

## The Role Of Social Media In Shaping Tourists' Perceptions Of Nature-Based Tourism In East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

Paramjeet Kumar<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Sharad Kumar Kulshreshtha<sup>2</sup>, Rajesh Kumar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Research Scholar (Pursuing PhD), Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, North -Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India, Email id: [Paramjeetchoudhary35@gmail.com](mailto:Paramjeetchoudhary35@gmail.com), Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3824-2289>

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, North -Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India, Email id: [sharad\\_mta@yahoo.com](mailto:sharad_mta@yahoo.com), Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7324-8013>

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor & Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Institute of Management Studies Ghaziabad- B School, National Institute of Technology, Agartala, India, <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8281-246X>, Email: [rajeshseco@gmail.com](mailto:rajeshseco@gmail.com)

**\*Corresponding Author:** Paramjeet Kumar

\*Email id: [Paramjeetchoudhary35@gmail.com](mailto:Paramjeetchoudhary35@gmail.com)

---

### **Abstract**

The primary area of tourism that is considered for the study revolves around nature based tourism which is highly prevalent in the present times. India is naturally endowed with flora and fauna which allows it to promote nature base to raising across tourists around the world. The study here however considers the region of East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya to be investigated specifically as a part of this quantitative study. The region has shown tremendous tourist footfalls in the past few years and holds the potential of being one of the prominent nature based tourism spots. There are 395 primary responses collected from tourists who have been to make earlier in the past years. The collected data has been analysed using appropriate statistical tools which has led to the identification of the factors established in the study. The overall perception held by the respondent towards the region has been estimated by understanding their social media engagement, the information quality on social media and the social media influence on them. The role of trust has been established as important when considering the social media information by researchers and this study has also found the impactful role of it. The trust on the social media information generated and used for the purpose of tourism can effectively mediate the relationship between the overall perception derived and the established independent variables. The partial mediation reflects that the rule of trust can be significant when trying to establish the perception about nature-based tourism spots using social media.

**Keywords** – Social; Media; Tourists; Perception; Tourism; Meghalaya

---

### **1. Introduction**

The tourism sector is one of the most prominent parts of any economic development across the world. While the pandemic in 2020 brought significant challenges to the sector, its comeback brought about a number of infinite opportunities with it (Abbasi et al., 2024). According to (Statista Research Department, 2023), the global tourism spend increased about 30% in the year 2022 compared to previous years of the pandemic. The tourists today are different from those which one experienced a decade ago. The sector can be divided into different subsections based on the type of tourist that they can anticipate (Moore et al., 2015; Vijay & Ravichandran, 2019). There are certain tourist groups who are conventional in nature and look for popular places to visit with either historical background or popularity based. There is also another section of tourists who like to go to offbeat places and explore the unexplored. The present tourism sector encompasses interest from tourists to visit places which are naturally endowed or manmade. The booming tourism sector today holds numerous opportunities as the number of tourists are increasing day by day (Divisekera & Nguyen, 2018; Erawan & Krairit, 2020). The mention of increasing tourism can be associated with the reach of social media across the world. The individuals today are more informed about the opportunities that the tourism sector provides and often undergo a process of investigation in the social media before selecting a destination (Perez-Vega et al., 2018; Rasheed, 2020). There are several ways in which information is made available on social media platforms about tourism.

It includes reviews and processes of travelling suggested by a group of professionals popularly known as influencers or from amateur travellers. The social media platforms are full of information that can at times also be misleading and ineffective (Kilipiri et al., 2023; Li et al., 2020). While there are both positive and negative aspects to the use of social media by the tourist board knowing a place of interest, it is important to mention that at this point of time the acknowledgement of social media as a source of information for tourists is mandatory.

The study here attempts to integrate to different aspects of tourism that is - the level of social media influence caused and its impact across developing the overall perception of the tourist in case of a nature based destination. The destination interested in this study is that of Meghalaya which is a state located in the north eastern part of India (Zou & Prasain, 2017). The place is known for its natural beauty which comprises greenery all across with beautiful landscapes. The state is home to the area with the highest average rainfall in the world - Mawsynram, Asia's cleanest village - Mawlynnong and many beautiful waterfalls. The tourist footfall in Meghalaya has significantly increased in the past few years due to an effective role of social media. In order to understand how the information received on social media acted on developing the final perception of the tourist about the place, the study here has been initiated. There would be many interesting revelations as a part of the study and would provide significant implications for the future.

The following research questions would be investigated through this study using different methodological approaches.

RQ1: How does social media influence the perception building process across the tourism sectors?

RQ2: What are the important components of social media that can influence the overall perception building process for a nature based tourism approach in the East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya?

RQ3: Can trust of the tourists on the social media information cause a barrier to the impact of social media influence on perception building in tourism?

The study would run a detailed investigation on the above questions using a detailed statistical process. The study also conducts a rigorous literature review in the topic and extends the gaps in it for the future course of the study.

