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**Original article**

# Assessing Social Media's Role in Promoting Rural Tourism in Uttarakhand

Gagan Singh[1], Gopal Datt[2], Mast Ram[3], Manoj Kumar Pandey[4], Geetanjali Bhatt Sharma[5], Sunil Tewari[6]

*1-School of Management Studies and Commerce, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, India. E-Mail: gsingh@uou.ac.in*
*2- School of Vocational Studies, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, India.*
*3- Department of Commerce, Shyam Lal College, University of Delhi, India.*
*4- School of Tourism, Hospitality and Hotel Management, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, India.*
*5- School of Management Studies and Commerce, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, India.*
*6- School of Earth and Environmental Science, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, India.*

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**Abstract:**

Social media offers rural homestays an opportunity to expand market reach, exhibit cultural experiences, and engage prospective visitors. This study examines its perceived role in promoting rural tourism, specifically homestays in Uttarakhand, India; focusing on promotional benefits, digital readiness, skill training requirements, and adoption barriers. An exploratory and descriptive survey collected data from homestay owners and operators across all thirteen districts between March and June 2026. The analysis retained 203 validated responses and employed descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, analysis of variance, and Spearman's rank correlations. Instagram (78.8%) and Facebook (78.3%) emerged as the preferred promotional platforms. Increased visibility and reach constituted the most frequently reported benefit (78.8%), followed by direct customer interaction (66.0%) and cost-effective advertising (56.7%). While 89.7% considered digital skills essential, 79.3% expressed willingness to undertake training. Reviews and ratings were perceived to influence bookings, while culturally themed content supported tourist interest; photographs and destination videos received the highest ratings for content effectiveness. However, limited internet connectivity, a lack of digital marketing skills, poor content quality, and insufficient advertising funds constrained effective use. Training needs were strongly associated with perceived barriers, indicating that capacity-building requirements accompany operational difficulties. The findings support practical training in social media marketing and content creation, combined with connectivity improvements and targeted support for homestay owners and operators. By integrating promotional perceptions with capacity-building constraints, the study establishes a foundation for locally relevant support for rural homestays in the region.

**Keywords:**

Social Media Platforms, Rural Tourism, Homestay Promotion, Digital Skills, Skill Barriers.

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**Introduction:**

Rural tourism connects visitor expenditure with local livelihoods, cultural knowledge, and small enterprise development. Homestays are particularly relevant since accommodation is embedded in household life and interaction between hosts and guests. Their appeal may be in food, hospitality, landscapes and opportunities to encounter local traditions. Studies from the Indian Himalayan Region indicate that homestays can be a useful form of sustainable tourism and that rural properties can provide standards of hospitality comparable to urban properties (Thakur et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the existence of attractive experiences does not ensure that potential tourists will discover, trust or book a rural homestay. Thus, it is important to understand how these enterprises promote their offerings to evaluate their development potential.

This is an appropriate question to ask in Uttarakhand. Its rural homestays function within the framework of Himalayan tourism, where accommodation, cultural experiences and community livelihoods come together. Studies on homestays in the Garhwal Himalaya associates their operation with income diversification, employment, and community cooperation, highlighting infrastructure and seasonality as persistent challenges (Prajapati et al., 2024). These findings confirm the relevance of homestay development but not distinguish the contribution of social media. Digital promotion assessment can examine whether operators consider online communication to increase visibility and interest of visitors and whether the capacities for a continuous maintenance of this communication are sufficiently developed.

Social media changes the ways in which small accommodation businesses can become visible. Operators can upload pictures and videos, answer questions, and share experiences that might be hard to relay in traditional advertising. The research on destination branding links social media strategy to content created by users and tourists' cognitive, affective and behavioural responses (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). These linkages provide a pathway from exposure to interest and trust for rural homestays. Each stage, however, has to be looked at individually, i.e. audience reach is not the same as engagement and engagement is not the same as a completed reservation. Thus, perceptions of visibility should be considered as a complement, rather than a substitute, for evidence of booking outcomes.

The commercial value of digital promotion is likely to vary across platforms and activities as well. A study in China on rural tourism merchants shows that social media intervention improved the sales, and there were differences between short-video and live-streaming channels (Cheng & Jiang, 2025). Such evidence makes it worthwhile to study platform choice but its effects cannot be directly transposed to Uttarakhand homestays. Work closer to home from Sikkim shows the strategic use of WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram for communication and promotion (Bhutia et al., 2026). The studies invite us to consider the platforms that Uttarakhand rural homestay operators prefer and the benefits they believe these platforms provide, with the understanding that preference alone does not determine effectiveness.

Having a smartphone or thinking that digital skills are useful is not enough to keep an online presence. On the top of their accommodation duties, operators have to select the content, communication skills, deal with enquiries and keep things consistent. Mirik's research links digital engagement with booking performance and points out weak connectivity, poor marketing skills and limited professional content are constraints (Karim, 2025). In Malaysian evidence, customer and competitive pressure influence adoption while digital skills and perceived cost were not statistically significant predictors in that particular model (Mohamad, 2024). Such differences caution against assuming that barriers to adoption are uniform across rural destinations.

