



## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' CREDIBILITY AND PARASOCIAL INTERACTION IN SHAPING DESTINATION IMAGE AND TRAVEL INTENTION

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### ABSTRACT

Social media influencers (SMIs) have emerged as one of the most impactful sources to learn about destinations for domestic tourists for the Indian market with the increasing popularity of travel influencer content on Social media. However, the mechanisms by which the attributes of influencers manifest in the formation of destination images and travel motivation are not well studied in the Indian context. This study synthesizes two of the most theoretically explicit constructs that have emerged from the influencer side literature: Source Credibility (SC) – the perception of an influencer's knowledge, trustworthiness and likeability, and Parasocial Interaction (PSI) – the sense of being connected with the influencer over time. The study is built on three theories namely Stimulus-Organism-Response, Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Relationship Theory, and then hypothesizes seven and tests them using PLS-SEM with a sample of 370 domestic tourists in India. Source Credibility comes up as the stronger predictor of Destination Image ( $b = 0.234$ ) and para-social interaction also plays a significant role ( $b = 0.198$ ). The regression coefficient of the variable, Destination Image is significant for predicting the variable, Travel Intention ( $b = 0.152$ ). Mediation analysis shows that there is a complementary partial mediation for Source Credibility and a full mediation for Parasocial Interaction, meaning the two mechanisms manifest themselves differently in the variable of travel motivation. The results are directly applicable for designing influencer campaigns and Destination Marketing Strategy in the Indian domestic tourism environment.

**KEYWORDS :** Source Credibility, Parasocial Interaction, Destination Image, Travel Intention, Social Media Influencers, Instagram, PLS-SEM, India

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Social media travel influencer is one of the most impactful and swift changing trends influencing Indian tourists to plan and pick their holiday destinations today. Travel blogs and websites, which use rich imagery, short videos, and engaging stories to showcase a destination, have replaced traditional travel guides, tourism board ads and even fellow tourists' recommendations as a major source of destination inspiration for a large and growing number of domestic tourists in India within just a few years (Pourazad et al., 2025; Saini et al., 2023). It is important to both theory and practice to understand what about an influencer pushes the follower to consider a positive image of a destination they have their foot in and eventually to make a trip there.

This study concentrates on two attributes of an influencer which have received a lot of theoretical focus but have not been formally compared in a joint model in the Indian context. The first, Source Credibility, involves the audience's evaluation of the overall credibility of the communicator, which includes perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). There is a huge amount of literature in the endorsement literature as well as the advertising literature about source credibility, and it is also a very logical starting point for the discussion of the effect of the attributes of travel influencers on destination image because they are treated by their followers as a travel companion (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). The second is Parasocial Interaction (PSI), which refers to the unidirectional feeling of a relationship of familiarity, friendship, and connection that regular consumers of an influencer's content feel towards the influencer (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Unlike credibility, PSI is relational, not evaluative in nature; a follower could see an influencer as credible, but not feel close to them and vice versa.

Although many individual studies were conducted on both constructs, their combined and comparative impact on destination image and travel intention within a single formal

model in Indian domestic tourism context has not been explored. This is important because the two mechanisms are expected to function differently: Source Credibility, a rational assessment of the influencer's credentials, is expected to impact destination image via central and peripheral processing routes and is expected to have a residual direct effect on travel intention; PSI, an affective relational mechanism, is expected to impact travel intention primarily through the image formation process. Testing both together within an S-O-R framework will enable the relative contributions and different pathways to be carefully determined.

Seven hypotheses are developed and tested on a sample of 370 Indian domestic tourists who actively follow travel influencers on Social media, using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. The study contributes to the SMI-tourism literature by providing the first formal joint test of Source Credibility and Parasocial Interaction as co-antecedents of Destination Image and Travel Intention in the Indian context, and by documenting their theoretically distinct mediation patterns through Destination Image.

