



## **Analysis of The Expectations of Gresik Residents in Searching for Tourist Information Through Hashtags and Geotags on Instagram**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to analyze the process of forming tourists' expectations through the use of information search features such as hashtags and geotags on the social media platform Instagram. Social media has transformed how information is disseminated and consumed through user-generated content. On Instagram, users are not only passive consumers but also active providers and consumers of information. They can freely share their travel experiences through posts that are tagged with hashtags and geotags. By searching using hashtags and geotags, tourists' initial expectations are formed. This research utilizes a case study method with a qualitative approach, conducting interviews with 10 individuals through purposive sampling, and content analysis to examine the formation of tourist expectations through hashtags and geotags on Instagram. The results of the study indicate that user interaction through hashtags and geotags plays a crucial role in shaping expectations. Search features such as hashtags and geotags support the formation of tourists' initial expectations, encompassing the geographical overview of a place to nearby accommodations. Additionally, visually appealing content and information contained in tags or captions also play a vital role in users' decision-making.

**Keywords :** Expectation, Hashtag, Information, Instagram, Tourism

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Research by Buhalis and Law (2008) shows that the internet has changed the way people search for information about tourism and plan their trips. Social media, such as Instagram, plays a key role in connecting consumers, allowing them to share experiences and read other people's stories that influence their choices in choosing travel destinations and activities (Law et al., 2014). The use of social media, including various forms of content such as blogs, virtual communities, wikis, and social networks, has changed the way people communicate and seek

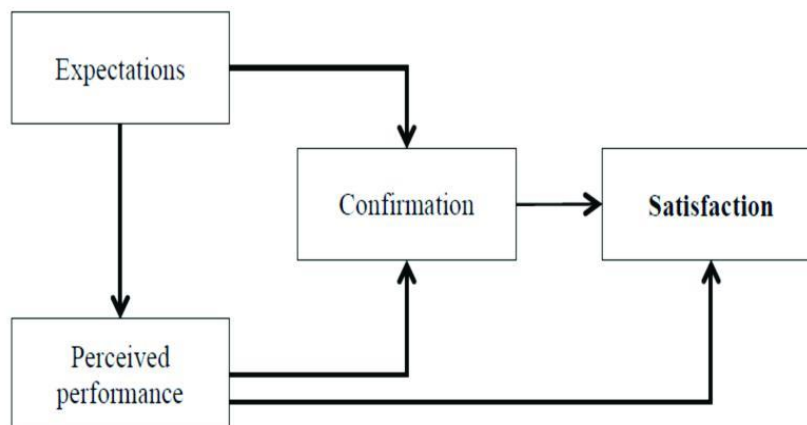
information in the context of the tourism industry (Chung & Koo, 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

In recent years, the popularity of the internet and social media among Indonesian tourists has increased rapidly, reaching 77% of the total Indonesian population using the internet (We Are Social, 2023). Instagram, with 89.15 million users in Indonesia, is one of the main platforms for searching for information about tourism (We Are Social, 2023). Instagram users use features such as geotags and hashtags to search for information relevant to their interests. Geotags allow them to find tourist attraction locations, while hashtags facilitate discussion and search for specific information about travel (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Chung & Lee, 2016). Hashtags and geotags are not only information retrieval tools, but also play an important role in enhancing the traveler experience. Instagram users feel comfortable using geotags because it can increase the efficiency of information searches during their travels (Chung et al., 2017). Additionally, the use of relevant hashtags on Instagram is considered standard etiquette, allowing tourists to find specific content easily (Knapp & Baum, 2015).

Indonesian Instagram users generally use hashtags such as #travellingindonesia, #indonesiagateway, #exploreindonesia, #thisisindonesia, and #livefolkindonesia when looking for information and inspiration about tourist attractions (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). Tourists' decisions to visit content with certain hashtags are influenced by the quality of the photos and information presented in the content (Lund et al., 2018). Instagram users look for travel references and inspiration through these popular hashtags, considering the quality of the visuals and information presented. In this context, the use of hashtags and geotags not only influences tourists' decision making, but also influences their satisfaction during or after the trip. Attention-grabbing content, uploaded with relevant hashtags and geotags, has a positive impact on user satisfaction, as their travel experience exceeds expectations (Krisna et al., 2019; Paül i Agustí, 2018).

Digital literacy on the other hands using tools on social media to improve impact on users' ability to consume, evaluate, and respond to digital information. Thus, this research is important in the context of digital literacy because it helps understand how digital literacy plays a key role in how users utilize social media to search for tourism information.

Based on the description above, the problem formulation in this research is the process of forming tourist expectations through the use of information search features such as hashtags and geotags on Instagram social media. It is hoped that the findings from this research will provide valuable insight into how the use of hashtags and geotags on Instagram influences tourists' expectations. The Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) by Oliver (1980) is used as a foundation. According to ECT, expectations are the standard by which travellers judge tourism experiences (Brown et al., 2008).