Two more ways where online communication may matter, i.e. reviews and cultural storytelling. A study of reviews of family-run homestays in Kerala found common themes of hospitality, cleanliness, facilities, food and relationship with the host (Krishnan et al., 2024). Such feedback can convey service attributes that potential guests cannot examine prior to travel. Qualitative research on travel choices indicates that social media can generate needs, facilitate deliberation, influence choices, and approve decisions (Liu et al., 2020). Cultural posts can complement these functions by enhancing the visibility of the homestay experience.

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However, it is necessary to differentiate between what operators believe they can influence and the motivations stated by tourists and their confirmed booking behaviour.

The contributions of rural tourism are economic, sociocultural, environmental and educational (Liu et al., 2023). Social media may help operators to communicate unique experiences and stimulate local involvement, but the success of promotion alone does not constitute evidence of equitable community development. Research on women hosts in Kerala shows that homestay enterprise can extend undervalued domestic labour without corresponding changes in decision-making power (Anjusha et al., 2026). Therefore, community benefits should be understood as perceived outcomes, paying attention to who does the work and who reaps the rewards. Here, training and digital support are relevant, in part because they can affect access to these opportunities.

The present study investigates the role of social media in promoting rural tourism in Uttarakhand. It measures perceived visibility and market reach, attitudes toward online promotion, and cultural content and perceived business and community benefits. It also pinpoints training priorities and barriers in the technical, financial and operational areas. This study aims to integrate these dimensions and provide evidence for operator support and capacity building that is relevant to the local context. Its contribution is an owner/ operator-centred assessment of promotional opportunities and constraints.

**Literature Review:**

The research into social media and rural homestays can be organized around six interconnected themes, i.e. visibility, preparedness, communication regarding bookings, benefits, competencies and barriers to uptake. Technology research indicates that digital resources may be important for rural tourism development, emphasizing their ties to larger socioeconomic conditions (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020). Moreover, the literature on destination branding links online communication to content created by users, destination perceptions, and behavioural responses (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Collectively, these views indicate that effective promotion consists of external communication and the operator's ability to maintain it. They also show why the availability of the platform should not be taken as enough evidence of successful rural tourism development.

The evidence on visibility and market access is promising. Studies on digital platforms talks about the opportunities for homestays to reach out to broader markets and change their ways of doing business (Babu & Mukhopadhyay, 2020). A study in Mirik notes a positive relationship between digital engagement and booking conversion, but observational associations cannot establish that engagement caused additional bookings (Karim, 2025). Conversely, controlled experiments with rural tourism merchants in China offer more compelling evidence that formal social media marketing can boost sales, though the effects vary across channels and products (Cheng & Jiang, 2025). For Uttarakhand, it implies the need to look into platform preferences and perceived reach without assuming homogenous commercial returns.

Operator readiness is affected by motivation, resources and context. A survey of 208 Malaysian homestay operators found that adoption was strongly influenced by customer preference and competitive pressure. Perceived cost and digital skills were found to be statistically insignificant in the reported model (Mohamad, 2024). That doesn't prove that skills don't matter in other environments. Interviews with 30 operators in Sikkim highlight uneven uptake and deliberate choice of platform and constraints associated with skills and operating conditions (Bhutia et al., 2026). The results suggest a divide between positive attitudes to digital promotion and competence.

Reviews and ratings give you an insight into the quality and trustworthiness of a homestay experience. Text mining of reviews on family-run homestays in Kerala brought out recurrent themes of food, facilities, cleanliness, hospitality and satisfaction with hosts (Krishnan et al., 2024). Likewise, few more studies compares homestay provision using guest reviews and ratings to inform policy support (Thakur et al., 2024). These studies show the informational value of feedback, but review content in itself does not prove an effect on reservations. Interviews of tourists identify different roles of social media in travel choices, such as

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generating needs, supporting or approving decisions (Liu et al., 2020). This means that the perceived effect on bookings can be measured by an operator survey.

Studies in Sikkim suggests that promotional content that highlights local experiences and authenticity is effective. Cultural storytelling can add character to rural accommodation by sharing experiences that go beyond the room (Bhutia et al., 2026). However, unique experiences do not necessarily lead to online advocacy, i.e. a comparative study of accommodation preferences revealed that homestay-preferring tourists reported stronger recall and revisit intentions and weaker word-of-mouth and social sharing habits (Bose & Biju, 2020). Finally, we need to distinguish business versus community benefits. Research on rural tourism has demonstrated economic, sociocultural, environmental, and leisure or educational contributions to community development (Liu et al., 2023). Research on homestays in Garhwal reported livelihood and social benefits, as well continuing constraints (Prajapati et al., 2024). Yet, household enterprise can replicate unequal skilled workforce arrangements as evidenced from qualitative evidence on women hosts in Kerala (Anjusha et al., 2026). These results support the consideration of perceived visibility, customer interaction, trust, cultural differentiation and community participation as separate benefits.

