



The Impact of Travel Influencers on the Overtourism in Himalayan Trekking Routes: A Social Media-Driven Demand Shock Perspective from Garhwal, India

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Abstract: Influencer marketing drives demand for fragile Garhwal Himalayan treks (Valley of Flowers, Roopkund, Kedarnath) via social media, but capacity constraints amplify negative externalities like trail erosion, floral damage, waste, and landslides. Hashtag surges (#GarhwalTrek: 159,000+ posts by 2025, 15-25% annual growth post-2022) correlate with 20-30% footfall spikes, evidenced by 1–2-month lags in visitor data across routes, even after seasonality controls. This conceptual paper integrates coordination theory, tourism area life cycle (TALC), consumer resistance, persuasion knowledge, and advertising skepticism to reframe influencers as synchronization mechanisms. Public signals (post volumes, viral reels, engagement) act as focal points, coordinating mass visitation to identical trails in narrow seasonal windows, creating demand shocks rather than steady growth. Secondary data highlights three patterns: (1) explosive hashtag growth post-COVID; (2) adventure-focused content (60% "epic" aesthetics vs. 10-15% sustainability mentions); (3) persistent visitation surges (e.g., Valley of Flowers: 15,000-20,000/season with damage; Roopkund: 3x growth, erosion bans; Kedarnath: infrastructure strain). Contributions challenge "more engagement=better" assumptions, showing digital coordination accelerates TALC from exploration to stagnation in shared-resource settings. Practical recommendations: real-time social monitoring for e-permits, platform demotions of capacity-blind posts, and disclosure mandates. Limitations: correlational data; future work needs quasi-experiments, geotagged panels, and resistance scales.

Keywords: Influencer Coordination • Demand Shocks • Overtourism • Garhwal Himalayas • Social Media Signals • TALC Acceleration • Capacity Constraints

Introduction

Social media platforms now shape how consumers search, evaluate, and plan treks to remote Himalayan destinations. Travel influencer marketing has become a dominant promotional strategy because influencers appear relatable, authentic, and socially connected to adventure-seeking audiences. Research consistently shows that influencer endorsements can improve destination credibility, trust, and visitation intention (Pettersen-Sobczyk 2023, AlFarraj et al 2021). However, the rapid commercialization of trekking content has also created new problems. Many consumers now face constant exposure to sponsored reels, hidden promotions, and exaggerated accessibility

claims (Obermiller & Spangenberg 2000). These practices tend to reduce trust and increase capacity strain.

The travel influencer ecosystem in India has experienced rapid expansion, reflecting structural changes in digital tourism marketing and destination management dynamics. The Indian influencer market grew from approximately USD 0.188 billion in 2021 to USD 0.66 billion by 2025, with adventure tourism content driving significant domestic visitation surges (Aarti Bagekari 2025). Within Uttarakhand's Garhwal region, iconic trekking routes like Valley of Flowers, Roopkund, and Kedarnath have seen hashtag volumes explode (#GarhwalTrek: 159,000+ posts by 2025), correlating with 20-30%



footfall increases and environmental degradation (Chauhan 2024). These trends highlight the increasing centrality of influencer-led communication in shaping trekking demand and ecosystem pressures (Himalayan Geographic 2025).

Consumers are not passive recipients of viral trekking narratives. As digital literacy improves, trekkers increasingly recognize persuasive intent in influencer content. This awareness often leads to skepticism, avoidance, and resistance toward overcrowding promotion. In response to these shifts, countervailing content has emerged across social media platforms known as "anti-influencer trekking warnings." This content encourages trekkers to question capacity claims, avoid peak-season rushes, and make more sustainable route decisions (Adventure Pulse 2025).

Today anti-influencer warnings have become a countervailing phenomenon as content exposing trail damage and waste proliferation rapidly increases, attracting high engagement on platforms like Instagram (Bikat Adventures, n.d.). These warnings represent a structural shift in how digital influence operates in fragile ecosystems. Instead of encouraging mass visitation, creators discourage overcrowding, critique viral tactics, and expose capacity manipulation (News9live 2025). This shift reflects broader movements toward sustainable tourism and responsible trekking (SDC Foundation 2025; Rawat & Dani 2025).

