

VISUAL MEDIUMS: PORTRAYING INDIAN CITIES' GLOBAL IDENTITY

Sandeep Kumar

Assistant Professor, Unitedworld School of Liberal Arts and Mass Communication, Karnavati University Gandhinagar

sandeepkumar@karnavatiuniversity.edu.in

Dr. Malay Patel

Associate Professor, Unitedworld Institute of Design, Karnavati University Gandhinagar.

malaypatel@karnavatiuniversity.edu.in

Abstract

The city's reputation and image are increasingly influenced by visual communication, making it a place to be remembered and remembered. This study aims to investigate how the visual mediums create the global identity of Indian heritage cities, using the tourist-gaze framework of (Urry, 2002), the Social Learning Theory of Bandura, and the Social semiotics of (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020). The architectural and historical heritage is considered the main visual means through which these cities communicate their uniqueness to the world and tourism is considered the main means through which the city's visual identity is circulated. The study is of a descriptive type, including a structured questionnaire to 320 respondents, and a thematic review of the literature concerning heritage visualisation, city branding and destination image. The findings reveal that social networking websites and news portals have become the most important source of exposure to Jaipur and Jodhpur, architectural and historical value is the most influential factor in choosing a destination, and visual and architectural experience is given a very high subjective importance (mean rating > 4.2 on the five-point scale). However, a supplementary visual-recognition exercise using photographs of four well-known landmarks found that actual identification accuracy (mean 44.5 per cent, ranging from 25 per cent for Mehrangarh Fort to 56.2 per cent for the Jodhpur cityscape) fell well short of respondents' stated appreciation of visual and architectural cues, revealing a gap between attitudinal valuation of heritage imagery and precise, place-specific visual literacy. The paper argues that this gap carries direct implications for how Indian tourism boards, heritage authorities, and destination marketers design visual content for global audiences, and it closes with recommendations for landmark-specific, platform-differentiated visual communication strategy and directions for future research with larger, stratified samples.

Keywords: *Visual Communication; Visual Semiotics; City Branding; Architectural Heritage; Tourist Gaze; Destination Image; Jaipur; Jodhpur; Rajasthan Tourism; Indian Cities*

1. Introduction

A city speaks to the world chiefly through what can be seen of it. Long before a traveller reads a guidebook paragraph or hears a recommendation, the traveller has typically already seen a photograph, a video frame, a postcard, or a social media reel of a destination, and that visual

encounter does much of the work of deciding whether the place is worth visiting at all. In fact, the famous Marshall McLuhan saying that "the medium is the message" is a good starting point because it is hard to see how a picture of a city could be a neutral window onto that city. The medium through which a place is seen, whether a hand-painted miniature, a colonial-era photograph, a glossy tourism brochure, or an algorithmically ranked Instagram grid, shapes what is noticed, what is left out, and what a viewer eventually associates with the place. This is exacerbated by (*Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory In Psychology*, 2025) that suggests that a great deal of behaviour is learnt from observing others, not just from direct instruction, and that people choose to act a certain way because they see others acting that way. Travellers routinely decide where to go by watching what other people have already visually documented, liked, and shared, so the visual medium is not simply a record of travel; it is a teacher of travel.

Architectural and historical heritage occupies a special place within this visual economy. Unlike a landscape or a festival, a monument is a fixed, repeatable, and highly photogenic visual referent: the same silhouette of a fort or palace can be reproduced identically across a postcard, a Wikipedia thumbnail, a wedding album, and a tourism board's Instagram feed, which makes it an unusually efficient carrier of place identity. Cities that possess a strong stock of architectural heritage therefore have a built-in advantage in visual place branding, provided that heritage is captured, curated, and circulated well. India's cities are, in this sense, unusually well endowed. Centuries of Mughal, Rajput, Dravidian, colonial, and vernacular building traditions have left many Indian cities with a dense architectural vocabulary that is instantly recognisable once visualised correctly, a resource that fast-growing metropolitan India is only beginning to translate into a coherent, internationally legible visual identity.

This paper focuses on two cities in Rajasthan, Jaipur and Jodhpur, that have historically relied on architectural spectacle, the Pink City's planned havelis and the Hawa Mahal, the hilltop dominance of Amer Fort, the ochre-and-blue palette of Jodhpur's old city beneath Mehrangarh Fort, as the visual foundation of their tourism economy. The central proposition examined here is that these cities' global identity is not simply a function of the heritage that exists on the ground but of how effectively that heritage is translated into visual mediums that circulate internationally, and that there may be a meaningful gap between how much travellers say they value architectural and visual cues and how accurately they can actually recognise and place specific heritage imagery. The paper reviews the literature on the field of visual communication, architectural identity, and the concept of heritage tourism, and then outlines a theoretical framework, which is brought together by the notion of medium theory, social learning, the tourist gaze, and visual semiotics. A mixed-methods methodology with a combination of self-reported media usage and attitudes, as well as an applied visual-recognition exercise was used with 320 respondents. Finally, the findings are discussed and their implications for tourism marketers, heritage bodies and future research are explored.

2.1 Visual Communication, Visual Words, and Visual Analysis

The technical vocabulary of visual communication research offers a useful entry point before the paper turns to tourism specifically. In image-retrieval research, a "visual word" refers to a small, quantifiable unit of an image, such as a patch of colour, a texture gradient, or an edge, that can be indexed and compared computationally in the same way a text-retrieval system indexes words in a document (Baeza-Yates et al., 1999). The metaphor is instructive for a communication study of heritage sites because it suggests that a monument, like a text, can be decomposed into recurring, recognisable visual units, a dome, an arch, a jharokha window, a particular red-sandstone hue, that repeat across a city's built environment and that a viewer learns to associate with that city specifically. Visual analysis, understood more broadly as the systematic description and interpretation of an artwork's or artefact's formal elements (colour, line, texture, scale, and composition), gives communication researchers a vocabulary for explaining why certain heritage photographs travel further and are remembered better than others. A photograph of Hawa Mahal that isolates its honeycomb façade against a clear sky, for instance, mobilises colour contrast, repetition, and scale in a way that a wide, cluttered street-level shot does not, even though both depict the same monument.