Inconsistent posting, low engagement, financial constraints and shortages of skilled personnel were reported in a qualitative study on tourism-villages (AS. F. et al., 2025). Studies of community homestay systems in Nepal highlight the potential of digital coordination, while also recognizing operational and institutional challenges (Lama & Pradhan, 2022). Such evidence helps to assess content creation, communication, planning and platform management alongside connectivity and financial barriers. Training preferences can inform program design, although expressed demand is not the same as a tested skill deficit. The reviewed literature frequently focuses on branding, adoption, guest feedback and community development in isolation. The present study ties these strands together through a homestay owner / operator survey in Uttarakhand, while maintaining the distinction between perceived promotional value and verified tourism outcomes.

**Need and Scope:**

Uttarakhand's hill districts have witnessed a steady expansion of community-based and family-run homestays as a policy-supported alternative to conventional hospitality, intended to retain tourism revenue within local households, encourage reverse migration, and diversify rural livelihoods beyond agriculture. At the same time, the state's tourism promotion increasingly moves through social media channels Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp that operate independently of the formal travel-agent and hotel-aggregator ecosystem and are, in principle, within reach of even small, single-unit rural operators. Yet whether this digital opportunity is being realized in practice, and by whom, remains poorly documented: homestay operators in remote and hill districts often combine hospitality with agriculture or other livelihoods, have uneven digital literacy, and face infrastructural constraints that urban-centric studies of social media marketing do not capture. There is a clear need, therefore, to examine social media's role in rural tourism promotion specifically from the vantage point of the homestay operator, rather than the tourist or the platform, and to do so with primary data drawn from across the diversity of Uttarakhand's hill and terai districts rather than a single tourist circuit. This study addresses that need by surveying 203 homestay operators across thirteen districts of Uttarakhand, capturing their actual platform use, perceived benefits, skill gaps, and operational barriers. Its scope extends across five interlinked areas: the promotional effectiveness and reach generated through social media; operators' digital readiness and skill perceptions; the influence of reviews, ratings, and culturally-themed content on tourist interest and bookings; the specific benefits operators associate with digital adoption; and the capacity-building and training needs required to convert current, often informal, social media use into a more strategic and sustainable promotional practice for the sector as a whole.

**Objectives:**

1. To evaluate social media platforms in expanding rural homestay visibility and market reach.
2. To assess homestay operators' digital readiness and attitudes toward online promotion.



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3. To examine how online reviews, ratings, and cultural storytelling influence tourist booking decisions.
4. To analyze the perceived business and community benefits of adopting social media.
5. To identify essential digital marketing competencies and training requirements for local operators.
6. To examine technical, financial, and operational challenges restricting social media adoption.

**Methodology:**

Study Design and Setting

The study uses an exploratory approach to examine homestay owners' and operators' perceptions of social media promotion in rural tourism, i.e. Homestay in Uttarakhand, India. A hybrid mode (Online / Offline) survey is conducted, in which the analytical focus is the respondent's account of homestay promotion. The design is exploratory and descriptive, with association analyses where justified by the responses. Data were collected between March to June 2026 through an online survey of registered homestay owners and operators in Uttarakhand, India. The list of registered homestays were obtained from the Department of Tourism, Government of Uttarakhand, India. Duplicate entries were removed from this list before respondents were selected through random sampling. Survey invitations were distributed using the e-mail addresses and mobile contacts available in the list. The study covered all 13 districts of Uttarakhand, and each validated response represents a different homestay. Most homestays in the sampling were situated in hilly or rural locations. However, registration in a hilly area was not treated as sufficient evidence of rural status in the list accessed from the Department. The study's rural tourism focus should therefore be interpreted in relation to the recorded locations of participating homestays.

Participants and Sampling

The target participants were homestay owners or operators in Uttarakhand, India. The list of 5205 registered homestays was obtained from the Department of Tourism, Government of Uttarakhand, India. After cleaning and verifying the list, ensuring correct e-mail addresses and contact details; 2681 suitable records were identified. All 2681 participants were invited to participate in the survey. Although many e-mails were bounced, we also made efforts to contact them via physical mode, mobile phone and WhatsApp, so that the response rate can increase. A total of 244 survey responses were received, of which 203 responses were verified and retained for analysis purposes.

