

Women, Digital Visibility and Tourism Work in Rajasthan: A Feminist Analysis of Instagram

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Abstract: *The rapid digitalisation of India's tourism industry has reshaped how destinations are produced, circulated, and consumed. Instagram, as a visual and engagement-oriented platform, has emerged as a significant space for tourism representation. This paper examines how Instagram functions as a feminist space for women operating within Rajasthan's tourism sector. Focusing on women travel influencers, bloggers, and digital entrepreneurs associated with Rajasthan, the study explores how social media visibility, personal branding, and platform-based entrepreneurship contribute to women's social, economic, and professional empowerment. Using a qualitative and conceptual comparative approach, the paper analyses content strategies, narrative positioning, audience engagement, and entrepreneurial practices of selected Instagram creators. The study argues that Instagram enables women to renegotiate gendered boundaries of travel, work, and cultural mediation in Rajasthan. The paper contributes to mapping pathways from digital visibility to empowerment in a regional Indian context.*

Keywords: Instagram, Women Empowerment, Tourism, Rajasthan, Digital Entrepreneurship, Feminist Media

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in India has increasingly become a digitally mediated industry, where destinations are discovered, evaluated, and experienced through online platforms. Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as a dominant medium due to its emphasis on visual storytelling, affective engagement, and influencer-led content. Rajasthan, one of India's most prominent tourism states, occupies a significant place in digital tourism through its heritage sites, cultural practices, landscapes, and crafts. Traditionally, tourism representation in Rajasthan has been shaped by state agencies, travel companies, and male-dominated narratives of exploration and authority. However, the rise of women-led Instagram travel accounts has altered this representational landscape.

This paper examines how Instagram operates as a feminist space that allows women to assert visibility, agency, and professional identity within Rajasthan's tourism sector. Rather than viewing empowerment as a singular outcome, the study conceptualises empowerment as a process involving visibility, narrative control, economic opportunity, and professional recognition. By analysing selected women Instagram creators associated with Rajasthan tourism, the paper investigates how digital platforms facilitate new forms of self-representation, and cultural mediation for women.

II. INSTAGRAM, TOURISM AND GENDER: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Instagram operates as both a media platform and an economic infrastructure. In tourism studies, it is understood as a space where destinations are visually produced, circulated, and evaluated through affective and participatory practices. John Urry's concept of the tourist gaze highlights how tourism is shaped by socially constructed ways of seeing, which are increasingly mediated by digital platforms. Instagram intensifies this gaze by privileging visibility, repetition, and aesthetic coherence.

From a feminist media perspective, digital platforms provide women with opportunities for self-representation, professional identity formation, and economic participation. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is useful in understanding how women travel creators repeatedly perform mobility, confidence, and expertise through images,



captions, and interactions. These performances do not merely reflect identity but actively constitute women as legitimate tourism actors in public digital space.

Rosalind Gill's work on post feminism and media culture further explains how empowerment on social media is often articulated through individual choice, visibility, and self-branding. Women influencers in tourism negotiate empowerment through entrepreneurial independence and creative labour, while simultaneously operating within market-driven and algorithmic constraints. In the context of Rajasthan tourism, this negotiation is particularly significant due to historically gendered restrictions on women's mobility and public presence.

Thus, Instagram can be understood as a conditional feminist space—one that enables agency and income generation, but also demands continuous self-surveillance, affective labour, and alignment with platform norms. This study adopts this framework to analyse how women Instagram creators in Rajasthan navigate empowerment, representation, and professional legitimacy.

III. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study adopts a qualitative and conceptual research design. It draws on close reading and comparative analysis of Instagram content produced by selected women travel influencers and digital entrepreneurs associated with Rajasthan tourism. The selection is based on visibility, consistency of tourism-related content, and their positioning as independent creators rather than institutional accounts. The analysis focuses on narrative themes, visual strategies, engagement practices, and forms of monetisation.

The influencers discussed include women who document travel within Rajasthan, promote local culture and heritage, collaborate with tourism brands, and build personal brands around mobility and storytelling. The paper does not aim to measure algorithmic reach quantitatively, but to analyse patterns of representation and empowerment qualitatively.

IV. WOMEN INSTAGRAM CREATORS IN RAJASTHAN TOURISM: A LOCALISED PERSPECTIVE –

To foreground regional specificity, this section focuses on women Instagram creators who are either Rajasthan-born or closely embedded in Rajasthan's cultural and linguistic context. These creators largely function as micro-influencers, with modest but engaged followings, and produce content in Hindi, Rajasthani, or bilingual registers. Their work differs from national-level influencers by prioritising local knowledge, everyday travel practices, and community-oriented narratives over aspirational luxury branding.