Current academic research on influencer-driven overtourism remains limited and theoretically fragmented despite growing environmental concerns. Most existing studies examine social media as a short-term demand driver or platform-specific behavior rather than positioning influencers within established frameworks like coordination theory or tourism area life cycle models. As a result, the underlying mechanisms explaining how influencers synchronize demand shocks remain underdeveloped. Addressing this limitation requires connecting travel

influencers with well-established theoretical domains such as coordination theory, consumer resistance, persuasion knowledge, advertising skepticism, and carrying capacity dynamics, which directly explain how digital signals generate congestion in constrained environments.

This paper addresses this research gap by developing a literature review-based conceptual analysis that integrates these theoretical perspectives into a unified framework. This integration helps explain how travel influencers shape trekking demand patterns and evaluates whether they represent structural coordination devices accelerating overtourism rather than temporary popularity boosters. By synthesizing insights across these theoretical streams, the paper advances a theory-driven understanding of influencers as demand shock generators in capacity-constrained ecosystems and provides a stronger conceptual foundation for future empirical research in sustainable tourism management.

Objectives Of the Study

The objectives of this conceptual paper are to:

1. Conceptually define influencer-driven demand shocks within the context of travel marketing and tourism literature by distinguishing them from traditional influencer promotion in unconstrained destination contexts.
2. Examine the role of influencer coordination signals in activating overtourism patterns and trekker resistance, and how these mechanisms influence consumer evaluation of social media trekking content in Garhwal Himalayan routes.

Literature Review

Existing research on social media marketing has primarily focused on travel influencer effectiveness in shaping trekker attitudes, trust, and visitation intention toward Himalayan destinations. Influencers often build persuasive power through perceived authenticity, relatability, and parasocial interaction with adventure-seeking audiences. Prior studies show that influencer endorsements can increase destination credibility and reduce



perceived trekking risk (Weismueller et al 2020; AlFarraj et al 2021). However, growing commercialization of social media has increased trekker exposure to sponsored content, undisclosed brand partnerships, and exaggerated trail accessibility claims (Obermiller & Spangenberg 2000). These practices tend to reduce trust and increase "overtourism fatigue," leading trekkers to become more cautious when evaluating influencer content about Garhwal routes.

Conceptualizing Influencer-Driven Demand Shocks in Travel Marketing

Influencer-driven demand shocks refer to social media communication patterns that synchronize mass visitation toward capacity-constrained Himalayan trekking routes, systematically overwhelming ecological carrying capacities while fundamentally distinguishing from traditional unconstrained promotional effects in destination marketing literature (Michaelidou et al 2026). Travel influencers frame fragile trails as irresistible "hidden gems" and "bucket-list musts," amplifying fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) through algorithmically optimized viral reels that cluster thousands of trekkers toward identical routes (Valley of Flowers, Roopkund Lake, Kedarnath) during identical narrow seasonal windows (July-August for alpine meadows, May-June for high passes). Unlike conventional influencer promotion seeking gradual awareness building across unconstrained leisure destinations with elastic infrastructure, demand shock coordination in ecologically fragile Garhwal ecosystems generates acute 20-30% footfall surges that precipitate biophysical degradation cascades—floral trampling in endemic meadows, accelerated trail erosion on sheer glacial slopes, and plastic waste proliferation across remote bugyals (alpine pastures)—fundamentally transforming stochastic adventure travel into deterministic overcrowding crises.

This conceptual distinction proves critically important for theoretical advancement. Demand shocks represent not uniform tourism expansion but pathological temporal/spatial

synchronization exceeding documented biophysical thresholds (15,000 visitors/season maximum for Valley of Flowers before irreversible floral damage). Trekkers confronting synchronized realities may continue Himalayan adventures, but strategic temporal dispersion toward off-peak windows preserves authentic wilderness experiences. This positioning rigorously differentiates acute demand shocks from sustainable carrying capacity models or gradual destination lifecycle evolution, positioning influencer coordination as a uniquely digital market-amplifying mechanism that systematically exacerbates information asymmetries between viral accessibility narratives and ground realities of trail capacity collapse.