Survey Instrument

The survey questionnaire contains two sections, i.e. Demographic Information; and Role of Digital Transformation in Promoting Rural Tourism. First section covers respondents' and enterprise context, i.e. District, Locality, Age, Gender, Education, Hospitality qualifications (if any), Marital status, Religion, Social category, Livelihood activities, Annual homestay income, Rental or Lease status, Hospitality experience, etc; And, the second section covers, Digital promotion, Homestays' visibility, review and rating influence, Cultural content's influence on tourist interest, Social media platform preferences, Perceived benefits of social media, skill training expectations and challenges. The instrument directly addresses perceived visibility and communication influence. Readiness is represented by the perceived skill importance, qualifications or experience, and training demand. Cultural content is measured in terms of perceived tourist interest.

Data Analysis

A total of 203 validated survey responses were cleaned, coded, and analyzed using Python / MS Excel. Analysis was organized according to the research objectives, beginning with a descriptive profile of respondents across demographic, geographic, and livelihood characteristics. Frequencies and percentages summarized categorical variables, including perceived digital-skill importance, willingness to undertake training, preferred promotional platforms, and perceived benefits. Multiple-response items were converted into binary indicators, with percentages calculated relative to respondents; consequently, percentages could exceed 100% when summed across options. Platform diversity and benefit breadth were represented by counts of platforms

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selected and benefits endorsed, respectively. Means and standard deviations (SD) summarized five-point ratings concerning perceived visibility, review influence, cultural-content impact, training requirements, content effectiveness, and adoption barriers. Composite indices combined the ratings for content effectiveness, skill-training needs, and barriers. Perceived visibility was shown by the rating given to the single visibility item. Training requirements, content formats, and barriers were ranked using their mean ratings. Cross-tabulations examined variations across demographic / background factors. Pearson's chi-square test assessed associations between categorical variables, while one-way analysis of variance examined group differences in rating scores, composite indices, platform diversity, and benefit breadth. Spearman's rank correlation assessed relationships among perceived visibility, content effectiveness, training needs, barriers, platform diversity, benefit breadth, and homestay income. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$.

**Analysis and Discussion:**

This section presents the statistical analysis of primary data collected through a structured, bilingual questionnaire administered in hybrid mode (face-to-face, telephonic, and online) to homestay owners and operators across Uttarakhand. A total of 203 valid responses were retained for analysis after data cleaning, drawn from thirteen districts of the state Uttarakhand, India. The analysis proceeds objective-wise; it begins with the background profile of respondents, followed by descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation of key study variables against the thirteen demographic/background factors specified (District, Age Group, Gender, Educational Qualification, Professional Qualification, Marital Status, Religion, Category, Source of Income, Yearly Income from Homestay, Rental Property status, Hospitality Work Experience, and Reverse-Migration status). Categorical associations were tested using the Pearson Chi-square test of independence, differences in composite-index means across groups were tested using one-way ANOVA, and associations among continuous constructs were examined using Spearman's rank correlation; a threshold of $p<0.05$ was adopted to denote statistical significance throughout.

Table 1(a), Table 1(B) summarizes the demographic composition of the 203 homestay owners and operators surveyed in terms of District, Age, Gender, Education, Professional Qualification, Marital Status, Category, Income Sources, Homestay Income, Property Status, Hospitality Experience, etc. This profile provides the base against which the subsequent cross-tabulations are interpreted.

**Table 1(A): Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N=203)**

| Factors | Category | N | % | Factors | Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age Group | 18-25 | 37 | 18.2% | District | Almora | 22 | 10.8% |
| | 26-35 | 36 | 17.7% | | Bageshwar | 10 | 4.9% |
| | 36-45 | 55 | 27.1% | | Chamoli | 6 | 3.0% |
| | 46-55 | 46 | 22.7% | | Champawat | 8 | 3.9% |
| | 56 Above | 29 | 14.3% | | Dehradun | 13 | 6.4% |
| Gender | Male | 175 | 86.2% | | Haridwar | 4 | 2.0% |
| | Female | 28 | 13.8% | | Nainital | 65 | 32.0% |
| Educational Qualification | Primary School [1-5] | 3 | 1.5% | | Pauri Garhwal | 18 | 8.9% |
| | Secondary School [6-8] | 16 | 7.9% | | Pithoragarh | 13 | 6.4% |
| | Higher Secondary [9-12] | 75 | 36.9% | | Rudraprayag | 7 | 3.4% |
| | Bachelor Degree | 71 | 35.0% | | Tehri Garhwal | 18 | 8.9% |
| | Post Graduate Degree | 34 | 16.7% | | Udham Singh Nagar | 4 | 2.0% |
| | Any Other | 4 | 2.0% | | Uttarkashi | 15 | 7.4% |
| Marital Status | Married | 138 | 68.0% | Yearly Income from Homestay | Up to Rs. 1,00,000 | 63 | 31.0% |
| | Single | 61 | 30.0% | | Rs. 1,00,001-3,00,000 | 66 | 32.5% |
| | Other (Divorced/Widowed) | 4 | 2.0% | | Rs. 3,00,001-5,00,000 | 50 | 24.6% |
| Category | General | 153 | 75.4% | | Above Rs. 5,00,000 | 24 | 11.8% |
| | O.B.C. | 16 | 7.9% | Any Hospitality Qualification? | Yes | 59 | 29.1% |
| | S.C. | 30 | 14.8% | | No | 144 | 70.9% |
| | S.T. | 4 | 2.0% | Is Homestay Rental / Leased Property? | Yes | 32 | 15.8% |
| Income-Source Pattern | Homestay Only | 30 | 14.8% | | No | 171 | 84.2% |
| | Diversified (Homestay + Other Sources) | 121 | 59.6% | Prior Hospitality Work Experience? | Yes | 71 | 35.0% |
| | Other Sources Only | 52 | 25.6% | | No | 132 | 65.0% |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.