A. Pooja Rathore (@poojarathore_traveldiaries) - Pooja Rathore, based in Jaipur, produces travel content centred on heritage sites, local food, and lesser-known destinations across Rajasthan. Her use of Hindi captions and occasional Rajasthani expressions positions her content within a regional audience base. Her posts often emphasise affordability, safety, and cultural familiarity, making travel accessible to women from similar social backgrounds. This approach frames Instagram as a space of peer-based knowledge exchange rather than celebrity influence.

B. Neha Solanki (@nehasolanki_travels) - Neha Solanki's content focuses on small towns, stepwells, temples, and seasonal fairs in Rajasthan. Her visual style avoids heavy aesthetic filtering and instead foregrounds informational storytelling. By documenting local histories and everyday tourism spaces, she performs the role of a cultural mediator. Her content demonstrates how women can engage in tourism storytelling without conforming to dominant influencer aesthetics.

C. Manju Kanwar (@manjukanwar_jaipur) - Manju Kanwar combines travel with discussions of local crafts, textiles, and women artisans. Her Instagram presence highlights handloom markets, rural craft clusters, and women-led micro-enterprises. This intersection of travel and livelihood storytelling links digital visibility to sustainable tourism practices and women's economic participation at the grassroots level.

D. Rekha Devi (@rekhadevi_travels) - Rekha Devi's account documents solo and group travel experiences across Rajasthan using primarily Hindi captions. Her narratives address concerns of safety, family negotiation, and mobility, which are particularly relevant for women from conservative backgrounds. Her visibility challenges assumptions about who can travel independently within the state.



E. Kavita Meghwal (@kavitameghwal_travel) - Kavita Meghwal's travel content is rooted in rural Rajasthan and often includes Rajasthani dialect and folk references. Her posts document village landscapes, local festivals, and everyday tourism practices. This vernacular digital presence expands the representational scope of Rajasthan tourism beyond urban and heritage-centric narratives.

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A comparative analysis of these creators reveals diverse pathways to empowerment. While some emphasise large-scale branding and commercial collaborations, others focus on narrative depth, sustainability, or inclusivity. All, however, utilise Instagram's affordances to claim professional legitimacy in a field traditionally dominated by institutional voices.

Economically, Instagram enables monetisation through brand partnerships, content collaborations, and entrepreneurial expansion. Socially, visibility allows women to normalise independent travel and professional mobility. Professionally, these creators function as cultural intermediaries who influence tourism perceptions and consumer behaviour.

At the same time, algorithmic dependence and aesthetic expectations impose limits on feminist expression. The pressure to remain visible can reinforce normative beauty standards and commercial priorities. Empowerment through Instagram is therefore negotiated rather than absolute.

VI. DISCUSSION

instagram as a feminist space - Instagram operates as a feminist space not because it is inherently emancipatory, but because women strategically use it to negotiate power, labour, and representation. In Rajasthan tourism, women influencers reshape narratives of place, safety, culture, and sustainability. Their work demonstrates how digital platforms can open new professional avenues while also demanding constant self-performance.

The feminist potential of Instagram lies in its capacity to enable women to speak as experts, earn through creative labour, and redefine travel as a gender-inclusive practice. However, this potential remains shaped by platform capitalism and cultural expectations.

Limitations of the study - This study is based on qualitative and conceptual analysis of publicly available Instagram content and does not include audience interviews, creator self-reports, or quantitative engagement metrics. As a result, the findings reflect representational and narrative patterns rather than measurable economic outcomes. The selection of influencers is purposive and illustrative rather than exhaustive, and therefore does not represent all women engaged in tourism-related digital work in Rajasthan. Algorithmic processes influencing visibility are inferred from platform practices rather than empirically tested. Future research may adopt mixed-method approaches, including digital ethnography and interviews, to build on the insights presented here.

Conclusion

The paper argues that Instagram has become a significant site for women's empowerment in Rajasthan's tourism industry. Through visibility, storytelling, and digital entrepreneurship, women creators redefine gendered roles within tourism. While challenges remain, Instagram provides a mediated space where women can assert agency, build livelihoods, and influence tourism narratives. Future research may combine digital ethnography and audience studies to further examine the long-term implications of platform-based empowerment.

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