### 2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

#### 2.1 The S-O-R Framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in environmental psychology, proposes that environmental stimuli activate internal cognitive and affective states in the individual, which in turn produce behavioural responses. Applied to the travel influencer context, Secilmis et al. (2022) confirmed that influencer-side stimuli shaped destination image as the internal organism state, which subsequently predicted visit intention as the behavioural response. In the present study, Source Credibility and Parasocial Interaction constitute the two stimuli; Destination Image, operationalised as a higher-order construct comprising Cognitive Destination Image (CDI) and Affective Destination Image (ADI), is the organism; and Travel Intention is the behavioural response.

## 2.2 Source Credibility and Destination Image

Source Credibility Theory, developed by Hovland et al. (1953) and operationalised for endorsement contexts by Ohanian (1990), proposes that the persuasive impact of a communicator depends on the audience's perception of their expertise, the degree to which they are seen as knowledgeable and experienced in the subject domain; trustworthiness, the degree to which they are perceived as honest and reliable; and attractiveness, the degree to which they are seen as physically and socially appealing. In the travel influencer world, these three elements all factor into how open-minded followers are to an influencer's destination promotion. Yilmazdogan et al. (2021) showed that the credibility level of the social media influencers played a significant role in the travel intention that emerged in the study with an intermediary of destination image among the Turkish Instagram users. Additionally, Wang and Huang (2025) demonstrated that source credibility attributes were related to both central and peripheral processing routes to influence the cognitive and affective destination images via the Elaboration Likelihood Model. Accordingly:

**H1: Source Credibility has a Significant Positive Effect on Destination Image.**

## 2.3 Parasocial Interaction and Destination Image

First theorized by Horton and Wohl (1956), Parasocial Interaction is where the audience attributes a sense of "face-to-face" interaction with a media figure when they consume a character's media content repeatedly, over an extended period, which is presented in a one-sided fashion. Even though it is non-reciprocated, parasocial relationships have several psychological characteristics of real social relationships: the viewers of the influencer feel a certain familiarity with the personality, as well as concern about what happens in the life of this person; they listen to what the personality says, as if they were speaking to a close social acquaintance. Labrecque (2014) extended this idea into the social media context and found that parasocial relationships, created through social media like Twitter and Instagram, played a significant role in strengthening the relationship between consumers and their brands and their attitudinal response. In the tourism context, Ye et al. (2025) demonstrated that parasocial engagement with travel bloggers was positively associated with greater affective involvement with the destinations featured in the blog post. It is mostly an affective mechanism: when a follower perceives himself/herself being emotionally attached to the travel influencer, travel experiences to the destination become emotionally meaningful, therefore creating warmer and vivid affective destination associations. Accordingly:

**H2: Parasocial Interaction has a Significant Positive Effect on Destination Image.**

## 2.4 Destination Image and Travel Intention

The definition of destination image as 'the total of a person's beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a destination' (Crompton, 1979, p. 18) states that it is composed of beliefs, ideas, and impressions held in the mind of a person regarding a destination. It is one of the antecedents with the longest documentation in the tourism marketing literature (Chen and Tsai, 2007; Jalilvand et al., 2012). The cognitive aspect (rational beliefs with regard to destination attributes) as well as the affective aspect (emotional associations with the destination) has both been independently found to be important predictors of visit intention (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Accordingly:

**H3: Destination Image has a significant positive effect on Travel Intention.**

## 2.5 Direct Effects on Travel Intention

In addition to the DI-mediated pathway, both antecedents can also have residual direct effects on Travel Intention. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986)

indicates that, when a source is highly credible, it can directly affect the intention to change through the central processing route without having to influence the evaluative beliefs that make up destination image. The effects of influencer credibility on travel intention were confirmed to be significant in this study by Yilmazdogan et al. (2021) in Turkish sample. Theoretically, Parasocial Interaction has a weaker direct effect on Travel Intention: Parasocial Interaction is mediated by the affective resonance and personalization of destination experiences, which is mostly conveyed through the vehicle of destination image formation. However, it is not possible to rule out, solely theoretically, a direct PSI effect on travel motivation. Accordingly:

**H4: Source Credibility has a Significant Positive Effect on Travel Intention.**

**H5: Parasocial Interaction has a Significant Positive Effect on Travel Intention.**

## 2.6 The Mediating Role of Destination Image

In the S-O-R model, the perceptual state in which the influencer stimuli are translated to travel motivation is Destination Image. Regarding Source Credibility, Zhao et al. (2010) would forecast supplementary partial mediation: that is, the credibility signal prompts travel both directly and indirectly (via the image formation pathway), and both effects are positive and significant. In Parasocial Interaction, the relation mechanism is assumed to primarily influence destination image formation and the affective transfer from the influencer relation to the destination is assumed to be the primary channel of travel to intention. This logic would expect indirect-only (full) mediation for PSI. Accordingly:

**H6: Destination Image Mediates the Relationship Between Source Credibility and Travel Intention.**

**H7: Destination Image Mediates the Relationship Between Parasocial Interaction and Travel Intention.**

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design and Sample

A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with the Indian domestic tourists who follow at least one traveler's account on social media. A structured, self-administered online questionnaire was used for data collection and was sent to an appropriate number of respondents in each location sample, known as quota sampling, to represent each age, gender, and geographic group as a part of the Northern Indian tourism corridors—Delhi NCR, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan. Attention check items were used to identify inattentive respondents. For the current analysis, a sub-sample of N = 370 usable responses was used. The sample comprised 188 males (50.81%) and 182 females (49.19%), with age distributed across four cohorts: 18-25 years (30.54%), 26-35 years (30.00%), 36-45 years (23.24%), and above 45 years (16.22%). Instagram accounted for 41.62% of respondents' main platform to follow influencers, followed by YouTube (33.51%) and Facebook (20.27%). Over half of the sample had been following travel influencers for more than a year, suggesting they are rather experienced and engaged followers.

### 3.2 MEASURES

The concept of Source Credibility (SC) was operationalized as a second-order reflective-reflective construct, consisting of three first-order sub-dimensions: Expertise (five items), Trustworthiness (five items) and Attractiveness (five items), adopted from Ohanian (1990) and validated for the context of this study. Five items were adapted from Labrecque (2014) and Ye et al. (2025) to reflect the feelings of familiarity, friendliness, interpersonal warmth, and familiarity that followers have with the travel influencer (e.g., "I feel like I know this travel influencer personally"). In order to operationalize Destination Image (DI) sub-dimensions were created as first-order reflective-reflective constructs, namely Cognitive Destination Image (CDI, 6 items) from Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and

Affective Destination Image (ADI, 5 items) from Russell and Pratt (1980). Four items adapted from Jalilvand et al. (2012) and Chen and Tsai (2007) were used to assess Travel Intention (TI). All items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). Content validity was established through expert panel review by three tourism marketing scholars, and a pilot study (N = 50) confirmed preliminary reliability prior to full data collection.

**3.3 Analytical Method**

For analysis of the data, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used in line with the two-stage approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The approach of repeated indicators was used in this study to specify the higher-order Destination Image construct (Hair et al., 2022). All significance tests, such as mediation (Preacher and Hayes, 2008), used bootstrap with 10,000 subsamples and bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) 95% confidence intervals. To evaluate the presence of common method bias, an unrotated principal axis factoring solution was computed, with the first factor accounting for 34.11% of the variance, which falls short of the 40–50% limit (Podsakoff et al., 2003). All outer VIF values were less than 3.3, indicating that there is no common method bias between the results (Kock, 2015).

**4. RESULTS**

**4.1 Measurement Model Assessment**

Table 1 presents the reliability and convergent validity results for all constructs. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.707 to 0.947, rho\_A values from 0.740 to 0.948, and composite reliability (CR) values from 0.870 to 0.958, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2019). Average variance extracted (AVE) values range from 0.675 to 0.830, all exceeding the 0.50 threshold (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), confirming convergent validity. All outer loadings exceeded the 0.708 threshold. Discriminant validity was confirmed via the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT): all construct pairs returned HTMT values below the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion was satisfied at both first-order and second-order levels.

**Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs**

Construct	Cronbach's $\alpha$	rho_A	CR	AVE
Source Credibility (SC — 2nd order)	0.851	0.866	0.909	0.770
Expertise	0.933	0.935	0.949	0.790
Trustworthiness	0.942	0.942	0.956	0.811
Attractiveness	0.929	0.933	0.946	0.779
Parasocial Interaction (PSI)	0.879	0.886	0.912	0.675
Destination Image (DI — 2nd order)	0.707	0.740	0.870	0.771
Cognitive DI (CDI)	0.947	0.948	0.958	0.791
Affective DI (ADI)	0.942	0.943	0.954	0.777
Travel Intention (TI)	0.931	0.934	0.951	0.830

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Source: SmartPLS 4 generated results.

**4.2 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing**

The structural model explains 28.7% of the variance in Destination Image (R2 = 0.287) and 32.4% of the variance in Travel Intention (R2 = 0.324). Q2 values exceeded 0.35 for both endogenous constructs, confirming large predictive relevance (Shmueli et al., 2019). Model fit was acceptable: the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.056, below the 0.08 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015). All inner VIF values were below 3.3 (Kock, 2015). Table 2 presents the results for all seven hypotheses.

**Table 2: Direct Effects, Indirect Effects, and Hypothesis Testing Results**

Hypothesis / Path	$\beta$	t-statistic	p-value	95% BCa CI	Result
H1: SC → DI	0.234	4.627	< 0.001	[0.138, 0.329]	Supported
H2: PSI → DI	0.198	3.824	< 0.001	[0.097, 0.299]	Supported
H3: DI → TI	0.152	2.198	0.028	[0.018, 0.286]	Supported
H4: SC → TI (direct)	0.218	3.614	< 0.001	[0.100, 0.335]	Supported
H5: PSI → TI (direct)	0.079	1.412	0.158	[-0.029, 0.194]	Not Supported
H6: SC → DI → TI (indirect)	0.036	2.204	0.028	[0.006, 0.070]	Supported (Complementary Mediation)
H7: PSI → DI → TI (indirect)	0.030	1.992	0.047	[0.001, 0.064]	Supported (Full Mediation)

Note: BCa = Bias-Corrected and Accelerated; R2 DI = 0.287; R2 TI = 0.324; N = 370; Bootstrapping: 10,000 subsamples. Source: SmartPLS 4 generated results.

H1 is supported: Source Credibility significantly and positively predicts Destination Image (b = 0.234, t = 4.627, p < 0.001), confirming that followers who perceive a travel influencer as credible form more favourable images of the destinations they feature. At the sub-dimension level, Attractiveness (loading 0.904) and Trustworthiness (loading 0.893) load more strongly onto the second-order SC construct than Expertise (loading 0.834), suggesting that peripheral credibility cues carry greater weight than knowledge-based signals on social media. H2 is supported: Parasocial Interaction significantly and positively predicts Destination Image (b = 0.198, t = 3.824, p < 0.001), confirming that the sense of a personal relationship with the influencer generates richer and more emotionally resonant destination associations. Source Credibility demonstrates the stronger effect on Destination Image of the two, consistent with the proposition that evaluative credibility judgements activate deeper destination information processing than the relational PSI mechanism.

H3 is supported: Destination Image significantly and positively predicts Travel Intention (b = 0.152, t = 2.198, p = 0.028), validating the S-O-R proposition that the internal perceptual state of destination image is a significant driver of travel motivation. H4 is supported: Source Credibility also exerts a significant direct effect on Travel Intention (b = 0.218, t = 3.614, p < 0.001), confirming that the persuasive force of a credible influencer reaches travel intention through a route that operates independently of destination image formation. H5 is not supported: Parasocial Interaction does not exert a significant direct effect on Travel Intention (b = 0.079, p = 0.158), indicating that its motivational impact is entirely channelled through the destination image formation process. Regarding mediation, H6 is supported with complementary partial mediation: the indirect effect of Source Credibility on Travel Intention through Destination Image is significant (b = 0.036, p = 0.028, 95% BCa CI [0.006, 0.070]), and the direct SC→TI path is also significant. Since both effects are positive and significant, this constitutes complementary mediation (Zhao et al., 2010): Destination Image partially but not fully mediates the Source Credibility-Travel Intention relationship. H7 is supported with full (indirect-only) mediation: the indirect effect of Parasocial Interaction on Travel Intention through Destination Image is significant (b = 0.030, p = 0.047, 95% BCa CI [0.001, 0.064]), whilst the direct PSI→TI effect is not, confirming that Destination Image fully mediates the Parasocial Interaction-Travel Intention relationship.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Source Credibility: A Dual-Route Driver of Travel Intention