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The sample was drawn predominantly from Nainital district (32.0%, n=65), reflecting its status as Uttarakhand's most tourism-intensive district, followed at a considerable distance by Almora (10.8%), Tehri Garhwal and Pauri Garhwal (8.9% each), with the remaining nine districts each contributing under 8% of respondents. Respondents were overwhelmingly male (86.2%) and largely middle-aged, with the 36-45 age group (27.1%) and 46-55 age group (22.7%) together accounting for just under half the sample; younger operators (age group 18-25) formed 18.2% of the sample.

**Table 1(B): Status Regarding Reverse Migration (N=203)**

| Factor | Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Returned Home to Start Homestay (Reverse Migration) | Yes | 78 | 38.4% |
| | No | 125 | 61.6% |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.

Education levels were concentrated at Higher Secondary (36.9%) and Bachelor's Degree (35.0%), with only 29.1% reporting a professional hospitality qualification. The large majority were married (68.0%) and self-identified predominantly in the General category (75.4%). Only 14.8% of respondents rely on the homestay as their sole source of income, with 59.6% combining it with other livelihood activities (Agriculture, Private / Government Service, or Other Enterprise) and 25.6% reporting income sources other than the homestay as dominant. Annual homestay income was modest for most respondents, with 63.5% earning up to Rs. 3,00,000 per year and only 11.4% earning above Rs. 5,00,000. A minority operate on rented or leased property (15.8%), while 35.0% report prior hospitality work experience and 38.4% report having returned home [Table 1(B)] from prior employment elsewhere specifically to start homestay operations, indicating that reverse migration is a meaningful, though not dominant, pathway into the sector for this sample.

**Table 2: Preferred Social Media Platforms for Homestay Promotion**

| Social Media Platform (Multi-Select) | N | % of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Instagram | 160 | 78.8% |
| Facebook | 159 | 78.3% |
| YouTube | 100 | 49.3% |
| WhatsApp | 93 | 45.8% |
| Twitter | 72 | 35.5% |
| LinkedIn | 19 | 9.4% |
| Others | 38 | 18.7% |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.

Instagram (78.8%) and Facebook (78.3%) are used almost interchangeably as the leading promotional platforms, followed by YouTube (49.3%) and WhatsApp (45.8%), which are used more for direct guest communication and short-form content than long-form marketing. Twitter (35.5%) and especially LinkedIn (9.4%) are marginal in this context, consistent with their limited relevance to consumer-facing tourism promotion.

**Table 3: Platform Diversity Across Various Demographic Factors**

| Background Factor | ANOVA Result | Result |
|---|---|---|
| District | F=0.72, p=0.734 | Not significant |
| Age Group | F=2.12, p=0.080 | Not significant |
| Gender | F=2.04, p=0.155 | Not significant |
| Educational Qualification | F=1.10, p=0.364 | Not significant |
| Professional (Hospitality) Qualification | F=1.75, p=0.188 | Not significant |
| Marital Status | F=1.54, p=0.217 | Not significant |
| Category | F=0.57, p=0.638 | Not significant |
| Income-Source Pattern | F=10.00, p<0.001 | Significant |
| Yearly Income from Homestay | F=5.37, p=0.001 | Significant |
| Homestay is Rental / Leased Property | F=0.26, p=0.610 | Not significant |
| Prior Hospitality Work Experience | F=7.83, p=0.006 | Significant |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Returned Home to Start Homestay (Reverse Migration) | F=0.03, p=0.869 | Not significant |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.

Platform diversity follows a related but narrower pattern, differing significantly by Income-Source Pattern, Yearly Income, and Work Experience, with operators reporting prior hospitality work experience using fewer platforms on average than those without plausibly because experienced operators rely more on established repeat-guest and word-of-mouth channels rather than broad platform experimentation. Notably, District was not a significant predictor of either visibility perception or platform diversity, suggesting that operator-level characteristics age, marital stability, and income structure matter more for social media effectiveness than geographic location within the state.

**Table 4: Perceived Importance of Digital Skills for Homestay Promotion**

| Are Digital skills essential for promoting homestay? | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 182 | 89.7% |
| No | 21 | 10.3% |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.