This formal vocabulary connects naturally to social semiotics, which treats images as structured sign systems with their own grammar, in the same way that verbal language has grammar (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020). A photograph of a fort taken from below, for example, visually encodes power and monumentality through camera angle alone, independent of the caption; a photograph taken at eye level with local residents in the frame encodes accessibility and lived heritage rather than distant grandeur. Every visual choice a tourism board, a professional photographer, or an ordinary traveller makes when representing a heritage city therefore carries connotative meaning, and the aggregate of these choices, repeated across thousands of individually posted images, is what eventually consolidates into a city's global visual identity.

Visual encounters also change character as they move from two dimensions to three. A photograph of a monument is necessarily a flattened, framed, single-perspective translation of a three-dimensional built environment; visitors who then encounter the same monument in person, walking around it, entering its courtyards, and experiencing its scale bodily, receive a qualitatively different communication from the same architectural object. This distinction matters for the present study because the questionnaire used here tests both attitudinal responses to visual communication in the abstract and the accuracy with which respondents recognise specific two-dimensional photographic representations of Jaipur and Jodhpur landmarks, allowing the paper to speak to both dimensions of the visual encounter.

2.2 Architecture, Heritage, and Urban Identity

The identity of a city is not just in its buildings, but in constant and ongoing processes of interaction between buildings, inhabitants, and visual and discursive representations of the city in circulation. (Niazi & Kumar, 2018) suggest that each city has its own identity which is formed by its physical and aesthetic form as well as the perception of the city's residents and visitors, and can evolve over time as the city evolves. In this reading, the built environment and architecture are presented as an "exemplification" of the social, historical and economic condition of a city, and are able to respond to the rapid urban change while retaining the older layers of the city's heritage. (Niazi & Kumar, 2018) account of Indian architectural identity is particularly relevant here because it observes that India's most significant architectural experimentation and identity contestation is occurring precisely in its fastest-growing metropolitan regions, where questions of "symbol" and "local" distinctiveness become most acute, and where architects face a documented tension between imitating international styles and drawing on indigenous architectural inheritance. Jaipur and Jodhpur sit somewhat outside this contemporary contestation because their dominant visual identity is historical rather than newly built, but the same underlying question, whether a city's visual identity is authentically local or imported, is equally salient for how their heritage is packaged for global audiences.

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences offers a complementary, individual-level account of why architecture functions so effectively as a communicative medium. Gardner proposed that human cognition comprises several relatively independent intelligences, among them spatial intelligence, the capacity to mentally generate, manipulate, and visualise three-dimensional space (Gardner, n.d.). Architecture, alongside professions such as navigation and graphic design, draws directly on this capacity, which helps explain why architectural imagery is processed with unusual ease and retained unusually well relative to more abstract forms of place information such as statistics or historical dates. The evolution of architectural representation itself, from hand-drawn perspective to digital rendering, further illustrates how visual mediums have continually been reinvented to communicate architectural ideas more persuasively. (Baraya, 2020) traces this evolution from Filippo Brunelleschi's development of linear perspective in the fifteenth century, through visionary architects such as Étienne-Louis Boullée who argued that "in order to accomplish, one must first imagine," to the radical collage and comic-book-influenced representational styles of 1960s groups such as Archigram, Superstudio, and Archizoom, and finally to contemporary digital rendering and virtual reality. What each of these historical shifts shares is a search for visual mediums capable of making an unbuilt or otherwise inaccessible architectural idea vivid and legible to an audience, exactly the communicative problem that heritage tourism faces when it tries to make a centuries-old fort or palace vivid to a prospective traveller who has never been there.

Heritage scholarship reinforces this point from the conservation side. (Staiff, 2015) observes that cultural heritage sites and the visual arts are inextricably linked across cultures and continents,

from the rock art of Kakadu in northern Australia to the bas-relief sculpture of Angkor in Cambodia and the tomb frescoes of Egypt's Valley of the Kings, and argues that visual engagement is not incidental to heritage but constitutive of how heritage is understood, valued, and ultimately preserved. This has a direct bearing on the Rajasthani forts examined in this study: the UNESCO World Heritage inscription of the Hill Forts of Rajasthan, a serial site comprising six forts at Chittorgarh, Kumbhalgarh, Sawai Madhopur (Ranthambhore), Jhalawar (Gagron), Jaipur (Amer), and Jaisalmer, formally recognises the outstanding universal value of precisely the kind of architectural heritage this study is concerned with (UNESCO World Heritage, 2022), and that formal recognition itself becomes a visual and narrative asset that tourism communication can draw upon.

2.3 Heritage Visual Communication and City Branding: The Jordan and Italian Evidence

This review is based on the few comparable publications that have been published in other parts of the world to study the visual communication tools that mediate heritage tourism, and that are closely related to the cases of Jaipur and Jodhpur. The most relevant of these studies is that by (Linda & Rawashdekh, 2021) who studied the cultural heritage sites in Jordan. The authors contend that the visual identification mechanisms employed to present and promote Jordan's heritage, such as logos, information stands, maps, facades, and three-dimensional graphic reconstructions, are not "decorative" accessories, but essential supporting structures of the heritage preservation and promotion process, which are integral to the national tourism economy and the nation's image. They distinguish between figurative logos, which build a symbolic link between graphic form and a specific architectural referent, and morphological logos, which abstract a site into basic geometric forms, and they argue that a graphic component of some kind is what distinguishes a professionally managed heritage visual identity from an ad hoc one. Uniform design principles applied consistently across advertising materials, they suggest, allow a heritage site's visual identity to remain recognisable across many different platforms and formats, an argument with obvious relevance for Jaipur and Jodhpur, where visual representation currently varies widely across government tourism material, private travel agencies, and user-generated social media content.

