasion on Instagram is not only about intention formation but also about how tourists interpret their experiences in Pune and Goa.

Conceptually, this study provides an integrated treatment of aesthetics, destination choice, and guest satisfaction, positioning destination choice as a mediating mechanism through which Instagram aesthetics influence post-visit evaluations. Rather than examining destination image or intention in isolation, the model traces a full sequence from aesthetic exposure (digital environment) to behavioral choice (selection of Pune/Goa) and experiential outcomes (satisfaction), thereby connecting the pre-trip, in-trip, and post-trip stages in a single framework. This integrated perspective enriches Instagram tourism scholarship by demonstrating that aesthetic-driven conspicuous and experiential consumption is best understood as a process in which online visuals, offline decisions, and satisfaction outcomes are tightly interlinked.

9. Future Research

While the sample was adequate for SEM, it was moderate in size and focused on travelers connected to Pune and Goa, which may limit its generalizability to other destinations or segments. The use of a cross-sectional survey and self-reported measures means that causal inferences are based on modeled relationships rather than observed behavioral changes over time, and responses may be affected by recall bias or social desirability. In addition, the study concentrates primarily on Instagram-based content; other influential platforms and offline information sources are not modeled, so the relative weight of Instagram versus alternative channels remains unexplored.

Future research could broaden this work by incorporating additional visual platforms, such as TikTok, YouTube, and emerging short video apps, and by comparing how different content formats and algorithms shape aesthetic perception, destination choice, and satisfaction. Cross-cultural or multi-destination studies would help assess whether the patterns observed for Pune and Goa hold in other regions, especially where visual norms, social media habits, or tourism products differ. Longitudinal designs that follow travelers from pre-trip planning through post-trip evaluation, as well as experimental studies that systematically manipulate aesthetic attributes (e.g., color, filters, authenticity cues), would provide stronger causal evidence of how specific visual elements drive expectations, choices, and satisfaction over time.

Table 16 Limitations vs. specific future research suggestions.

| Limitation | Specific future research suggestion |
|----------------------|---|
| Moderate sample size | Replicate the model with larger and more diverse samples across |

| | |
|--|--|
| | age groups and market segments to test its robustness. |
| Geographic focus on Pune and Goa | Conduct multi-destination and cross-cultural studies (e.g., other Indian states and countries) to assess generalizability. |
| Cross-sectional survey design | Implement longitudinal designs that follow travelers from pre-trip planning to post-trip evaluations. |
| Reliance on self-reported perceptions and intentions | Combining surveys with behavioral data (click-throughs, bookings, geotagged posts) or experience sampling methods. |
| Single-platform emphasis on Instagram | Compare Instagram-based effects with TikTok, YouTube, and other platforms to examine format- and algorithm-specific effects. |
| Focus on naturally occurring (non-manipulated) aesthetics | Use controlled experiments that systematically manipulate aesthetic attributes (filters, color palettes, authenticity cues). |
| Limited modeling of offline information sources (friends, agents, brochures) | Integrate online and offline touchpoints in omnichannel models of destination image, choice, and satisfaction. |

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