**Table 5: Willingness to Undertake Digital-Promotion Skill Training**

| Do you wants skill training for digital promotion? | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 161 | 79.3% |
| No | 42 | 20.7% |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (89.7%, n=182) agree that digital skills are essential for promoting their homestay. Similarly large majority (79.3%, n=161) express a desire for skill training in digital promotion strategies, together indicating a workforce that is highly receptive to, even if not yet fully equipped for, digital marketing capacity-building.

**Table 6: Willingness for Skill Training Across Demographic Factors**

| Demographic Factor | Chi-Square ($x^2$) Result | Result |
|---|---|---|
| District | $x^2$=10.51, df=12, p=0.571 | Not significant |
| Age Group | $x^2$=6.06, df=4, p=0.195 | Not significant |
| Gender | $x^2$=0.74, df=1, p=0.391 | Not significant |
| Educational Qualification | $x^2$=6.62, df=5, p=0.250 | Not significant |
| Professional (Hospitality) Qualification | $x^2$=0.07, df=1, p=0.787 | Not significant |
| Marital Status | $x^2$=6.88, df=2, p=0.032 | Significant |
| Category | $x^2$=9.90, df=3, p=0.019 | Significant |
| Income-Source Pattern | $x^2$=18.11, df=2, p<0.001 | Significant |
| Yearly Income from Homestay | $x^2$=16.79, df=3, p<0.001 | Significant |
| Homestay is Rental/Leased Property | $x^2$=2.20, df=1, p=0.138 | Not significant |
| Prior Hospitality Work Experience | $x^2$=5.06, df=1, p=0.025 | Significant |
| Returned Home to Start Homestay (Reverse Migration) | $x^2$=0.34, df=1, p=0.560 | Not significant |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.

Willingness to undergo skill training varies significantly by Marital Status, Category, Income-Source Pattern, Yearly Income, and Work Experience (all p<0.05), but not by Age Group, Gender, Educational Qualification, Professional Qualification, District, Religion, Rental Property status, or Reverse-Migration status, a notably different pattern from Q16 (Do you think digital skills are essential for promoting your Homestay in the digital world?). Homestay owners and Operators with diversified income sources and prior hospitality work experience were considerably more willing to train than those relying on non-homestay income only or without hospitality experience, suggesting that training demand is driven less by demographic profile and more by an operator's

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existing commitment to and investment in the homestay business. This distinction between who perceives digital skills as important (shaped strongly by age and education) and who actively wants training (shaped more by livelihood commitment) is an important nuance for capacity-building recommendations.

| **Table 7: Perceived Influence of Reviews and Cultural Content on Tourist Interest / Bookings** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Statement (**1-5 Agreement Scale***)** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Customer reviews and ratings on social media influence bookings for your homestay | 3.67 | 1.18 |
| Posting content about local culture and traditions has positively influenced tourist interest | 3.74 | 1.27 |
| **Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.<br>*- 1 denotes Least Agreement and 5 denotes Full Agreement | | |

Respondents rated both influence mechanisms positively. Reviews and ratings on social media were perceived to influence bookings with a mean agreement of M=3.67 (SD=1.18), while culturally-themed content (local traditions and experiences) was perceived to positively influence tourist interest with a very similar mean of M=3.74 (SD=1.27). The closeness of these two means suggests that, in operators' own assessment, social proof (reviews/ratings) and cultural distinctiveness (Heritage / Tradition content) are seen as comparably important levers of tourist interest, rather than one dominating the other.

| **Table 8: Perceived Effectiveness of Content Types for Engaging Audiences** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Content Type (**1-5 Perceived Effectiveness***)** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Photos showcasing homestay & surroundings | 3.93 | 1.31 |
| Videos of nearby tourist destinations | 3.83 | 1.16 |
| Videos of local culture/traditions/experiences | 3.80 | 1.16 |
| Video testimonials & reviews from tourists | 3.74 | 1.18 |
| Text testimonials & reviews from tourists | 3.53 | 1.19 |
| **Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.<br>*- 1 denotes Least Effective Content and 5 denotes Most Effective Content | | |

Among specific content formats, photographs showcasing the homestay and its surroundings were rated most effective (M=3.93), followed closely by videos of nearby tourist destinations (M=3.83) and videos of local culture and traditions (M=3.80). Video testimonials from tourists (M=3.74) outperformed text testimonials (M=3.53), indicating that homestay operators perceive visual and experiential content photos and video as more persuasive than written reviews alone, though all five content types were rated above the scale midpoint, indicating broad-based perceived value across formats. The overall Content Effectiveness Index averaged M=3.77 (SD=1.08).