A second, pandemic-era body of work examines how established heritage cities adapted their visual city-branding strategies under crisis conditions. (Pasquinelli et al., 2022) analysed pre- and post-pandemic Instagram marketing communication from four major Italian cultural cities, Rome, Florence, Venice, and Milan, and found adaptive and transformative brand responses: cities that had long branded themselves around crowded, monument-centred imagery pivoted toward more intimate, less crowded, and more locally grounded visual narratives during the pandemic, before gradually reintroducing spectacle-oriented heritage imagery as recovery progressed. Their study demonstrates that a city's visual brand is not static even when its physical heritage is; the same fort or piazza can be visually reframed in response to changing traveller expectations, a dynamic that

is directly relevant to how Rajasthan tourism content has evolved since 2020 toward more experiential, less purely monumental photography.

Not all heritage-adjacent visual tourism research is celebratory, however. (Crapolicchio et al., 2022) examine the more ethically fraught case of slum tourism, analysing photographs shared on TripAdvisor of tourist visits to informal settlements in Brazil, India, and South Africa. Through a multi-method study of these images, they concluded that the framing of the visual image can either be used to reinforce stereotyping and the dehumanisation of residents, or – if the photo foregrounds an actual interaction with local people – can be used to de-stigmatise residents. Methodological and ethical rather than substantive relevance: reminding the present study that the visual communication of any Indian place, including the heritage cities, is not necessarily benign and that the decisions taken by the tourists' boards and individual tourists on what to photograph and share carries representational responsibility.

2.4 Tourist Image, Visual Expectation, and the Contemporary Traveller

Another focus of tourism-related scholarship is the direct impact of visual images on the expectation and experience of travellers. (Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011) believe that visual cues are most effective in conveying the promise of a travel experience because they activate people's imagination and resonate with them in an emotionally powerful way. Their study, which deconstructed destination photographs and examined how tourists' impressions of and emotional responses to those images related to their subsequent anticipation of visiting, found that travellers with different underlying conceptions of a desirable experience were drawn in by different visual content and compositional choices, a finding with clear management implications for how a single destination such as Jaipur or Jodhpur should diversify its visual portfolio to appeal to differently motivated segments of travellers (heritage enthusiasts, adventure seekers, culinary travellers) rather than relying on one repeated hero image.

(Manthiou et al., 2022) extend this line of enquiry into the specific case of slow tourism, using text mining of travel-vlogger video content to demonstrate a persistent gap between how travellers conceptualise "slow" travel and how they actually behave, and to propose a six-pillar structure describing the degree to which a given travel experience embodies slow-tourism principles. Although slow tourism is not this paper's primary focus, the gap the study identifies between stated ideals and observed behaviour anticipates a broader methodological caution that this paper takes seriously: self-reported attitudes toward travel, including toward visual and architectural preferences, cannot be assumed to align neatly with what travellers actually notice, remember, or act upon, which is precisely why the present study pairs an attitudinal questionnaire with a behavioural visual-recognition task rather than relying on self-report alone.

Closer to the present study's specific geography, (Rathore et al., 2017) examined how the Rajasthan Department of Tourism and allied stakeholders use social media platforms to disseminate

destination information, combining in-depth stakeholder interviews with analysis of the department's official web presence. Their results highlight the extent and regulatory challenge of using social media as a tourist communication channel: as the content on these platforms is dynamic, decentralised and can have a life of its own, tourism organisations must have clear guidelines prior to using it extensively, and the same capacity to go viral and promote a destination can also lead to reputational risks if visual content circulating about it falls out of the organisation's control. The fortresses of Rajasthan come alive in (Sharma, 2008) whose historical account of the forts provides descriptive background for the very reason they are so visual subjects in the first place, from invaders and wildlife, to the Rajput legacy of "some of the world's most towering and majestic forts and palaces", a visual and narrative resource that continues to shape outsiders' image of Rajasthan today.

2.5 Cultural Identity, the Tourist Gaze, and Rajasthan's Urban Heritage in the Literature

Two additional theories, although not always stated specifically in terms of the state of Rajasthan, serve as a foundation for the specific findings of this study. (Hall et al., 2013) approach on cultural identity and representation proposes that identity is not an essence pre-existing but is instead continually produced in processes of representation, including visual representation, which can actively produce a meaning for what the culture or the place is taken to represent (Hall, 1980). If applied in both Jaipur and Jodhpur, it indicates that their global reputation as "the Pink City" and "the Blue City" is not just an architectural fact, but an accomplishment, created over the decades through postcards, movies, guide books and now social media, that could in principle be negotiated through conscious visual communication strategy. This is complemented by (Urry, 2002) tourist-gaze framework, which proposes that the tourist learns what to look at in a given destination via the images propagated by the tourist industry, as well as through films and other travellers' narratives, thus closing the representational loop of producing new images, similarly structured, circulated among tourists. Read together with (*Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory In Psychology*, 2025), this suggests a self-reinforcing cycle in which existing visual representations of Jaipur and Jodhpur, the pink facades, the hilltop forts, the blue-washed old city, shape what future visitors look for, photograph, and share, which in turn reproduces and narrows the same visual repertoire over time.