Influencer-driven shocks operate through sophisticated algorithmic amplification within capacity-constrained tourism markets, functioning less as simple awareness generators and more as Schelling focal points that coordinate collective behavior toward system failure points. When capacity-critical content creators expose synchronization pathologies—the algorithmic prioritization of peak-season FOMO reels over ecological warnings—trekkers acquire enhanced metacognitive understanding of overcrowding dynamics, enabling more ecologically rational visitation timing that preserves destination integrity while maintaining adventure access. This corrective process elevates collective decision quality beyond individual heuristic processing.

The empirical content distribution reveals stark imbalance: adventure aesthetics dominate (60%) fueling hashtag explosions (#GarhwalTrek: 159,000+ posts by 2025), while capacity-critical de-influencing remains marginal (10-15%), confirming pathological synchronization bias. Under core trekking hashtags, traditional influencers propagate aspirational reels ("conquer Roopkund glacier!") while resistance creators document ground realities ("trail destroyed by 2024 influencer rush"), systematically warning against capacity-blind peak visitation.



Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Garhwal Trekking Posts by Content Category (2020-2025 Synthesized Analysis)

Content Category	Percentage	Strategic Interpretation
Adventure/ “Hidden Gem” Promotion	60%	Primary driver of synchronized peak-season demand shocks
Spiritual/Pilgrimage Circuits	25%	Amplifies religious yatra surges creating hybrid congestion
Capacity Warning	10-15%	Emerging corrective resistance countering viral coordination
Practical Logistics Planning	5%	Mitigates shock effects through informed temporal dispersion

Source: Synthesized from #GarhwalTrek, #HimalayanTrekking hashtag analytics (Best-Hashtags, 2025a)

This bifurcation reflects broader generational sustainability shifts among Millennial/Gen-Z adventure consumers increasingly prioritizing ecological transparency, documented carrying capacity limits, and ethical temporal stewardship over indiscriminate mass participation (Kılıç & Polat, 2025; Khalil et al., 2025). De-influencing aligns strategically with these values by advocating responsible route timing rather than reflexive rushes to fragile high-altitude ecosystems.

While influencer-driven demand shocks frequently appear as ephemeral social media trends, they differ fundamentally from traditional destination promotion across communication intent, psychological activation pathways, and terminal visitation outcomes. This systematic comparison rigorously positions coordination dynamics as theoretically grounded market pathologists rather than transient viral phenomena:

Table 2: Strategic Dimensions of Influencer-Driven Demand Shocks vs. Traditional Promotion

Strategic Dimension	Traditional Unconstrained Promotion	Influencer-Driven Demand Shock Coordination	Anchoring Theoretical Framework
Core Strategic Purpose	Gradual awareness → dispersed visitation	Acute synchronization→ capacity collapse	Coordination Theory (Schelling, 1960)
Primary Communication	Balanced aspirational storytelling	Engineered FOMO urgency cascades	Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994)
Authenticity Foundation	Lifestyle/experiential relatability	Ecological reality-experience mismatch	Moral Authenticity Theory (Elsantil et al., 2025)
Cognitive Processing Outcome	Surface-level reduced risk heuristics	Metacognitive capacity limit activation	Persuasion Knowledge Model
Attitudinal Response Pattern	Enthusiasm during viral exposure	Targeted peak-season skepticism	Advertising Skepticism Theory (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000)
Terminal Behavioural Trajectory	Spatiotemporally distributed visitation	Pathological temporal/spatial clustering	Consumer Resistance Theory (Roux, 2007)

Source: Author's integrative conceptual synthesis



Influencer Coordination Signals Activating Overtourism Patterns and Trekker Resistance Mechanisms

Consumer resistance theory systematically predicts trekker opposition to influencer coordination when synchronization threatens core experiential autonomy or precipitates ecological manipulation perceptions (Roux, 2007). Trekker resistance manifests behaviorally as strategic off-peak temporal dispersion, rigorous capacity threshold verification, systematic counterarguing of "moderate trek for all" viral fabrications, and amplified negative word-of-mouth documenting overcrowding realities (Talwar et al., 2020). Classical resistance scholarship conceptualizes responses as privatized individual cognition (Seth et al., 2020); however, Instagram's public architecture transforms resistance into scalable collective signaling with normative contagion effects.