## 2. Review of Literature

The concept of nature-based tourism is established to entertain the individuals who obtain non-materialistic pleasures by travelling across different locations (Kim et al., 2019). It attempts to engage the tourist through the medium of spiritual enrichment, reflection, cognitive development and aesthetic pleasures. The main aim of establishing this form of tourism is to facilitate the tourist with the existing ecosystems and defining the coexistence among the human and nature (Moyle et al., 2017). There are various areas which are protected under the provisions of nature based tourism in order to allow individuals to visit these areas and learn about nature and its elements. Previous studies are investigating nature based tourism in different aspects of it and try to identify the main factors that influence the increase of interest among the tourists about it. From National Park visitors to enthusiasts about botanical gardens, nature-based tourism uses different forms of establishments around it (Sergiacomi et al., 2022). It is observed that the visits to national parks often help in rebuilding the connection between the human and nature and encourage a sense of positivity (Winter et al., 2019). The use of social media in such a situation can be effectively utilized by understanding what kind of virtual social environment is provided by the tourist after their experiences (Hausmann et al., 2020). The role of social media platforms such as Instagram is also considered effective in promoting nature based tourism due to the ability of the users to share pictures representing their experiences. It can help in defining the user generated content with pictures that further re-establishes the association between the two (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020). The use of Facebook is also significant in enhancing the influence in the mind of the tourist towards visiting a nature based spot. The image of a botanical garden can be completely altered with the use of social media posts where its purpose can be extended towards educational aspects and a medium for understanding the past and the future (Gaffar et al., 2022). This can lead to the increasing number of tourists in the botanical gardens and thereby promoting nature based tourism.

The role of social media and the Influence that it causes upon the tourist is quite evident in the present studies. It is not only in case of nature-based tourism that the social media influence is observed on the tourists. The experiences shared by different tourists on social media are looked at by the potential travellers in order to validate their choices and rely on a potential tourist (Wozniak et al., 2018). The tourists are influenced by the opinions and behaviors of their social network, leading to increased conformity in travel choices. This peer influence can shape perceptions of destinations, making them more appealing based on positive social media portrayals (Tolkach & Pratt, 2021). The rise of social media influencers has further added another dimension to the role of social media in shaping tourist perceptions. Influencers, especially those who have large followings, can sway their audience's travel choices through their endorsements and experiences very easily. Research by (Chen et al., 2022; Rao Hill & Qesja, 2023) suggests that influencers' recommendations are perceived as authentic and trustworthy, thereby impacting tourists' destination choices and overall perceptions. Additionally, peer reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor also provide a form of social validation that can influence tourist decisions. Positive reviews can enhance a destination's credibility, while negative reviews can lead to a decline in interest (Machado Carvalho, 2024). Despite its positive influences, social media also poses challenges in shaping tourist perceptions. The authenticity and reliability of user-generated content can be questionable at times and the chances of fake reviews and misleading information can distort tourists' perceptions and lead to dissatisfaction (Yilmazdoğan et al., 2021).

The integration of social media influence on the nature based tourist perception is a bit challenging as any misrepresentation can lead to the generation of a twisted view about the places. The study here can help in understanding how much social media information the tourists prefer when looking into a nature based tourism spot and to what level it can impact on their final perception.

### 3. Research Methodology

The research methodology forms and integrates part of any study and it requires a sufficient amount of planning to execute the proper method of conducting a research. The study here has paid substantial attention to designing the appropriate methodological framework for conducting the study in hand. The design of the framework is made in such a manner that the results derived as a part of the study are free from error and biasness.

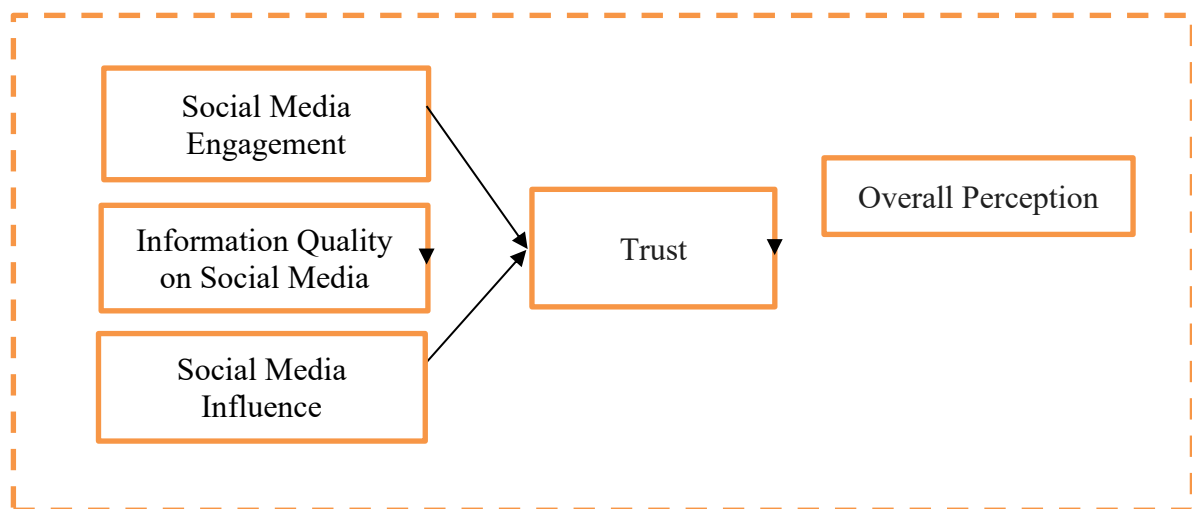
The form of the study here is descriptive in nature where further analyses about the role of social media in developing tourism aspects are being understood. The approach considered here is quantitative in nature and attempts to navigate the results using proper statistical methods. Both primary and secondary data are utilised for the purpose of the study. The secondary data are collected from journal articles on tourism, books, reports and other online articles available on the area of concern. The secondary data is also extensively used to design the research instrument used for collecting primary data. A structured questionnaire is designed for the purpose of estimating each of the variables quantitatively and collecting the responses from the population of the study. The questionnaire designed is in a five point Likert type scale that promotes the responses in a continuous rating scale. The process of collecting data involves an intricate plan and is discussed below.