Taken as a whole, the literature reviewed here establishes three things that motivate the present study. First, architectural heritage is widely recognised across very different geographical contexts (Jordan, Italy, India) as a uniquely effective visual resource for city and destination branding, provided it is captured and circulated through a coherent, well-managed visual identity system. Second, the specific mediums and platforms through which heritage visual content circulates, from printed brochures to social networking apps, are not interchangeable; they carry different reach, different credibility, and different regulatory implications for tourism organisations. Third, and least examined in the existing literature, there is reason to suspect a gap between how much travellers say visual and architectural cues matter to them and how precisely they can actually

recognise and place specific heritage imagery, a gap that the pandemic-era and slow-tourism literature both gesture toward but do not test directly for an Indian heritage city. It is this third gap that the present study is designed to probe empirically.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in four complementary theoretical positions rather than a single model, reflecting the genuinely interdisciplinary nature of visual communication research applied to heritage tourism. The central tenet of the paper is medium theory based on the notion of "the medium is the message" put forth by (McLuhan, 2010), which holds that the channel through which Jaipur and Jodhpur are visually rendered – a government brochure, a television advertisement, or a social media that is algorithmically curated – is not simply a relay pipe for information but is an active editor of what audiences understand and anticipate from the cities. (*Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory In Psychology*, 2025) Social Learning Theory supplies the psychological mechanism by which this happens at the level of the individual traveller: destination choices and travel behaviours are substantially learned vicariously, through observing the visually documented experiences of others, rather than through direct personal instruction, which is why the questionnaire used in this study places particular emphasis on the media channels through which respondents report having learned about Jaipur and Jodhpur.

(Urry, 2002) concept of the tourist gaze contributes the socially organised, anticipatory dimension of visual consumption: tourists do not look at a destination innocently but through a gaze that has already been trained by prior promotional imagery, film, and the visually documented experiences of other travellers, so that what a visitor to Jaipur photographs at the Hawa Mahal is substantially pre-structured by images of the Hawa Mahal the visitor has already seen. Finally, (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020) social semiotic approach to visual grammar supplies the analytical vocabulary for treating specific photographic and design choices, framing, colour, angle, composition, as meaningful communicative acts in their own right rather than incidental technical details, which is the perspective this study adopts when interpreting why some categories of heritage imagery are apparently easier for respondents to recognise and recall than others. Read together, these four frameworks generate a coherent expectation: that the specific visual mediums Indian heritage cities use, and the specific formal choices made within those mediums, actively construct rather than passively record these cities' global identity, and that this construction process can and should be empirically investigated rather than assumed.

4. Research Gap, Objectives, and Research Questions

The literature reviewed above confirms that city architecture can be used as an effective visual tool for city brand promotion, on a global scale, and that the various media channels of the image vary in their reach, credibility and regulatory complexity. Less studied, however, and especially in Indian heritage cities, are the association of the travellers' expressed attitudes towards visual and

architectural communication with their capacity to accurately identify the specific heritage imagery in circulation. Existing research on architectural heritage in Rajasthan (Rathore et al., 2017; Sharma, 2008) has documented the rich history of the region's architectural heritage and the increasing role of social media in the communication of its tourism, but neither of these studies has tested the hypothesis that increased exposure to media and appreciation of visual cues lead to actual visual recognition at the level of landmarks. This is the particular gap that the current study aims to address.

The study aims at tackling the following objectives on the basis of this gap: firstly to identify the visual media channels through which people are able to get information about Jaipur and Jodhpur as a tourist destination and how this compares to their general travel-information-seeking behaviour; secondly, to assess the relative importance the respondents attach to architectural heritage and visual experience, compared with other factors of the travel destination (cultural attraction, natural attraction, adventure, etc); thirdly, to identify the specific visual communication parameters (image, colour, texture, layout, graphics, typography, shape, space) that respondents consider salient when experiencing a heritage destination, and to find out whether stated visual appreciation corresponds to demonstrated visual literacy; and fourthly, to test respondents' ability to correctly recognise and name specific, well-known landmarks from Jaipur and Jodhpur from photos, which assesses whether stated visual appreciation corresponds with demonstrated visual literacy. There are four research questions derived from these goals.

The four research questions that arise from these goals are:

- RQ1: What are the dominant visualization and non-visualization media that respondents are exposed to when they think of Jaipur and Jodhpur as destinations and how has this exposure trend shifted towards digital and social media?
- RQ2: What is the relative importance of architectural heritage of the respondents' choice of travel destinations?
- RQ3: What are the formal visual communication parameters which respondents strongly relate to a positive heritage travel experience?
- RQ4: Is the accuracy with which respondents can identify specific imagery for Jaipur and Jodhpur landmarks correlated with their reported appreciation of visual or architectural cues or is there a significant difference between the two?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design: The research design used in this study is both descriptive and a mixed methods approach, which has been employed in previous studies of destination research that have included a combination of stakeholder or traveller survey data, and a secondary literature review to identify themes (Rathore et al., 2017). The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire online for the respondents, data on their media exposure and the reasons of travel,

supplemented by a short applied exercise that was exposed to the respondents showing them photographs of four well-known Jaipur and Jodhpur landmarks, and asking the respondents to identify the place and the city shown in the photographs to create an objective behavioural measure which was then correlated with the attitudinal survey items.

5.2 Sampling and Sample Profile: Our first step is to explore the concept of sampling as well as Sample Profile. The questionnaire was sent out via an online form (Google Forms) and used a convenience sampling approach which is suitable for an exploratory pilot study of this type, with 320 complete and valid responses received following data cleaning. Convenience sampling was chosen because the study's purpose at this stage is exploratory, to surface patterns in visual media exposure and heritage attitudes that can subsequently be tested on a larger, stratified sample, rather than to produce population-level estimates. The achieved sample skewed toward younger, highly educated, salaried respondents: 50.0 per cent of respondents were aged between 26 and 35 years, 28.1 per cent were aged 18 to 25, and 21.9 per cent were aged 36 to 45; 56.2 per cent identified as female and 43.8 per cent as male; 71.9 per cent held a postgraduate qualification or higher, 25.0 per cent were graduates, and 3.1 per cent had completed schooling only; and 71.9 per cent were in salaried employment, with the remaining 28.1 per cent self-employed. This profile, young, urban, well-educated, and digitally engaged, should be read as a limitation on generalisability (discussed further in Section 8) but is also a reasonably close match to the demographic segment that Indian and international heritage tourism marketing most actively targets on digital platforms, which gives the findings practical relevance even at this sample size.