Digital trekking platforms amplify resistance through three interdependent mechanisms: (1) Algorithmic virality pathology heightens exposure to capacity-blind influencer reels, generating acute manipulation reactance that catalyzes resistance motivation; (2) Public comment ecosystems enable real-time critique of peak-season rushes ("Valley of Flowers trampled into mud this July"), normalizing avoidance as socially intelligent behavior; (3) Community story amplification reinforces shared skepticism through visceral documentation—before/after trail erosion photos, plastic-choked bugyal imagery—rendering capacity-aware resistance not merely acceptable but morally imperative (Ki et al 2023).

Anti-influencer trekking warnings systematically strengthen these resistance pathways. Capacity-critical creators openly deconstruct synchronization infrastructure (#RoopkundRuinedByInfluencers) while equipping audiences with tactic-neutralization tools for interrogating FOMO engineering. This public resistance architecture eliminates stigma around rejecting viral temporal prescriptions, catalyzing phase transition from

privatized route caution to collective off-season advocacy networks that fundamentally reshape Garhwal visitation evaluation paradigms toward sustainability equilibria.

Persuasion Knowledge Activation Dynamics in Trekking Content Evaluation

The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) posits that consumers accumulate executable metacognitive schemas enabling tactic identification, interpretation, and neutralization when encountering marketing stimuli (Friestad & Wright 1994). Garhwal trekkers progressively develop coordination schema recognition—"hidden gem" exaggeration systematically masks high-altitude technical realities (4,000m+ passes, sheer moraine navigation)—fostering analytical processing superseding viral heuristic capture (Olson & Thjørmøe 2009).

De-influencing activates PKM through three precision-engineered mechanisms: (1) synchronization infrastructure demystification systematically unpacks hashtag cascade phenomenology, neutralizing covert FOMO engineering (Olson & Thjørmøe, 2009); (2) algorithmic amplification transparency reveals peak-season trending prioritization independent of content quality (Nevado-Catalán et al 2023); (3) capacity incentive system mapping discloses trekking operator revenue maximization through synchronized group premiums irrespective of ecological carrying cost externalization. Persuasion knowledge maturation catalyzes cognitive pivot from visceral viral response to deliberative capacity analytics, systematically attenuating pathological synchronization efficacy while elevating sustainable visitation discernment (Elhajjar & Itani 2025).

Advertising Skepticism and Moral Authenticity as Constitutive Psychological Processes

Advertising skepticism systematically calibrates doubt toward commercial truthfulness, functioning adaptively in capacity contexts to discriminate sustainable temporal windows from engineered peak manipulations (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000). Targeted



skepticism generates three high-utility outcomes: (1) attenuated peak-season FOMO vulnerability; (2) institutionalized demands for biophysical capacity verification; (3) preference cascade toward peer-validated off-peak itineraries over influencer-curated rushes. This skepticism architecture strategically rewards capacity-transparent operators while systematically penalizing viral accessibility fabrications.

Moral authenticity—defined through ecological transparency, trekker experience preservation fidelity, and demonstrated willingness to reject capacity-destructive peak promotion—emerges as the constitutive psychological anchor redefining influencer credibility post-synchronization crisis (Tsen & Cheng 2021). De-influencers cultivate moral credibility through unvarnished capacity documentation (trampled Valley of Flowers meadows, eroded Roopkund approaches), realigning parasocial bonds from aesthetic escapism toward ecological stewardship imperatives (Elsantil et al 2025). This authenticity recalibration shifts audience credibility adjudication from lifestyle congruence heuristics toward ethical trail preservation alignment, generating resilient trust structures prioritizing Garhwal ecosystem viability over indiscriminate visitation volume maximization (Lee & Eastin, 2020; García-de-Frutos & Estrella-ramón 2021).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual, literature-review-based methodology to explore the role of influencer-driven demand shocks in shaping overtourism patterns, trekker resistance, and capacity perceptions in Garhwal Himalayan social media environments. The paper synthesises existing theoretical and empirical research from established marketing, tourism, coordination theory, and consumer behaviour literature to develop an integrated conceptual understanding of influencer coordination mechanisms.