As mentioned above, the study is focused on understanding the tourism aspect of the state of Meghalaya in India and hair by, the population for the study includes the tourists who have visited the state. In order to facilitate the collection of the right samples from the population, a non- probabilistic method of sampling has been used. The use of purposive sampling allows the researcher to select only dose samples from the population will fulfil the condition of visiting Meghalaya and especially the East Khasi Hills in the near past. The idea of the study is to collect responses from those tourists who have visited the state in and around the duration of the last one year so that they can remember their experience there. The use of this method of sampling has allowed the researcher to consider only those samples who fulfil the specific requirements. The sample size for the study is established at 395 according to the fulfilment of the minimum sample size of 384 by (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) who mentions it as a minimum threshold for an infinite population.

As discussed previously, the study here attempts to understand the social media engagement impacting the perception of the tourist about the state. The detailed investigation in the previous literature has established the measurement of this situation with relevance to other variables which would play different roles in the conceptual model. The list of variables included and their definitions are as follows –

Variable Name	Definition	Role in the Conceptual Model
Overall Perception	The overall idea built about Meghalaya based on the information received on social media	Dependent Variable
Social Media Engagement	The level of engagement the individual tourists have on social media about their visit to Meghalaya	Independent Variable
Information Quality on Social Media	The level of information received on social media about Meghalaya and its authenticity	Independent Variable
Social Media Influence	The amount of influence social media has caused on the decision of the tourists to visit the Meghalaya	Independent Variable
Trust in Social Media Information	The level and nature of trust the tourist has on the information received on social media about Meghalaya	Mediating Variable

The conceptual model hereby developed for the purpose of the study is as follows-



The hypotheses to be tested as a part of the statistical analysis are as follows-

H<sub>01</sub>: There is a significant impact of social media engagement on the trust of the tourists on social media information.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is a significant impact of information quality on social media on the trust of the tourists on social media information.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is a significant impact of social media influence on the trust of the tourists on social media information.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is a significant impact of trust of the tourists on social media information as a mediator on their overall perception about Meghalaya.

The conceptual model designed above attempts to investigate the relationship across the five established variables. It would be done by using regression models to examine the role of the mediating variable of trust and the individual relationships. The factors would be confirmed using principal component analysis (PCA) while the demographic associations would be tested using t-test and one-way ANOVA.

The next section is dedicated towards providing the detailed data analysis process conducted to fulfil the research questions established in the study.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The thorough analysis conducted for arriving at the results of the set hypotheses are provided in this section of the study. Before understanding the investigated questions in detail, the demographic profile of the respondents are provided here.

Frequencies of Gender

Gender	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Female	237	60.0 %	60.0 %
Male	158	40.0 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of Age

Age	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
26-35	80	20.3 %	20.3 %
36-45	158	40.0 %	60.3 %
46-55	79	20.0 %	80.3 %
Above 55	78	19.7 %	100.0 %

The respondents include 60% female tourists and 40% male tourists. On the other hand, the majority of the tourists fall in the age group of 36-45 years with 40% of the total. It is followed by 20% tourists in the 46 to 55 age group and 19.7% being above 55 years. There are 20.3% of the respondents who belong to the 26 to 35 years of age.

Apart from the demographics, the study has also enquired about the specificities of their visits.