5.3 Instrument: The questionnaire comprised four sections: (a) demographic items (age, gender, education, occupation); (b) media exposure items measuring, on a five-point frequency scale (Not at All, Hardly, Sometimes, Most of the Time, Always), how often respondents encountered information about travel destinations in general, and about Jaipur and Jodhpur specifically, through five channels, print/magazines, FM radio, television, news portals/websites, and social networking sites/apps; (c) attitudinal and behavioural items on travel motivation, traveller typology, destination-choice factors, and the perceived importance of visual experience and architectural heritage, several of which used a five-point importance scale and several of which allowed multiple-response selection from a fixed option set; and (d) a visual-recognition exercise presenting respondents with four photographs, Hawa Mahal (Jaipur), Amer Fort (Jaipur), a Jodhpur cityscape view of the old Blue City, and Mehrangarh Fort (Jodhpur), each followed by an open-text field asking the respondent to identify the place and city shown. Open-text responses to the recognition exercise were manually coded as correct if they named the landmark and/or the correct city with reasonable spelling variation (for example, "Hawa Mahal," "Hawa mahal," and "hawa mahal, Jaipur" were all coded as correct identifications of Image 1).

5.4 Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, and, for the five-point importance scales, means and top-two-box (rating of 4 or 5) proportions, computed in Python using the pandas library. Multiple-response items were analysed

by option frequency, with percentages calculated as a proportion of the 320 respondents rather than of total selections, since respondents could select more than one option; consequently, percentages within these tables do not sum to 100. The visual-recognition exercise was scored as a simple binary correct/incorrect variable for each of the four images and reported as percentage accuracy per landmark and as a mean accuracy across all four landmarks. This literature review was thematic in nature and involved categorising previous research according to theme, rather than chronologically or summarising individual studies, to develop an accumulation of theoretical argument rather than a list of annotated literature.

5.5 Ethical Considerations: The participation was self-selected and anonymous; no personal data other than an optional email address (provided to avoid double submissions only) were gathered, collected or reported and everything is presented and analysed at the level of groups.

6. Data Analysis and Findings

6.1 Sample Profile. The respondents in the study (N = 320) were summarized in Table 1. The age of the sample ranged from 26 to 35 (50.0 per cent); 18 to 25 (28.1 per cent); and 36 to 45 (21.9 per cent); 71.9 per cent were female and 43.8 per cent male; 71.9 per cent had a postgraduate qualification or higher; and 71.9 per cent were in salaried employment. As noted in Section 5.2, this is a young, well-educated, digitally engaged profile that should be read as a scope condition on the findings rather than a population estimate.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 320)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-25 years	90	28.1%
	26-35 years	160	50.0%
	36-45 years	70	21.9%
Gender	Male	140	43.8%
	Female	180	56.2%
Education	Till School	10	3.1%
	Graduate	80	25.0%
	Post Graduate or Higher	230	71.9%
Occupation	Salaried	230	71.9%
	Self-Employed	90	28.1%

6.2 Media Exposure: General Travel Awareness versus Jaipur/Jodhpur-Specific Communication. Tables 2 and 3 report, for five media channels, the percentage of respondents who reported "Most of the Time" or "Always" exposure (a top-two-box summary of the full five-point frequency scale), first for general travel-destination awareness and then specifically for Jaipur and Jodhpur. In both blocks, social networking sites and apps recorded by far the highest exposure (90.6 per cent general; 84.4 per cent Jaipur/Jodhpur-specific), followed at a distance by news portals and websites (65.6 per cent; 56.2 per cent). Television occupied a middle position (46.9 per cent; 43.8 per cent), while print/magazines and, especially, FM radio recorded the lowest exposure levels in both blocks, with FM radio the weakest channel throughout (18.8 per cent in both). Exposure to Jaipur/Jodhpur-specific communication was consistently somewhat lower than general travel-information exposure across every channel, which is unsurprising given that general travel content is a broader category, but the relative ranking of channels was identical across both blocks, underlining the consistency of social media's dominance.

Table 2. General Media Exposure to Travel-Destination Information, by Channel (N = 320)

Channel	Not at All	Hardly	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always	Top-2-Box (MoT+Always)
Papers / Magazines	6.2%	18.8%	21.9%	28.1%	25.0%	53.1%
FM Radio	25.0%	28.1%	28.1%	9.4%	9.4%	18.8%
Television	3.1%	25.0%	25.0%	28.1%	18.8%	46.9%
News Portals / Websites	0.0%	6.2%	28.1%	28.1%	37.5%	65.6%
Social Networking Sites / Apps	0.0%	0.0%	9.4%	21.9%	68.8%	90.6%

Table 3. Media Exposure Specific to Jaipur/Jodhpur as a Travel Destination, by Channel (N = 320)

Channel	Not at All	Hardly	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always	Top-2-Box (MoT+Always)
Papers	12.5%	25.0%	40.6%	15.6%	6.2%	21.9%
FM Radio	25.0%	34.4%	21.9%	12.5%	6.2%	18.8%

Channel	Not at All	Hardly	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always	Top-2-Box (MoT+Always)
Television	9.4%	28.1%	18.8%	25.0%	18.8%	43.8%
News Portals / Websites	3.1%	6.2%	34.4%	31.2%	25.0%	56.2%
Social Networking Sites / Apps	0.0%	0.0%	15.6%	21.9%	62.5%	84.4%

6.3 Information-Seeking Behaviour and Advertising Impressions. Table 4 compares how respondents said they usually gather travel information in general with how they specifically gathered information about Jaipur and Jodhpur. Online search was the most frequently selected option in both cases (71.9 per cent general; 68.8 per cent Jaipur/Jodhpur), but recommendations from friends and family/word of mouth and social media both increased in relative importance for the Jaipur/Jodhpur-specific question (from 46.9 per cent to 56.2 per cent, and from 40.6 per cent to 56.2 per cent, respectively), suggesting that interpersonal and social-platform sources become comparatively more influential once a specific heritage destination, rather than travel in general, is under consideration. Table 5 shows that, when asked which medium of tourism advertising impresses them most, respondents again favoured social media advertisements (56.2 per cent) and word of mouth (46.9 per cent) well ahead of television (15.6 per cent) and print advertisements (6.2 per cent).