In this research, ECT theory is used to relate how the confirmation of users' expectations of the tourism information they encounter on Instagram through hashtags and geotags has an impact on their level of satisfaction as well as on the perceived performance of the information. This research attempts to understand the dynamics between expectation, confirmation, satisfaction, and perceived performance in the context of using social media to search for tourism information.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To help finding a fit methodology, I used the social constructivism paradigm which aims to understand the participants' views on the situation being studied (Cresswell, 2009). The method applied was a text-based qualitative approach involving interviews. This research aims to explore the motives for using hashtags and geotags by Instagram users when searching for tourist information. With this approach, the research seeks to understand more deeply how users utilize hashtags and geotags in the process of searching for tourist information on Instagram.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Social Media Instagram as a Source of Search for Information About Tourism**

Social media has a strong impact in the tourism sector, especially since the industry is information-intensive (Sheldon, 1997; Werthner & Klein, 1999). This positive influence is seen in the restructuring of the tourism industry, where the presence of social media has become very important (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In this context, building online communities of people with similar interests and engaged in different areas of business, such as social commerce or entertainment, can be a cost-effective solution to utilise social media effectively. Especially Instagram has become very popular by businesses and stakeholders as it allows people to express their opinions, feelings and experiences in innovative ways (Nezakati et al., 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The popularity of social media has increased because it allows many people to participate in content creation, such as user generated content (UGC) or consumer generated media (CGM) (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Content shared through social media has important value in gathering travel-related information (Narangajavana et al., 2017).

This research examines the impact of social media use in the travel and tourism industry before and after the trip. Along with the development of social media platforms, there have been significant changes in the way travellers get information and how tourism information is disseminated (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The advantages of social media in reaching a global audience, providing easy access to information, and enabling mass communication through its platform, make it a convenient source of information for travellers when planning a trip (Fotis, 2015). Travellers often seek confirmation from their social circles after or during their trip. With the easy access of social media, they can constantly seek such confirmations (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Social media provides a platform that allows travellers to share their experiences, reinforce travel memories, and build their self-image and social status (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Studies by Lyu (2016) and Kim and Tussyadiah (2013) show that travellers often upload their selfies as proof of their trip, seeking support from their friends (Sedera et al., 2017).

Based on the results of interviews with informants, Instagram social media is the main social media in finding information about tourist objects or destinations. This is due to the content created by users. Holiday photos uploaded by users usually contain information about tourist attractions. Informants AA and CC stated that Instagram content that includes the tag of the service provider or official account of the tourist attraction can increase their interest in visiting the place. This is considered an added value because it reduces their efforts in finding

service providers to visit the destination. Apart from tags, other features that informants consider important in finding information about tourism are the use of hashtags in post captions and the geotag feature. As active Instagram users, the informants also admitted that they had uploaded content about their own travel experiences. The informants' motives for uploading their travel experiences vary, but are still in line with the results of previous research

<b>Table 1. Motives for using Instagram as a tourism information platform</b>			
<b>No</b>	<b>Informant</b>	<b>Information search motives</b>	<b>Motives for uploading travel content</b>
1	AA	Instragram provides an overview of the location through engaging content and concise, compact information (especially with the presence of tagging features for service providers)	Providing information for other users or participating in quizzes or contests with prizes
2	BB	Looking for travel destination recommendations	Keeping the content up-to-date by consistently uploading post-travel photos
3	CC	Reading reviews of tourist places from other users	Keeping the content up-to-date by consistently uploading post-travel photos
4	DD	Seeking an overview of the location	Keeping the content up-to-date by consistently uploading post-travel photos
5	EE	Looking for an overview of the location and reading reviews from other users	Maintaining updated content while showcasing only beautiful photo outcomes
6	FF	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seeking an overview of the location</li> <li>2. Looking for activities that can be done at the location</li> <li>3. Factors for decision-making considerations</li> </ol>	Maintaining updated content while showcasing only beautiful photo outcomes
7	GG	Searching for information and reviews from other users about the location	Maintaining updated content while showcasing only beautiful photo outcomes
8	HH	Searching for information and photo spots around the location	Maintaining updated content while showcasing only beautiful photo outcomes
9	II	Visual references for taking pictures at the location	Maintaining updated content while showcasing only beautiful photo outcomes
10	JJ	Searching for information about the location	Keeping the content up-to-date by consistently uploading post-travel photos

## **2. Hashtags as a Supporting Tool for Searching Tourist Information on Instagram**

In the era of contemporary web technologies, the search for travel information has undergone significant changes. Social media, including text messages, images, and real-time

videos, allow travellers to engage and interact more effectively in their travel experiences (Chung & Koo, 2015). Previously, travellers got recommendations from travel magazines, newspapers, and books. However, in the last 15 years, internet websites have replaced these traditional media sources, allowing users to search for travel information and share their experiences (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998).