Frequencies of How many times did you visit Meghalaya

How many times did you visit Meghalaya	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Just Once	40	10.1 %	10.1 %
More than 2 times	157	39.7 %	49.9 %
Twice	198	50.1 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of When did you visit Meghalaya for the last time

When did you visit Meghalaya for the last time	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
It's been a year	158	40.0 %	40.0 %
It's been less than a year	118	29.9 %	69.9 %
It's been more than one year	119	30.1 %	100.0 %

The first question enquired how many times they have visited Meghalaya and it is observed that for majority of the respondents i.e., 50.1% it is twice. There are 39.7% respondents who have visited the state more than two times and 10.1% who have visited only once. The next question enquires about the time when they last visited Meghalaya. As it has been established in the methodology that the last visit must be around a year, hence 40% says it has been a year, 30.1% says it has been slightly more than a year and 29.9% says it has been less than a year since their last visit. Overall, the conditions of the methodology are accordingly fulfilled and hence the further analysis of the study is established.

The structured questionnaire prepared includes a total of 24 items to measure the responses of the tourists about the various components considered in the study.

Firstly, these items would be investigated using PCA to determine the items corresponding to the relevant underlying extracted factors that have an eigenvalue of more than 1. This analysis allows the understanding about the formulation of the considered factors with the significant factor loading values of more than 0.4. The varimax rotation method is used to extract the factors as discussed in the methodology section. There are also sampling adequacy tests conducted to identify the role of the collected data sets with respect to the factors using KMO and Bartlett's test results. The tables generated are as follows-

Component Loadings						
	Component					Uniqueness
	1	2	3	4	5	
To what extent do you agree that social media influenced your decision to visit Meghalaya?	0.941					0.00320
How often do you use social media to gather information about travel destinations?	0.957					0.01442
How much do you rely on social media for recommendations on tourist attractions in Meghalaya?	0.924					0.01050
How important are social media reviews and comments in shaping your perceptions of nature-based tourism in Meghalaya?	0.978					0.00981
To what extent do you feel that social media enhances your overall travel experience in Meghalaya?		0.942				0.03843
How likely are you to share your travel experiences in Meghalaya on social media?		0.941				0.01714
How influential are social media influencers in influencing your travel choices, including visiting Meghalaya?		0.941				0.00320
The information I found on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya was accurate.			0.946			0.00749
I trust the information I find on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya.			0.924			0.01050
The information I found on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya was reliable.			0.978			0.00981

## Component Loadings

	Component					5	Uniqueness
	1	2	3	4			
The information I found on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya was credible.			0.941				0.00236
Social media posts influenced my perception of nature-based tourism in Meghalaya.			0.961				0.01697
The information I found on social media matched my experience of nature-based tourism in Meghalaya.			0.924				0.01050
I would recommend Meghalaya as a nature-based tourism destination based on the information I found on social media.			0.978				0.00981
Social media posts about Meghalaya influenced my decision to visit the East Khasi Hills.				0.941			0.00236
I actively seek travel information about Meghalaya on social media platforms.				0.941			0.01714
The opinions and reviews on social media about Meghalaya destinations help plan my trip.				0.941			0.00320
Social media posts about Meghalaya destinations influenced my perception of the place.				0.957			0.01442
I often share my experiences of visiting Meghalaya on social media platforms				0.765			0.03232
To what extent do you trust the information about nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, that you find on social media platforms?					0.943		0.00567
How likely are you to engage with social media posts or pages related to nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya?					0.869		0.03845
How would you rate the overall quality of information about nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, shared on social media?					0.941		0.00320
To what extent do you think the information on social media influenced your perception of nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya?					0.858		0.02466
How confident are you in the accuracy and reliability of the information about nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, that you find on social media?					0.924		0.01050

Note. 'varimax' rotation was used

The PCA table shows that there are a total of five factors extracted using the varimax rotation method. All the factor loadings are way above 0.4 and considers the effective criteria for converging to a factor. The number items in each of the factors are as follows-

Variable Name	Definition	Total Number of Factors
Overall Perception	The overall idea built about Meghalaya based on the information received on social media	3
Social Media Engagement	The level of engagement the individual tourists have on social media about their visit to Meghalaya	4
Information Quality on Social Media	The level of information received on social media about Meghalaya and its authenticity	7
Social Media Influence	The amount of influence social media has caused on the decision of the tourists to visit the Meghalaya	5
Trust in Social Media Information	The level and nature of trust the tourist has on the information received on social media about Meghalaya	5

Bartlett's test result below shows that there is a p-value of less than 0.05 which shows that it fulfils the criteria for sampling adequacy. Moreover, the overall KMO value of 0.801 fulfills the acceptable value of more than 0.7. This shows that the samples collected for the fulfilment of the study are appropriate to examine the above extracted variables for the study.

#### Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

$\chi^2$	df	p
Inf	276	< .001

#### KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy

	MSA
Overall	0.801
To what extent do you agree that social media influenced your decision to visit Meghalaya?	0.705
How often do you use social media to gather information about travel destinations?	0.778
How much do you rely on social media for recommendations on tourist attractions in Meghalaya?	0.850
How important are social media reviews and comments in shaping your perceptions of nature-based tourism in Meghalaya?	0.766
To what extent do you feel that social media enhances your overall travel experience in Meghalaya?	0.988
How likely are you to share your travel experiences in Meghalaya on social media?	0.805
How influential are social media influencers in influencing your travel choices, including visiting Meghalaya?	0.882
The information I found on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya was accurate.	0.601
I trust the information I find on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya.	0.667
The information I found on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya was reliable.	0.900
The information I found on social media about nature-based tourism in Meghalaya was credible.	0.987
Social media posts influenced my perception of nature-based tourism in Meghalaya.	0.922
The information I found on social media matched my experience of nature-based tourism in Meghalaya.	0.788



## KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy

	MSA
I would recommend Meghalaya as a nature-based tourism destination based on the information I found on social media.	0.811
Social media posts about Meghalaya influenced my decision to visit the East Khasi Hills.	0.851
I actively seek travel information about Meghalaya on social media platforms.	0.907
The opinions and reviews on social media about Meghalaya destinations help plan my trip.	0.672
Social media posts about Meghalaya destinations influenced my perception of the place.	0.522
I often share my experiences of visiting Meghalaya on social media platforms	0.803
To what extent do you trust the information about nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, that you find on social media platforms?	0.705
How likely are you to engage with social media posts or pages related to nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya?	0.778
How would you rate the overall quality of information about nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, shared on social media?	0.850
To what extent do you think the information on social media influenced your perception of nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya?	0.766
How confident are you in the accuracy and reliability of the information about nature-based tourism in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, that you find on social media?	0.988

As the factors for the final estimation have been extracted, the mean scores corresponding to each of the five factors are hereby discussed.

## Descriptives

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Overall Perception	395	3.04	3.33	1.19	1.33	5.00
Social Media Engagement	395	2.98	3.25	1.22	1.25	4.75
Information Quality on Social Media	395	3.01	3.29	1.17	1.43	4.86
Social Media Influence	395	3.05	3.20	1.19	1.20	4.80
Trust in Social Media Information	395	2.97	3.00	1.33	1.40	5.00

It is seen that the highest mean score is at 3.05 for the social media influence. This shows that the level of social media influence on the tourists considered here is the highest when it comes to making the decision of visiting Meghalaya. It is closely followed by the overall perception score at 3.04 which shows the impact of social media on deriving the overall perception about the visit of the tourists to Meghalaya. The lowest score is at 2.97 about the trust in social media and this establishes the state of concern raised by the tourists on the information about Meghalaya on social media.

In the next section of the analysis, the mediation analysis is initiated to fulfil the set hypothesis for the study. The details of the model are shown above where the role of each of the components and their relationships to be examined are exhibited.

## Models Info

Mediators Models		
Full Model	m1	Trust in Social Media Information ~ Social Media Engagement + Information Quality on Social Media + Social Media Influence
	m2	Overall Perception ~ Trust in Social Media Information + Social Media Engagement + Information Quality on Social Media + Social Media Influence
Indirect Effects		
	IE 1	Social Media Engagement $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception
	IE 2	Information Quality on Social Media $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception
	IE 3	Social Media Influence $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception
Sample size	N	395

## Indirect and Total Effects

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		$\beta$	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	Social Media Engagement $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	-0.0631	0.0203	-0.1028	0.0234	0.0650	-3.12	0.002
	Information Quality on Social Media $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	-0.2151	0.0269	-0.2679	0.1623	0.2112	-7.99	<.001
	Social Media Influence $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	0.1144	0.0105	0.0937	0.1350	0.1144	10.85	<.001

## Indirect and Total Effects

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		$\beta$	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Component	Social Media Engagement $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information	0.4159	0.1296	0.1620	0.6699	0.3842	3.21	0.001
	Trust in Social Media Information $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	-0.1518	0.0117	-0.1747	-0.1289	-0.1690	-12.98	<.001
	Information Quality on Social Media $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information	1.4173	0.1398	1.1433	1.6913	1.2493	10.14	<.001
	Social Media Influence $\Rightarrow$ Trust in Social Media Information	-0.7534	0.0381	-0.8281	-0.6787	-0.6768	-19.77	<.001
Direct	Social Media Engagement $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	-0.2147	0.0305	-0.2745	-0.1549	-0.2209	-7.04	<.001
	Information Quality on Social Media $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	1.3228	0.0365	1.2513	1.3942	1.2987	36.28	<.001
	Social Media Influence $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	0.0863	0.0125	0.0618	0.1108	0.0864	6.91	<.001

## Indirect and Total Effects

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		$\beta$	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Total	Social Media Engagement $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	-0.2778	0.0360	-0.3484	0.2073	0.2859	-7.72	< .001
	Information Quality on Social Media $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	1.1077	0.0388	1.0315	1.1838	1.0875	28.52	< .001
	Social Media Influence $\Rightarrow$ Overall Perception	0.2007	0.0106	0.1799	0.2214	0.2008	18.95	< .001

Note. Confidence intervals computed with method: Standard (Delta method)