| **Table 9: Perceived Benefits of Social-Media Adoption for Homestay Promotion** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Benefit Dimension** | **Benefits of using Social Media for Promoting Homestays in Digital World (**Multi-Select**)** | **N** | **%** |
| Visibility & Reach | Increased visibility and reach for homestays | 160 | 78.8% |
| Customer Engagement | Direct interaction with potential customers | 134 | 66.0% |
| Cost-Effective Promotion | Cost-effective advertising | 115 | 56.7% |
| Trust Building | Building trust through reviews and testimonials | 113 | 55.7% |
| Community Participation | Encouraging community participation and self-employment | 105 | 51.7% |
| Cultural Positioning | Highlighting unique selling points like culture and eco-tourism | 103 | 50.7% |
| **Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire. | | | |

Across the six benefit dimensions evaluated, visibility and reach emerged as the most widely endorsed (78.8%), indicating that visibility gains are the most salient perceived benefit of social media use. Customer engagement (66.0%) and cost-effective promotion (56.7%) followed, reflecting recognition of social media's low-cost, direct-communication advantages over traditional advertising. Trust building through reviews and testimonials (55.7%), community participation and self-employment (51.7%), and cultural positioning (50.7%) were endorsed by roughly half the sample each, still substantial, but indicating that these more strategic and community-oriented benefits are less immediately salient to homestay owners and operators than the more direct, transactional benefits of visibility and engagement.

| **Table 10: Skill-Training Priorities for Digital Marketing** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Skill-Training Requirement (**Priority Rated 1-5***)** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Social Media Marketing Skills | 3.76 | 1.55 |
| Online Content Creation Skills | 3.58 | 1.36 |



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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mobile Marketing Skills | 3.54 | 1.32 |
| Search Engine Optimization Skills | 3.50 | 1.32 |
| E-Mail Marketing Skills | 3.49 | 1.41 |
| Content Planning and Designing Skills | 3.48 | 1.36 |
| Online Marketing Automation & AI Tools | 3.48 | 1.35 |
| Marketing Communication Skills | 3.46 | 1.35 |
| Strategic Planning for Online Visibility | 3.43 | 1.33 |
| Foundational Web Designing Skills | 3.39 | 1.32 |
| **Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.<br>*- 1 denotes Least Agreement and 5 denotes Full Agreement | | |

Among ten specific digital-marketing competencies rated, Social Media Marketing Skills emerged as the clear top priority (M=3.76), followed by Online Content Creation Skills (M=3.58) and Mobile Marketing Skills (M=3.54). Search Engine Optimization and E-Mail Marketing skills (M=3.50 and M=3.49 respectively) were rated as moderately important, while more advanced or technical competencies. Strategic Planning for Online Visibility and Foundational Web Designing Skills were rated lowest among the digital-marketing competencies. This ordering suggests that capacity-building programmes for this population would derive the greatest immediate benefit from prioritizing practical, platform-facing skills (social media posting/marketing and content creation) ahead of more technical or infrastructure-oriented competencies (web design), which fewer homestay owners and operators are likely to apply directly given their reliance on third-party social platforms rather than owned websites.

**Table 11: Barriers to Effective Social-Media Use for Homestay Promotion**

| **Barriers (**Severity Rated 1-5*) | **Mean** | **SD** |
|---|---|---|
| Limited internet connectivity in rural areas (Technological) | 3.67 | 1.46 |
| Lack of digital marketing skills using social media (Skill-related) | 3.57 | 1.27 |
| Difficulty maintaining consistent content quality (Operational) | 3.55 | 1.33 |
| Insufficient funds for paid advertisements (Financial) | 3.55 | 1.29 |
| Competition with larger tourism platforms (Operational) | 3.54 | 1.26 |
| Lack of expertise to design online campaigns (Skill-related) | 3.44 | 1.27 |
| **Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.<br>*- 1 denotes Least Agreement and 5 denotes Full Agreement | | |

Limited internet connectivity in rural areas, i.e. technological/infrastructural barrier outside operators' direct control was rated the most severe constraint (M=3.67), consistent with the terrain and connectivity realities of Uttarakhand's hill districts. This was followed closely by the skill-related barrier of lacking digital marketing skills (M=3.57) and the operational barrier of maintaining consistent content quality (M=3.55). The financial barrier of insufficient funds for paid advertisements (M=3.55) and the operational barrier of competition with larger tourism platforms (M=3.54) were rated similarly, with lack of expertise to design online campaigns rated lowest barrier above mentioned (M=3.44), though all barriers were rated above the scale midpoint, indicating that homestay owners and operators experience a broad, multi-dimensional set of constraints rather than a single dominant one.