This change was fuelled by the development of Web 2.0, which changed the way the tourism industry operates. Travellers are now proactive information providers, sharing their travel experiences online, both during the planning phase and after the trip is over (Sigala, 2012). The use of hashtags on social media, such as Instagram, has played an important role in the search and dissemination of information. Hashtags are keywords or strings of words represented by hash marks (#) and function as hyperlinks (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011).

Hashtags not only act as promotional tools, but also as interpersonal media. They can be used to coordinate conversations, enact interpersonal relationships, or communicate feelings shared by others (Zappavigna, 2015; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). In addition, hashtags can also tag specific topics of experience and be used to search for information in a specialised domain (e.g., politics) or to give commands to an ambient audience (e.g., #retweet, #follow, #share) (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011).

The interviews with the informants revealed a positive relationship between the motives for using hashtags, as investigated by Krisna et al. (2019), especially in the context of historical recording and information seeking. Informants CC and II revealed that they use hashtags when uploading their holiday photos with the aim of spreading information about the destination so that it can be archived and found as a source of information for others. This motive from informants' CC and II support the historical recording motive as found in Krisna et al.'s research. (2019). Meanwhile, in the context of information seeking, informants EE, II, and JJ stated that they searched for information about tourism on Instagram social media using hashtags, which also supports the findings of Krisna et al.'s research. (2019). This is also in line with Zappavigna's (2015) view that in information search, hashtags can function as a persuasive tool to provide clues to the audience. In this case, persuasive clues can be in the form of an invitation to visit the tourist destination. However, in this study, ethics-based motives for hashtag use were not found, as none of the 10 informants interviewed stated any ethical motives in using hashtags on social media, either in the context of searching for information before a travel trip or when uploading their holiday content after the trip.

However, the use of geotags is not only limited to finding interesting photo locations. As informant CC revealed, through checking the geographical conditions around the location on the map, he can anticipate the terrain conditions around the location, which is an important consideration for his preparation before visiting the location. The effectiveness of geotags has been proven in detecting international events and mapping geo-based text (Rattenbury et al., 2007; Crandall et al., 2009). With information from global positioning systems (GPS), location recommendations can be extended to include places and activities near the user's current location (Zheng et al., 2010). Geotags allow other users to find the location where photos were taken directly and search for information about tourist destination locations based on previous individual experiences (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). Based on research by Kurashima (2013), and Okuyama and Yanai (2013), geotagging is a popular source for finding information about facilities, transport, and geographical conditions of tourist destinations (Chung et al., 2017)

No	Informant	Motives for using hashtags on Instagram	Motives for using hashtags in posts
1	AA	Information Search	Following trends and participating in online contests
2	BB	Information Search	Increasing engagement and visibility
3	CC	Information Search	Increasing engagement and visibility
4	DD	Information Search	(because want?)
5	EE	Information Search	Increasing visibility to be seen by other users beyond the following account
6	FF	Information Search	Not using hashtags in post-travel uploads
7	GG	Information Search	Not using hashtags in post-travel uploads
8	HH	Information Search	Not using hashtags in post-travel uploads
9	II	Information Search	To serve as a reference for other users seeking information about tourist destinations
10	JJ	Information Search	Increasing engagement and visibility

### **3. Geotag and Trend Industry-based Location Search**

Geotagging, or more commonly known as geotagging, is a feature that is widely favoured by users of location-based services. According to Gikas and Grant (2013), geotags are geographic identification metadata added to media to mark one's location for others and are provided by social media platforms such as Facebook, Flickr, Foursquare, Instagram and Twitter (Chung & Lee, 2016).

In this study, informants often highlighted geotags on posts with interesting settings, suggesting that interest in geotags is closely related to the content posted. Buczkowski (2012) emphasises that geotags enable the visualisation of social media content in unique ways, such as prominently displaying the location name, for example, in blue letters on Instagram or bold text on Facebook. Geotags can satisfy travellers' desire to share their travel experiences with others, provide useful information about tourist sites, and enrich the travel industry (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Wilson et al., 2012). The use of geotags by users not only increases its popularity but also makes great contributions to the travel industry (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Wilson et al., 2012). Diverse information technologies enable travellers to actively participate in online photo sharing, which in turn enhances the travel experience and encourages tourist visits (Chung et al., 2017).

From the interviews with informants, we found that the most important factor in user engagement on geotags is the quality of the content. The significance of the content factor to engagement on geotags is very large, because without interesting visuals, users will not be interested in clicking on geotags or exploring more about the destination. Informants HH and JJ added that their motivation to click on geotags is to find interesting photo spots or points of interest in the destination as a reference for tourism activities, in accordance with the findings

described in research by Fatanti & Suyadnya (2015) on the motives for using geotags as a source of recommendations for shooting locations.