Note. Betas are completely standardized effect sizes

This table generates the overall idea about all the relationships measured and the values generated from each of them. Firstly, looking into the direct effects of the relationships it is seen that the impact of all the three independent variables are significant on the overall perception of the place with p-values generated of below 0.05. Next, looking into the indirect effects where the variable of trust is incorporated as the mediator, the impact of the independent variables are found to be statistically significant. This highlights that the role of the mediator's trust on social media information is only partial and there are other components in the environment which also act on the relationship formulated. One interesting change observed looking into the estimates is that while the impact of information quality on social media on overall perception is positive in the direct effects, the impact converts into a negative approach when considered the mediating role of trust. This shows that if the tourists have a low level of trust on the information found on social media, the impact caused by the information quality attributed on social media.

Now, as part of the investigation further, the demographic analysis of the variables are conducted. The differences in the mean scores with respect to the gender of the tourists are established using t-tests, while for the age group, the one Way ANOVA method is used.

## Independent Samples T-Test - Gender

		Statistic	df	p
Overall Perception	Student's t	0.414	393	0.679
Social Media Engagement	Student's t	0.440	393	0.660
Information Quality on Social Media	Student's t	0.941	393	0.347
Social Media Influence	Student's t	0.507 <sup>a</sup>	393	0.613
Trust in Social Media Information	Student's t	3.793	393	< .001

<sup>a</sup> Levene's test is significant ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

The table above clearly shows that it is only with respect to trust on social media information that there are significant mean score differences observed among the tourists. There are different levels of trust expected from the tourist based on if they are males or females.

The ANOVA conducted on the other hand exhibits different results where all the variables show mean score differences based on the age group that they belong to.

Age Group			
	$\chi^2$	df	p
Overall Perception	365	3	< .001
Social Media Engagement	365	3	< .001
Information Quality on Social Media	363	3	< .001
Social Media Influence	354	3	< .001
Trust in Social Media Information	360	3	< .001

To understand the occurrence of the difference among the exact age group, the study undergoes a pairwise comparison method for each factor.

Pairwise comparisons - Overall Perception

		W	p
26-35	36-45	-18.3	< .001
26-35	46-55	-15.9	< .001
26-35	Above 55	-15.8	< .001
36-45	46-55	-18.3	< .001
36-45	Above 55	-18.2	< .001
46-55	Above 55	-15.8	< .001

Pairwise comparisons - Social Media Engagement

		W	p
26-35	36-45	-18.3	< .001
26-35	46-55	-16.8	< .001
26-35	Above 55	-16.7	< .001
36-45	46-55	-18.0	< .001
36-45	Above 55	-17.9	< .001
46-55	Above 55	-15.8	< .001

Pairwise comparisons - Information Quality on Social Media

		W	p
26-35	36-45	-18.1	< .001
26-35	46-55	-15.9	< .001
26-35	Above 55	-15.8	< .001

Pairwise comparisons - Information Quality on Social Media

		W	p
36-45	46-55	-18.0	< .001
36-45	Above 55	-17.9	< .001
46-55	Above 55	-15.8	< .001

Pairwise comparisons - Social Media Influence

		W	p
26-35	36-45	-18.3	< .001
26-35	46-55	-16.8	< .001
26-35	Above 55	-16.7	< .001
36-45	46-55	-16.0	< .001
36-45	Above 55	-17.9	< .001
46-55	Above 55	-15.8	< .001

Pairwise comparisons - Trust in Social Media Information

		W	p
26-35	36-45	-18.3	< .001
26-35	46-55	-15.9	< .001
26-35	Above 55	-16.7	< .001
36-45	46-55	-18.3	< .001
36-45	Above 55	-18.4	< .001
46-55	Above 55	-10.1	< .001

The results show that it is not only one age group where the difference is noticed but across all the groups there are significant levels of differences observed. This shows that the agreement levels for each of the factors in the study fluctuates according to the age group of the tourists.

After the statistical analyses conducted, here are the final status of the hypotheses set for the purpose of the study.

Hypothesis	Status
H <sub>01</sub> : There is a significant impact of social media engagement on the trust of the tourists on social media information.	Accepted
H <sub>02</sub> : There is a significant impact of information quality on social media on the trust of the tourists on social media information.	Accepted
H <sub>03</sub> : There is a significant impact of social media influence on the trust of the tourists on social media information.	Accepted
H <sub>04</sub> : There is a significant impact of trust of the tourists on social media information as a mediator on their overall perception about Meghalaya.	Rejected

The detailed discussion on the findings are provided in the next section.