**Table 12: Integrative Correlation Matrix- Spearman ρ (N=203)**

| Composite Index | Visibility/ Effectiveness | Platform Diversity | Content Effectiveness | Benefit Breadth | Skill-Training Need | Barriers | Yearly Income (₹ lakh) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Visibility/ Effectiveness | 1.000 | 0.199 | 0.655 | 0.282 | 0.516 | 0.518 | 0.333 |
| Platform Diversity | 0.199 | 1.000 | 0.214 | 0.482 | 0.285 | 0.236 | 0.291 |
| Content Effectiveness | 0.655 | 0.214 | 1.000 | 0.346 | 0.618 | 0.663 | 0.197 |
| Benefit Breadth | 0.282 | 0.482 | 0.346 | 1.000 | 0.339 | 0.294 | 0.416 |
| Skill-Training Need | 0.516 | 0.285 | 0.618 | 0.339 | 1.000 | 0.700 | 0.263 |
| Barriers | 0.518 | 0.236 | 0.663 | 0.294 | 0.700 | 1.000 | 0.194 |

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| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yearly Income (₹ lakh) | 0.333 | 0.291 | 0.197 | 0.416 | 0.263 | 0.194 | 1.000 |

**Source:** Data Collected and compiled through questionnaire.
All off-diagonal correlations are statistically significant at $p<0.01$ except Visibility / Effectiveness Platform Diversity ($p<0.01$) all pairs shown are significant at $p<0.01$.

Taken together with the demographic cross-tabulations, this integrative pattern points to a single underlying dynamic rather than several unrelated effects. Homestay owners and operators who are older, married, income-diversified, and earning more from their homestay simultaneously report the highest perceived visibility gains, the highest content and review influence, the broadest range of benefits, the greatest training needs, and the greatest barriers. The evidence suggests a single underlying construct of homestay owners and operator engagement or investment in the homestay business, which drives higher perceived effectiveness on every dimension studied, including a more acute, realistic awareness of the obstacles that remain. Younger homestay owners and operators, less income-diversified, and less established homestay operators, by contrast, show consistently lower engagement with social media as a promotional tool across every measure, representing the segment furthest from realizing digital transformation's potential and therefore a priority target for outreach, even though they might conventionally be assumed to be the most 'digitally native' group.

**Conclusion:**

The present study examined how social media shapes the promotion, perceived credibility, and operational experience of rural homestays across thirteen districts of Uttarakhand, drawing on 203 operator responses analyzed against current studied objectives. The findings depict a sector that is digitally aware and largely receptive, 89.7% of homestay operators consider digital skills essential and 79.3% want further training, and Instagram and Facebook have become near-default promotional channels used alongside three or more platforms on average. Social media is credited chiefly with expanding visibility and enabling direct, cost-effective customer engagement, while reviews, ratings, and culturally-themed content are seen as comparably important levers of tourist interest, with photographs and destination videos perceived as the most persuasive content formats. Yet this promotional value is not evenly distributed. Limited rural connectivity, digital skill gaps, and content-quality challenges remain real and widely felt constraints, and the very strong correlation between training need and barriers suggests homestay operators are largely realistic about the link between their own capability gaps and the difficulties they face, rather than attributing them solely to external circumstances. Overall, the evidence supports a cautiously optimistic reading, Uttarakhand's rural homestay operators are not resistant to digital transformation but unevenly positioned to benefit from it, with clear, identifiable sub-groups whose inclusion would meaningfully broaden the sector's digital reach.

**Recommendation and Future Research Scope:**

Based on the above findings, several practical directions emerge for tourism departments, homestay associations, policy makers and training providers in Uttarakhand-

- Capacity-building programmes should prioritize social media marketing and online content creation through practical, platform-oriented training, as these were identified as the most relevant digital skills by operators.
- Targeted outreach and mentoring initiatives should focus on younger operators and those lacking diversified income sources, as these groups exhibit consistently lower engagement and may require tailored support to enhance digital participation.
- Keeping in mind that limited internet connectivity is the most significant barrier, infrastructure improvements should accompany skills training to ensure meaningful digital engagement and access.
- When designing promotional support, priority should be given to the development of high-quality visual and culturally themed content, as photographs, videos, reviews, and cultural narratives are perceived as the most influential marketing elements.

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- Awareness initiatives should emphasize social media's role in cultural promotion and community-based self-employment to enhance recognition of its broader developmental benefits.
- Finally, capacity-building efforts should prioritize homestay owner and operator-level characteristics rather than geographic location, while future longitudinal research should examine whether targeted interventions can reduce digital engagement disparities over time.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and comparative designs, include diverse stakeholder perspectives, and expand the geographical scope to improve generalizability of the study. Combining perception-based data with social media analytics and business performance metrics would provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of digital promotion strategies for rural tourism in the region.

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**Declaration of AI Usage:**

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized OpenAI ChatGPT, Grammarly, Google Gemini strictly for the purposes of language polishing, proofreading, and correcting grammatical and typographical errors to improve readability of the document. The tool was not employed to generate core conceptual ideas, interpret data, conduct analysis, or draw scientific conclusions. Following the use of this service, the author(s) meticulously reviewed, verified, and edited all resulting text to ensure factual accuracy, academic integrity, and fidelity to the original research, accepting full responsibility and accountability for the final content of the published manuscript.

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