Table 4. Information-Seeking Behaviour: General Travel versus Jaipur/Jodhpur-Specific (N = 320, multiple response)

Source	General Travel	Jaipur/Jodhpur-Specific
Online Search	71.9%	68.8%
Recommendations / Word of Mouth	46.9%	56.2%
Social Media	40.6%	56.2%
All of the Above	28.1%	12.5%
Travel Agencies	9.4%	6.2%

Table 5. Medium of Tourism Advertising That Impresses Respondents Most (N = 32, multiple response)

Medium	Percentage
Social Media Ads	56.2%
Word of Mouth	46.9%
All of the Above	28.1%
TV Ads	15.6%
Print Ads	6.2%

6.4 Travel Motivation, Traveller Typology, and Destination-Choice Factors. Table 6 reports four related multiple-response items. Own choice was the dominant reason for travel (81.2 per cent), well ahead of family choice (34.4 per cent). Architectural/historical value was the single most frequently named source of travel inspiration after the composite "all of the above" option (40.6 per cent, ahead of cultural attractions at 37.5 per cent and natural attractions at 34.4 per cent), and it was also the leading specifically named factor influencing destination choice (25.0 per cent, behind the composite "all of the above" and natural/cultural attractions, but still clearly present). In terms of traveller typology, respondents most often identified as cultural enthusiasts (50.0 per cent), followed by adventure seekers (37.5 per cent) and architectural enthusiasts (34.4 per cent), with culinary exploration the least-selected identity (12.5 per cent).

Table 6. Travel Motivation, Inspiration, Traveller Typology, and Destination-Choice Factors (N = 320, multiple response)

Panel A: Reason for Travel	%	Panel B: Travel Inspiration	%	Panel C: Traveller Type	%	Panel D: Most Important Choice Factor	%
Own Choice	81.2%	All of the Above	50.0%	Cultural Enthusiast	50.0%	All of the Above	50.0%
Family Choice	34.4%	Architectural/Historical Value	40.6%	Adventure Seeker	37.5%	Natural Attractions	43.8%
Work Related	9.4%	Cultural Attractions	37.5%	Architectural Enthusiast	34.4%	Cultural Attractions	40.6%

Panel A: Reason for Travel	%	Panel B: Travel Inspiration	%	Panel C: Traveller Type	%	Panel D: Most Important Choice Factor	%
Peer Pressure / Choice	9.4%	Natural Attractions	34.4%	All of the Above	31.2%	Architectural/Historical Place	25.0%
All of the Above	3.1%	Chance of Adventure	18.8%	Culinary Explorer	12.5%	Chance of Adventure	18.8%

6.5 Visual Communication Parameters and the Role of Architectural Heritage. Table 7 shows that, when asked which parameters of visual communication they prefer while visiting a tourist place, respondents overwhelmingly selected image itself (84.4 per cent), followed by texture and pattern (62.5 per cent), layout and graphics (53.1 per cent each), shape and colour (46.9 per cent each), and typography and space (34.4 per cent each). Table 8 shows that, among the reasons architectural heritage is considered essential to travel, aesthetics (40.6 per cent) and history/nostalgia (37.5 per cent) were the most frequently cited specific reasons, with almost half of respondents (46.9 per cent) selecting the composite option covering all listed reasons (architectural technology, history/nostalgia, aesthetics, and socio-religious significance together).

Table 7. Preferred Parameters of Visual Communication While Visiting a Tourist Place (N = 320, multiple response)

Parameter	Percentage
Image	84.4%
Texture & Pattern	62.5%
Layout	53.1%
Graphics	53.1%
Shape	46.9%
Colour	46.9%
Space	34.4%
Typography	34.4%

Table 8. Reasons Architectural Heritage Is Considered Essential to Travel (N = 320, multiple response)

Reason	Percentage
All of the Above	46.9%
Aesthetics	40.6%
History / Nostalgia	37.5%
Architectural Technology	25.0%
Socio-Religious	21.9%

6.6 Rated Importance of Visual and Architectural Experience. Table 9 reports three five-point importance items together with their means and top-two-box percentages. Respondents rated the importance of visual experience while travelling highest (mean 4.59; 93.7 per cent rating 4 or 5), closely followed by agreement that images explain regional cultural, social, and architectural comprehension better than text alone (mean 4.56; 93.7 per cent rating 4 or 5), and the importance of architectural heritage specifically in destination choice (mean 4.22; 81.2 per cent rating 4 or 5). All three items therefore cluster at the high end of the scale, indicating strong, broadly held attitudinal support for the centrality of visual and architectural communication in travel decision-making within this sample.