## 5. Discussion

The role of social media in tourism has been highlighted by many researchers in the past and the study here is also an attempt to contribute towards the current body of knowledge. The primary area of tourism that is considered for the study revolves around nature based tourism which is highly prevalent in the present times. India is naturally endowed with flora and fauna which allows it to promote nature base to raising across tourists around the world. The study here however considers the region of East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya to be investigated specifically as a part of this quantitative study. The region has shown tremendous tourist footfalls in the past few years and holds the potential of being one of the prominent nature based tourism spots. There are 395 primary responses collected from tourists who have been to make earlier in the past years. The collected data has been analysed using appropriate statistical tools which has led to the identification of the factors established in the study. The overall perception held by the respondent towards the region has been estimated by understanding their social media engagement, the information quality on social media and the social media influence on them. The role of trust has been established as important when considering the social media information by researchers such as (Kitsios et al., 2022; Pop et al., 2022; Wang & Yan, 2022) and this study has also found the impactful role of it. The trust on the social media information generated and used for the purpose of tourism can effectively mediate the relationship between the overall perception derived and the established independent variables. The partial mediation reflects that the rule of trust can be significant when trying to establish the perception about nature-based tourism spots using social media. The results are in line with those provided by (Islam, 2021; Keshavarz, 2021; Narangajavana Kaosiri et al., 2019) mentions the importance of these factors and establishes their importance in case of tourism. The study bridges the gap of less focus on the nature based aspect of tourism and highlights the role played by social media and how it can be effectively used in the future. Here are some of the recommendations based on the findings that can be practically implied in the future for better to raise football across the nature based tourism spots.

The use of social media can be done strategically to establish tourism In regions promoting nature based tourism by a number of ways. Destination marketers should invest in creating high-quality, visually appealing, and engaging content to be shared on social media platforms. This includes professional photographs, videos, virtual tours, and storytelling that highlight the natural beauty, unique features, and experiences available at the tourism spot. The use of modern technology that can be provided to the social media platforms should be incorporated into the marketing strategies to enhance the interest of the tourists. The role of user generated content is highly influential in the present time as they are considered to be authentic by the users. Encourage tourists to share their experiences on social media by creating campaigns and incentives. Hashtag campaigns, photo contests, and rewards for sharing posts can increase the visibility of positive experiences, contributing to a favourable destination image. In the case of nature based tourism, instead of going forward with influencers, it would be more relatable to the targeted audience if they can observe the community based programs or representatives on social media. Engaging the local community in social media campaigns can create a sense of ownership and pride. Featuring local culture, traditions, and community stories can enrich the tourist experience and promote social inclusion. Overall there are a number of opportunities that can be utilised to social media for enhancing tourism in an area such as Meghalaya as the influence of social media and their level of trust is established clearly in the study.

## 6. Conclusion

The study here has been successful in understanding the role of social media for evaluating the perception of the tourist about nature based tourism. The statistical analyses conducted as a part of the study has validated the role of trust on social media information as a mediator along with identifying the level of impact caused by social media influence and engagement on developing the perception about nature based tourism sport. The study also establishes the theoretical framework that can be used further to conduct a study of similar nature. As social media platforms continue to dominate the information landscape, their influence on potential tourists' decision-making processes has become increasingly significant. The stock of user-generated content available on social media, including reviews, photos, videos, and personal narratives, serves as a critical source of information that directly impacts tourists' perceptions and expectations.

In the future course of studies, the role of user generated content specifically can be understood. It can also undertake longitudinal studies to understand the comparative aspect of using social media information for tourism purposes. Moreover, the need to explore more on different aspects of nature based tourism in India is also suggested.