No	Informant	Motive for geotag engagement on Instagram	Motive for using geotags in posts
1	AA	Becoming a reference for photography inspiration	Informing other users about the location of the photo shoot
2	BB	Becoming a reference and providing an overview of the location	Informing other users about the location of the photo shoot
3	CC	Becoming a reference and providing an overview of the location	1. As evidence of having visited a tourist destination 2. Informing other users about the location of the photo shoot
4	DD	Untuk melihat lokasi geografis	Informing other users about the location of the photo shoot
5	EE	Becoming a reference for photography inspiration	Informing other users about the location of the photo shoot
6	FF	Becoming a reference and providing an overview of the location	Informing other users about the location of the photo shoot
7	GG	To view the geographic location	Not using geotags in travel posts
8	HH	Becoming a reference and providing an overview of the location	Using irrelevant geotags for the content (entertainment motive)
9	II	Becoming a reference and providing an overview of the location	To enhance the uniqueness of the content
10	JJ	Becoming a reference for photography inspiration	1. Informing other users about the location of the photo shoot 2. Promoting locations to other users

#### **4. Instagram and fulfilling travellers' expectations**

Based on the results of interviews with informants, the researcher found that there are similarities in the process of expectation formation. First of all, the users get information about tourist destinations from their relatives, especially through feeds or stories on Instagram. Due to interest in the content, users will conduct further searches about the destination using geotags, hashtags, or search engines such as Google. This shows how important the content factor is in shaping user expectations.

While Instagram initially served as a platform for sharing photos online, over time, it evolved to be effective in advertising, promotion, marketing, and distribution of ideas and goods. Sepchenkova and Zhan (2013) state that these photos are used as a tool to "capture" reality. The phenomenon of tourists using their mobile phone cameras to take pictures has a deeper meaning, which is trying to convey reality as a message, both for themselves and for others. In addition, photography also allows travellers to share their experiences with others.

The combination of social media and mobile technology such as mobile phones makes taking photos more fun and easier. In the context of tourism, the goal of online photography is to create a positive perception of a tourist destination in the eyes of the audience. The images created by users will be produced, discussed, and shared through social media with a "silent" word of mouth (WOM) model. In other words, the online photography facilities provided by Instagram, such as uploading photos, become a symbol of the user's reality and experience as a traveller. The contribution of Instagram users shows a positive trend in shaping the brand of tourist destinations. This brand is built through eWOM (electronic word of mouth), which involves consumer comments about products and services uploaded on Instagram (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011).

As noted by Stylianou-Lamber (2012), tourists are active actors who can create unique places and experiences through various leisure activities. Along with the diversity of tourists' actions and their motives for visiting various locations, as well as with the ease of taking photos, this results in diverse types of behaviour (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). As a result, each type of tourist can have different motives and expectations, which in turn results in different types of spatial behaviour (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004).

An important finding of the research conducted by Narangajavana (2017) for the tourism industry related to content is that to create expectations about tourist destinations, the key factor is "trust in User-Generated Content (UGC)" or trust in UGC on social media. This means that the origin of the information is not the main factor, what is more important is the content of the information. Informants such as BB, AA, CC and GG also stated this in their interviews. They prefer content based on user accreditation and focus on the content of the information rather than the origin of the information.

Overall, the informants chose Instagram as the main social media to find inspiration for travel destinations because of its user-generated content. They believe that it provides a more tangible picture of the destination, which in turn influences their decision to visit the place. Some informants also prefer to hear recommendations from their circle of friends due to the trust in reviews and recommendations from people they know. This shows that informants' choice of information sources is subjective and depends on various factors, including practicality and trust in the content provider. Tourists are active actors who can create unique places and experiences through various leisure activities. Along with the diversity of tourists' actions and their motives for visiting various locations, as well as with the ease of taking photos, this results in diverse types of behaviour (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). As a result, each type of tourist can have different motives and expectations, which in turn results in different types of spatial behaviour (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The presence of social media has changed trend in expectation. With its user-generated content format, Instagram presents information in a concise and attention-grabbing content. Users can upload their holiday photos using hashtags and geotags, which in turn become useful references for other users looking for information about a particular destination. However, it is important to remember that the level of user engagement in searching for information through hashtags is highly influenced by the quality of the content. Through hash-tagged and geotagged searches that are influenced by content factors, users form initial expectations about the destinations they will visit through Instagram. These expectations are considered the standard by which travelers judge their experience at the destination. The extent to which a traveler's initial expectations are met will ultimately affect the level of traveler satisfaction. The formation of travelers' expectations is important not only because it will affect the level of satisfaction, but also because it is the first element in the purchase decision-making process.



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