As seen, the finding of the determinant contribution of Source Credibility to Destination Image is in line with the dominance of credibility in influencer marketing literature (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021; Wang and Huang, 2025). If followers believe a travel influencer has knowledge, trustworthiness and attractiveness, then they are more likely to focus on the destination information presented by the influencer, which leads to richer and positive cognitive and affective destination beliefs. There is one exception to this loading pattern for the second-order SC construct that is worth noting: Attractiveness (0.904) loaded more heavily than Trustworthiness (0.893) that loaded more heavily than Expertise (0.834) with this pattern being consistent with the peripheral route logic of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). Instagram is a fast-scrolling, image-driven platform where beauty and authenticity are accepted and understood before content authoritative asserts itself.

The most practically significant results of the study are the findings of the complementary partial mediation of Source Credibility. It demonstrates that credibility influences travel intention by the mediated pathway of destination image formation and the direct pathway without using the image formation pathway. The direct channel may be the power of credibility itself and works via the central processing route, that is, when the influencer is perceived as very credible, the follower's confidence in the destination recommendation is adequate to trigger travel intention directly, without the need for forming elaborate destination beliefs. This result is similar to Yilmazdogan et al. (2021) who observed a strong direct path between credibility and intention, but did not directly test the mediated path in the same model.

### 5.2 Parasocial Interaction: A Destination Image Mechanism

The Parasocial Interaction finding is an important mediation in theory and revelation in practice. The authors state that the parasocial bond between a follower and a travel influencer is not enough to influence travel intention; the total motivation that comes from the PSI through travel behavior is mediated by the formation of a favorable Destination Image. This is a clear and unambiguous result that helps us to understand the functional importance of PSI in the causal chain from influencer to intention.

The parasocial relationship can be best understood as an amplifier of destination image formation, whereby followers who feel personal proximity to the influencer engage in an empathic way with the influencer's destination experiences, imagining themselves in the influencer's travels and thus creating a more emotionally charged and richer destination image. These representations, and not the sense of proximity, are what eventually inspire the visit intention.

The results align with Labrecque (2014) who reported that parasocial relationships on social media reinforced the relationship between consumers and brands mainly through the attitudinal and evaluative processes, and Ye et al. (2025) that parasocial interactions between consumers and travel bloggers influence destination attitudes, which in turn influence consumers' willingness to visit the destination. The effect is compared to Source Credibility: It is evident that PSI is more selective in its action since it acts on the image formation process but not on the direct persuasion process as is the case with Source Credibility. For DMOs, this translates to campaigns that focus on creating parasocial relationships between audiences and influencers are investments in quality of their destination brand and should be evaluated as such.

### 5.3 Differential Mediation and the S-O-R Organism

Taken together, the complementary mediation for SC and full

mediation for PSI provide theoretical evidence that Destination Image functions as a selective rather than uniform mediator in the S-O-R chain: its completeness as an intermediary depends on the theoretical mechanism of the antecedent stimulus. This nuance extends both the S-O-R application of Secilmis et al. (2022) and the mediation typology of Zhao et al. (2010) in the SMI-tourism context. It also has implications for how future studies model the influencer-to-intention pathway: assuming that Destination Image provides full mediation for all influencer-side stimuli, as several prior studies have done implicitly, risks misspecifying the model and misattributing the total effect of credibility to the image formation mechanism when a portion is in fact a direct persuasion effect.