## References

1. Abbasi, A. Z., Rather, R. A., Hooi Ting, D., Nisar, S., Hussain, K., Khwaja, M. G., & Shamim, A. (2024). Exploring tourism-generated social media communication, brand equity, satisfaction, and loyalty: A PLS-SEM-based multi-sequential approach. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 30(1), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667221118651>
2. Chen, X., Hyun, S. S., & Lee, T. J. (2022). The effects of parasocial interaction, authenticity, and self-congruity on the formation of consumer trust in online travel agencies. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 24(4), 563–576. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2522>
3. Conti, E., & Lexhagen, M. (2020). Instagramming nature-based tourism experiences: a netnographic study of online photography and value creation. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 34, 100650. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100650>
4. Divisekera, S., & Nguyen, V. K. (2018). Determinants of innovation in tourism evidence from Australia. *Tourism Management*, 67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.01.010>
5. Erawan, T., & Krairit, D. (2020). Responsible Tourism Consumption in Thailand: eWOM's Role. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, 2(42), 471–485.
6. Gaffar, V., Tjahjono, B., Abdullah, T., & Sukmayadi, V. (2022). Like, tag and share: bolstering social media marketing to improve intention to visit a nature-based tourism destination. *Tourism Review*, 77(2), 451–470. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-05-2020-0215>
7. Hausmann, A., Toivonen, T., Fink, C., Heikinheimo, V., Kulkarni, R., Tenkanen, H., & Di Minin, E. (2020). Understanding sentiment of national park visitors from social media data. *People and Nature*, 2(3), 750–760. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10130>
8. Islam, Md. T. (2021). Applications of Social Media in the Tourism Industry: A Review. *SEISENSE Journal of Management*, 4(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.33215/sjom.v4i1.556>
9. Keshavarz, H. (2021). Evaluating credibility of social media information: current challenges, research directions and practical criteria. *Information Discovery and Delivery*, 49(4), 269–279. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IDD-03-2020-0033>
10. Kilipiri, E., Papaioannou, E., & Kotzaivazoglou, I. (2023). Social Media and Influencer Marketing for Promoting Sustainable Tourism Destinations: The Instagram Case. *Sustainability*, 15(8), 6374. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15086374>
11. Kim, Y., Kim, C., Lee, D. K., Lee, H., & Andrada, R. II. T. (2019). Quantifying nature-based tourism in protected areas in developing countries by using social big data. *Tourism Management*, 72, 249–256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.12.005>
12. Kitsios, F., Mitsopoulou, E., Moustaka, E., & Kamariotou, M. (2022). User-Generated Content behavior and digital tourism services: A SEM-neural network model for information trust in social networking sites. *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 2(1), 100056. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jjime.2021.100056>
13. Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*. Small-Sample Techniques. The NEA Research Bulletin, 38.
14. Li, M.-W., Teng, H.-Y., & Chen, C.-Y. (2020). Unlocking the customer engagement-brand loyalty relationship in tourism social media: The roles of brand attachment and customer trust. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 184–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.06.015>
15. Machado Carvalho, M. A. (2024). Influencing the follower behavior: the role of homophily and perceived usefulness, credibility and enjoyability of travel content. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 7(2), 1091–1110. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-09-2023-0648>
16. Moore, S. A., Rodger, K., & Taplin, R. (2015). Moving beyond visitor satisfaction to loyalty in nature-based tourism: a review and research agenda. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 18(7), 667–683. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2013.790346>



17. Moyle, B. D., Scherrer, P., Weiler, B., Wilson, E., Caldicott, R., & Nielsen, N. (2017). Assessing preferences of potential visitors for nature-based experiences in protected areas. *Tourism Management*, 62, 29–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.03.010>
18. Narangajavana Kaosiri, Y., Callarisa Fiol, L. J., Moliner Tena, M. Á., Rodríguez Artola, R. M., & Sánchez García, J. (2019). User-Generated Content Sources in Social Media: A New Approach to Explore Tourist Satisfaction. *Journal of Travel Research*, 58(2), 253–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287517746014>
19. Perez-Vega, R., Taheri, B., Farrington, T., & O’Gorman, K. (2018). On being attractive, social and visually appealing in social media: The effects of anthropomorphic tourism brands on Facebook fan pages. *Tourism Management*, 66, 339–347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.11.013>
20. Pop, R.-A., Săplăcan, Z., Dabija, D.-C., & Alt, M.-A. (2022). The impact of social media influencers on travel decisions: the role of trust in consumer decision journey. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(5), 823–843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1895729>
21. Rao Hill, S., & Qesja, B. (2023). Social media influencer popularity and authenticity perception in the travel industry. *The Service Industries Journal*, 43(5–6), 289–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2022.2149740>
22. Rasheed, I. (2020). Social Media and Tourism Industry in Kashmir. *Journal of Engineering Sciences*, 11(4).
23. Sergiacomi, C., Vuletić, D., Paletto, A., Barbierato, E., & Fagarazzi, C. (2022). Exploring National Park Visitors’ Judgements from Social Media: The Case Study of Plitvice Lakes National Park. *Forests*, 13(5), 717. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f13050717>
24. Statista Research Department. (2023, November 7). Total travel and tourism spending worldwide from 2019 to 2022, by type. Statista.
25. Tolkach, D., & Pratt, S. (2021). Travel Professors: A YouTube channel about tourism education & research. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 28, 100307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2021.100307>
26. Vijay, D., & Ravichandran, K. (2019). Consumer Behaviour in Tourism. *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)*, 5(12), 113–118.
27. Wang, H., & Yan, J. (2022). Effects of social media tourism information quality on destination travel intention: Mediation effect of self-congruity and trust. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1049149>
28. Winter, P. L., Selin, S., Cervený, L., & Bricker, K. (2019). Outdoor Recreation, Nature-Based Tourism, and Sustainability. *Sustainability*, 12(1), 81. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12010081>
29. Wozniak, T., Schaffner, D., Stanoevska-Slabeva, K., & Lenz-Kesekamp, V. (2018). Psychological antecedents of mobile consumer behaviour and implications for customer journeys in tourism. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 18(1–4), 85–112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-017-0101-8>
30. Yılmazdoğan, O. C., Doğan, R. Ş., & Altıntaş, E. (2021). The impact of the source credibility of Instagram influencers on travel intention: The mediating role of parasocial interaction. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 27(3), 299–313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766721995973>
31. Zou, J. M. M. L., & Prasain, Dr. G. P. (2017). North-Eastern States Tourism: Exploring the Unexplored On Earth . *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science*, 22(8), 35–40.