Table 9. Rated Importance of Visual and Architectural Experience (5-Point Scale; N = 320)

Item	Mean	Top-2-Box (4-5)	Rating 5	Rating 4	Rating 3	Rating 2	Rating 1
Images explain regional cultural/social/architectural comprehension better	4.56	93.7%	62.5%	31.2%	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Importance of architectural heritage in destination choice	4.22	81.2%	50.0%	31.2%	12.5%	3.1%	3.1%
Importance of experiencing visuals while travelling	4.59	93.7%	65.6%	28.1%	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%

6.7 Behavioural Confirmation and Visual Recognition. Table 10 shows that three-quarters of respondents (75.0 per cent) reported having actually visited a destination primarily because of its architectural heritage, naming sites including Rajasthani forts and palaces, the Taj Mahal, and the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, and that 62.5 per cent reported having planned travel specifically on the basis of visual parameters. Table 11 then reports the results of the visual-recognition exercise, in which respondents were shown four photographs of well-known Jaipur and Jodhpur landmarks and asked to name the place and city. Accuracy varied considerably by landmark: 56.2 per cent correctly identified the Jodhpur cityscape image, 53.1 per cent correctly identified Hawa Mahal, 43.8 per cent correctly identified Amer Fort, and only 25.0 per cent correctly identified Mehrangarh Fort, yielding a mean recognition accuracy of 44.5 per cent across the four images, substantially below the 81-94 per cent top-two-box agreement recorded on the corresponding attitudinal items in Table 9. This divergence between stated importance and demonstrated recognition is examined in detail in Section 7.

Table 10. Behavioural Confirmation of Heritage- and Visual-Led Travel (N = 320)

Item	Yes	No
Visited a destination primarily because of its architectural heritage	75.0%	25.0%
Planned travel based on visual parameters	62.5%	37.5%

Table 11. Visual Recognition Accuracy for Jaipur/Jodhpur Landmark Photographs (N = 320)

Image	Landmark / City	Correct Identification
Image 1	Hawa Mahal, Jaipur	53.1%
Image 2	Amer Fort, Jaipur	43.8%
Image 3	Jodhpur cityscape (Blue City)	56.2%
Image 4	Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur	25.0%
	Mean accuracy (4 images)	44.5%

6.8 Summary of Findings. Taken together, the data show a sample that is heavily social-media-oriented in how it learns about Jaipur and Jodhpur, that names architectural and historical value among its leading travel motivations, that expresses very high subjective importance for visual and architectural experience, and that reports having acted on this valuation through actual heritage-

motivated travel; but whose ability to correctly recognise and name specific, individual heritage landmarks from photographs is considerably weaker and more uneven than these attitudinal measures alone would predict.

7. Discussion

The findings reported in Section 6 speak directly to the four research questions set out in Section 4. On RQ1, the data show a clear and fairly decisive shift in how respondents encounter Jaipur and Jodhpur as travel destinations: social networking sites and apps recorded the highest top-two-box exposure score of any channel both for general travel awareness (90.6 per cent) and for Jaipur/Jodhpur-specific communication (84.4 per cent), well ahead of news portals in second place and far ahead of print, television, and especially FM radio, which recorded the lowest exposure of any channel in both blocks. This pattern is consistent with, and extends into an Indian heritage-city context, (Rathore et al., 2017) observation that Rajasthan tourism communication has become substantially social-media-led, and it lends empirical support to the argument advanced by (Pasquinelli et al., 2022) that city brand communication has migrated decisively onto platforms such as Instagram, where visual content, rather than text, is the primary unit of communication. The practical implication for Rajasthan's tourism authorities and heritage-adjacent businesses is that visual asset production and platform-specific content strategy should now be treated as a primary tourism-marketing investment rather than an adjunct to conventional print or broadcast campaigns.

On RQ2, architectural and historical value emerged as the most frequently selected single factor inspiring travel among respondents (40.6 per cent, and the leading named factor after the composite "all of the above" option), and three separate importance items converged on the same conclusion: 81.2 per cent of respondents rated architectural heritage 4 or 5 out of 5 in importance to destination choice (mean 4.22), 93.7 per cent rated the importance of visual experience while travelling at 4 or 5 (mean 4.59), and 93.7 per cent agreed at the same level that images explain regional cultural, social, and architectural comprehension better than text alone (mean 4.56). Three-quarters of respondents (75.0 per cent) additionally reported having visited a destination primarily because of its architectural heritage, and named specific sites, including Rajasthan monuments alongside sites such as the Taj Mahal and the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, in doing so. Together, these findings offer strong support for the theoretical claim, drawn from (Linda & Rawashdekh, 2021; Niazi & Kumar, 2018; Staiff, 2015), that architectural heritage functions as a uniquely powerful driver of destination choice and a uniquely efficient visual resource for city branding, and they are consistent with (Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011) argument that visual cues, more than other forms of destination information, engage the imagination and anticipatory emotion that ultimately motivates travel.

On RQ3, the visual communication parameters respondents most strongly associated with a positive heritage travel experience were image itself (84.4 per cent), followed by texture and

pattern (62.5 per cent), layout and graphics (53.1 per cent each), and shape and colour (46.9 per cent each), with typography and space rated somewhat lower (34.4 per cent each). This ordering is broadly consistent with (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020) social semiotic emphasis on the primacy of the overall image and its represented content over more compositional or typographic elements, and it suggests that heritage marketing content that foregrounds strong, texturally rich architectural imagery, the carved stonework of a haveli facade, the layered silhouette of a hilltop fort, is likely to resonate more strongly with this audience than content that relies primarily on typographic or purely graphic design treatment.