The review focuses on four primary theoretical domains: coordination theory, tourism area life

cycle (TALC), consumer resistance theory, and persuasion knowledge. These domains were selected because they directly explain how public social media signals synchronise collective visitation, accelerate destination degradation, and trigger resistance responses in capacity-constrained trekking contexts. The study integrates findings across these research streams to build a theoretically grounded explanation of how influencer activity influences overtourism cognition and trekker behaviour patterns.

Rather than conducting a systematic meta-analysis, this study follows a theory-driven conceptual synthesis approach. The objective is to identify recurring theoretical patterns, conceptual overlaps, and unexplored linkages across existing literature on digital coordination, Himalayan carrying capacities, and resistance activation. This approach allows the study to move beyond isolated findings on influencer persuasion or descriptive overtourism accounts and propose an integrated explanation of demand shocks as coordination-oriented drivers of capacity collapse.

The analysis prioritises high-quality peer-reviewed research published in established marketing, tourism management, and consumer behaviour journals, supplemented by secondary data patterns from Uttarakhand Tourism statistics (2020-2025), Garhwal hashtag analytics (#GarhwalTrek, #HimalayanTrekking), and environmental impact reports documenting trail erosion and floral trampling. The synthesis process involves comparing theoretical arguments across coordination focal points and TALC acceleration, evaluating empirical trends in temporal visitation-hashtag correlations, and identifying conceptual gaps that demand shock research can address—particularly the absence of marketing theory integration with biophysical capacity constraints. The study then uses these insights to develop an integrated framework explaining the psychological, behavioral, and ecological mechanisms underlying influencer-driven



overtourism effects in fragile Himalayan ecosystems.

Observation And Discussion

Travel influencer-driven demand shocks represent a structural transformation in Himalayan tourism dynamics rather than ephemeral social media phenomena. Traditional destination marketing increases route desirability through social proof, aspirational summit imagery, and perceived adventure authenticity. In stark contrast, Garhwal influencer coordination synchronizes mass trekkers toward capacity-constrained routes—Valley of Flowers, Roopkund, Kedarnath—generating 20-30% footfall surges that overwhelm biophysical limits through viral hashtag cascades (#GarhwalTrek: 159,000+ posts). This reveals digital influence now operates through capacity coordination rather than unconstrained persuasion.

Influencer signals transform trekker resistance from isolated route avoidance into socially contagious behavior. Instagram comment ecosystems amplify Valley of Flowers trampling critiques and Roopkund erosion warnings, normalizing off-peak temporal dispersion. As resistance cascades through community stories, trekkers confidently reject FOMO synchronization, recalibrating visitation toward sustainable windows.

Simultaneously, coordination pathology shifts authenticity from curated lifestyle relatability toward moral credibility grounded in capacity transparency and ecological stewardship imperatives.

Persuasion knowledge activation proves central: public metrics systematically demystify hashtag focal points, algorithmic peak amplification, and operator synchronization incentives. This metacognitive awakening pivots trekkers from visceral viral response toward biophysical capacity analytics, systematically attenuating pathological clustering while elevating sustainable discernment.

Analysis confirms influencer coordination preserves marketing effectiveness under transformed credibility conditions. Capacity-transparent operators disclosing biophysical limits and off-peak incentives sustain trust amid skepticism saturation. Capacity-blind viral strategies face escalating resistance cascades. Destination competitiveness increasingly pivots from volume metrics toward ecological stewardship demonstrating verified carrying thresholds.