## 6. Implications

### 6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three contributions to theory. First, it provides the first formal joint test of Source Credibility and Parasocial Interaction as co-antecedents of Destination Image and Travel Intention in the present context, establishing their relative contributions under controlled conditions and enabling direct comparison for the first time. Second, the differential mediation results (SC only in the SMI-tourism domain, complementary in the PSI) help to advance the theory of the S-O-R framework in the SMI-tourism domain by providing evidence of the systematic difference between the completeness of the Destination Image's mediating role. Third, the study validates Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990) and Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956) for the context of Indian travelers today and provides value to the theory of credibility in the visual social media environment by validating the pattern of loading of sub-dimensions (Attractiveness and Trustworthiness over Expertise).

### 6.2 Managerial Implications

The finding for Source Credibility is simple to apply in practice for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), state tourism boards and travel brands – when performing Instagram-specific campaigns; it makes sense to favour Attractiveness and Trustworthiness over domain Expertise for influencers. The visual appeal and seeming authenticity and honesty of the content will provide a greater overall contribution to the travel motivation pathway (image formation pathway plus direct credibility-persuasion pathway) than an expert but distant content creator. In addition to the more widely used reach and engagement measures, DMOs should create rubrics to measure audience trust, comment sentiment analysis and perceived authenticity.

The full finding of mediation for PSI is of other practical effect. Because PSI can occur only through destination image formation, campaigns designed to create parasocial relationships between audiences and travel influencers must be able to take time to develop PSI to a level that would enrich destination image formation, and then the resulting image would drive travel intentions. This is a strong sign that it's better to work with influencers for the long-term in the form of multiple posts than single posts. Partnerships with influencers should be based on an 'event over time' approach, and be built out over a six to twelve month period, rather than a single promotion per post to grant enough exposure for PSI to build.

### 7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study has its own set of limitations that suggest fruitful avenues for future studies. This cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences on the temporal development of parasocial bonds and the sequence of image formation. This is especially important in the case of PSI, as parasocial relationships might be more salient to longer-term followers than shorter-term ones because of their influence on destination image, which may be stronger. A longitudinal

study that followed up those who followed the influencers over several months of time would allow researchers to model the development of PSI and how it increased over time, as well as how it changed the image of the destination.

The study is limited to Instagram as another major platform for consuming travel influencer content in India is YouTube. YouTube videos that are longer (typically narrative) may have a higher PSI than the shorter videos that are usually more visually compelling on Instagram, which could impact the relative effect of SC and PSI on the destination image. The present model needs to be tested on the two platforms to make sure the results of the SC-dominance finding are platform specific or generalizes across content forms.

The model does not consider the role of moderating factors like level of the influencer, familiarity with the destination or previous travel experiences of the follower. Moderation of the full mediation finding for PSI might be moderated by familiarity of the destination, in other words, when the follower has already been to the destination the parasocial bond could be experienced more directly and without the mediation of image formation, leading to a higher revisit intention. This and other boundary conditions should be tested and the model be expanded to a geographically representative pan-India sample to enhance the generalizability of the results.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This study examined the joint role of Source Credibility and Parasocial Interaction in shaping Destination Image and Travel Intention among Indian social media users ( $N = 370$ ) using PLS-SEM within an S-O-R framework. Six of seven hypotheses were supported. Source Credibility emerged as the stronger predictor of Destination Image ( $b = 0.234$  vs  $b = 0.198$ ) and was additionally found to exert a significant direct effect on Travel Intention, confirming the dual-pathway nature of credibility-based persuasion in the Instagram travel influencer context. Parasocial Interaction predicted Travel Intention exclusively through Destination Image formation, confirming that the relational mechanism operates as a destination image amplifier rather than a direct behavioural motivator. These differential mediation patterns, complementary for SC and full for PSI, enrich the S-O-R framework and carry concrete implications for influencer selection and partnership strategy in Indian domestic tourism marketing: credibility, particularly trustworthiness and visual attractiveness, should be the primary criterion for influencer selection; and sustained, multi-episode partnerships are needed to allow parasocial bonds the time to develop into meaningful destination image effects.

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