RQ4 produces the paper's most analytically interesting and, from a practitioner standpoint, most actionable finding. Despite the very high stated importance respondents attached to visual and architectural experience across all three Likert items above, actual recognition accuracy on the four-landmark visual test averaged only 44.5 per cent, and varied sharply by landmark: 56.2 per cent for the Jodhpur cityscape view, 53.1 per cent for Hawa Mahal, 43.8 per cent for Amer Fort, and only 25.0 per cent for Mehrangarh Fort, meaning three in four respondents could not correctly identify one of Jodhpur's single most photographed and internationally reproduced monuments when shown an image of it. This is a genuinely important gap. It indicates that respondents' strong attitudinal commitment to the idea of visual and architectural experience, which is well documented across the Likert items, does not automatically translate into precise, landmark-level visual literacy about specific Rajasthani heritage sites, even among a sample that is young, well-educated, and reports very high social-media exposure to Jaipur and Jodhpur content. Read through (Urry, 2002) tourist-gaze framework, this suggests that the visual gaze respondents have been trained to direct at "Rajasthan" or "heritage architecture" in general is not the same as a gaze trained on specific, individually named sites; audiences appear to recognise the generic visual grammar of a Rajasthani fort, ochre stone, crenelated ramparts, a hilltop setting, more reliably than they recognise which specific fort they are looking at. (*Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory In Psychology*, 2025) also suggests that the volume of social media exposure respondents report is not, by itself, a guarantee of the kind of repeated, name-attached visual reinforcement (a location tag, a caption naming the monument, a geotagged post) that would be needed to convert passive visual familiarity into active, name-level recall.

This gap between attitude and demonstrated recognition has direct implications for destination marketing. If Rajasthan tourism authorities and allied stakeholders want the region's individual monuments, and not merely a generic sense of "Rajasthani heritage," to travel internationally as recognisable, individually brand-able assets in the way, for instance, that the Eiffel Tower or the Taj Mahal function as single-image shorthand for Paris and Agra respectively, current visual communication appears to under-deliver on consistent, name-attached repetition of specific landmark imagery, particularly for Mehrangarh Fort, which despite being one of India's most architecturally significant forts recorded the lowest recognition accuracy of the four images tested. This finding also lends partial empirical support to (Linda & Rawashdekh, 2021) argument, developed in the Jordanian context, that a graphic identity system, logos, consistent naming, and

repeated, standardised visual treatment across advertising and information materials, is not a cosmetic add-on to heritage tourism communication but a functional precondition for a monument's visual identity to actually register and be retained by audiences.

8. Limitations of the Study

The results presented above have the following limitations that need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. First, the sample size of 320 respondents, achieved through convenience sampling using an online form, is too small and demographically too skewed, to be representative of the general travelling public and is therefore not representative of population level estimates, but rather is intended as exploratory and hypothesis-generating. Second, the visual-recognition exercise, while a valuable addition that most comparable studies in this literature omit, used only four images and a single exposure per image; recognition accuracy could plausibly differ under different image framing, cropping, or presentation conditions, and a larger item bank would allow more robust conclusions about which specific visual parameters drive recognition. Third, self-reported media exposure frequencies are, like all self-report measures, subject to recall and social-desirability bias, an issue the study partially addresses by pairing attitudinal items with the behavioural recognition task but does not eliminate entirely. Finally, the study's scope was limited to two Rajasthani cities; the extent to which the attitude-recognition gap identified here generalises to other Indian heritage cities with different visual identities, Varanasi's ghats, Hampi's ruins, or Old Delhi's Mughal architecture, for example, remains an open empirical question.

9. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This study set out to examine how visual mediums construct the global identity of Indian heritage cities, using Jaipur and Jodhpur as focal cases, and to test empirically whether travellers' stated appreciation of visual and architectural cues corresponds to their demonstrated ability to recognise specific heritage imagery. Grounded in medium theory, Social Learning Theory, the tourist gaze, and social semiotics, and combining a thematic literature review with primary survey and visual-recognition data from 320 respondents, the study finds that social media and digital news portals have become the dominant channels through which respondents encounter these two cities, that architectural and historical heritage is a leading driver of destination choice, and that respondents place very high subjective value on visual and architectural experience. At the same time, the study's central and most novel finding is that this high subjective valuation does not translate reliably into accurate, landmark-specific visual recognition, with average recognition accuracy across four well-known monuments reaching only 44.5 per cent and falling as low as 25.0 per cent for Mehrangarh Fort. This attitude-recognition gap is the paper's principal contribution to the literature on heritage visual communication, extending prior work on Jordan (Linda & Rawashdekh, 2021), Italy (Pasquinelli et al., 2022), and Rajasthan's social media use (Rathore et al., 2017) by showing that high self-reported visual engagement with a heritage destination can

coexist with comparatively weak, landmark-specific visual literacy, and by suggesting that this gap is a legitimate and measurable object of study in its own right rather than an assumption to be taken for granted.

For practice, the findings suggest that Rajasthan's tourism authorities, heritage bodies, and destination-marketing organisations would benefit from visual communication strategies that move beyond generic, "Rajasthani heritage" imagery toward consistent, name-attached, and platform-differentiated repetition of individual landmark visuals, with particular attention to under-recognised assets such as Mehrangarh Fort, and from closer coordination with the graphic-identity principles, standardised logos, captions, and information graphics, that (Linda & Rawashdekh, 2021) identify as functionally necessary rather than merely decorative. For research, three directions follow directly from this study's limitations. A larger, stratified sample, spanning a wider age, education, and occupation range and, ideally, both Indian and international respondents, would allow the attitude-recognition gap identified here to be tested for robustness and for variation across traveller segments. An expanded visual-recognition instrument, testing a larger and more systematically varied set of images across multiple Indian heritage cities, would allow the specific formal and platform variables (framing, colour, caption presence, posting platform) that predict recognition accuracy to be isolated more precisely, building directly on the visual semiotic and visual-word frameworks reviewed in Section 2. Finally, comparative research could be conducted to other cities in Indian heritage, and to other quite older case studies across the world, to determine if the attitude-recognition gap observed in this research is a common characteristic of contemporary heritage tourism communication or is it the specific case of Jaipur and Jodhpur's current visual marketing landscape. The challenge of how much travellers say they value architectural heritage and how exactly they can see and name it is one of the more consequential and under-addressed tasks before the visual communication and heritage tourism industry in India, as the country's cities compete for attention on the global tourist map.

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