Table 3: Route-Specific Coordination Impacts (2020-2025 patterns):

Himalyan Route	Hashtag Surge Timing	Overtourism Manifestation	Resistance Emergence
Valley of Flowers	July trending peaks	Floral trampling (15K+/season)	Off-season meadow warnings
Roopkund Lake	June viral cascades	Trail erosion/access bans	“Influencer rush destroyed”
Kedarnath Yatra	May religious amplification	Infrastructure collapse risk	Capacity quota advocacy

Source: Summarizes surges across routes (Uttarakhand Tourism Board, 2024).

Overall, Garhwal demand shocks function as pathological coordination mechanisms amplifying viral-ecological disconnects. Resistance activation through capacity warnings constitutes market correction, restoring trekker agency via temporal

dispersion that preserves Himalayan wilderness authenticity. Travel influencers thus emerge dual-natured: powerful synchronizers generating acute externalities alongside potential capacity stewards when realigned toward biophysical reality.



Sustainable Garhwal tourism demands integrated governance—real-time hashtag monitoring linked to dynamic e-permits, algorithmic demotion of capacity-blind content, mandatory ecological disclosures in sponsored reels. Theoretical advancement requires coordination models incorporating biophysical constraints, while practitioners must pivot from visitation maximization toward verified capacity stewardship. Understanding Garhwal's digital pathology illuminates global capacity-constrained adventure market evolution.

Conclusion

Travel influencers on Instagram have accelerated overtourism in Garhwal Himalayan treks through hashtag-driven demand shocks, syncing crowds beyond carrying capacity from 2020-2025 [Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board 2024]. Empirical patterns show 1-2 month lags between spikes in #GarhwalTrek activity and rises in footfalls, erosion, and waste on routes like Valley of Flowers and Roopkund [Himalayan Geographic 2025].

Influencer marketing must incorporate externalities, evolving from sales focus to sustainable coordination in constrained ecosystems. Recommendations include social media-triggered permits and eco-content mandates for influencers [Adventure Pulse 2025].

Future studies should use quasi-experiments and geotags for causality. This protects Uttarakhand's fragile heritage amid rising digital promotion [SDC Foundation 2025].

Limitations And Future Research Scope

This study is conceptual and does not empirically test the proposed relationships between influencer-driven demand shocks, overtourism patterns, trekker resistance, and capacity coordination mechanisms. The integrated framework emerges from theoretical synthesis of existing literature rather than primary data collection or causal analysis from Garhwal trekking contexts. Consequently, hypothesized coordination pathways—hashtag synchronization →

temporal visitation clustering → biophysical degradation cascades—require rigorous empirical validation to confirm directionality, magnitude, and boundary conditions.

The analysis evaluates influencer coordination across Himalayan trekking broadly but lacks platform-specific assessment of Instagram Reels, Stories, and YouTube formats, despite differences in algorithms, audience demographics, and content engagement patterns that may shape synchronization effects. Regional and cultural variations in trekking motivations also remain insufficiently explored. Furthermore, reliance on secondary data, such as #GarhwalTrek correlations with tourism footfalls, limits temporal precision, while confounding factors including offline promotions, infrastructure development, weather conditions, and religious festivals may independently affect visitor surges

Future research should empirically validate the coordination framework through:

1. Quasi-experimental difference-in-differences designs exploiting exogenous platform algorithm changes or viral suppression events
2. High-frequency geotagged social media panels matched against real-time ecological monitoring (trail camera traps, drone biomass surveys)
3. Experimental vignette studies manipulating hashtag visibility and capacity disclosure to measure synchronization intent
4. Developed measurement scales assessing "coordination resistance," capacity skepticism, and synchronization proneness alongside traditional persuasion metrics

Cross-platform comparative analysis (Instagram vs. YouTube vs. domestic apps) alongside longitudinal cross-cultural studies (Garhwal vs. Ladakh vs. Nepal Annapurna) will establish generalizability boundaries. Primary trekker surveys capturing self-reported synchronization pathways absent influencer exposure remain critical. Brand response experiments testing capacity-transparent versus volume-maximizing sponsored content performance provide



actionable managerial insights. Finally, policy simulations integrating real-time hashtag monitoring with dynamic e-permit allocation warrant field experimentation for sustainable Himalayan tourism governance.

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