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Rethinking Slow Tourism: Embedded Slowness and the Limits of Visibility- Based Operationalization

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Abstract

This study examines how platform-mediated tourism visibility spatially represents peripheral regions through an analysis of Instagram content associated with Jharkhand, India. Existing tourism scholarship frequently identifies slow tourism through explicit labels and highly visible destination branding, often overlooking spatially embedded forms of socio-ecological life in peripheral regions. Using visual discourse analysis and geotag interpretation, the study analyzes 600 publicly available Instagram posts associated with hashtags including #Jharkhand, #Ranchi, #Adivasi, and #IncredibleIndia. The findings reveal uneven spatial concentrations of digital visibility around accessible urban and scenic locations such as Ranchi, Netarhat, Patratu Valley, and major waterfall destinations, while several districts remain digitally underrepresented. Visual representations were dominated by forests, waterfalls, village settlements, community activities, and low-speed mobility practices despite the near absence of explicit slow tourism labeling. The study develops the concept of embedded slowness to explain how ecological rhythms, collective temporalities, and infrastructural conditions shape spatially grounded forms of tourism representation outside dominant tourism discourse. The paper contributes to spatial tourism research by demonstrating how platform visibility reproduces selective regional recognition while obscuring everyday socio-ecological practices in peripheral and Indigenous contexts.

1.0 Introduction

Digital platforms increasingly shape how places become visible, recognizable, and spatially represented within contemporary tourism discourse. Social media platforms such as Instagram not only influence destination branding and tourist imaginaries but also contribute to uneven geographies of visibility by privileging certain regions, landscapes, and mobility practices over others. Existing tourism research has extensively relied on platform-mediated representations, hashtags, and geotagged content to identify and analyze tourism experiences, including slow tourism (Busque et al., 2021). However, this visibility-driven approach tends to privilege highly curated, explicitly labeled, and commercially recognizable destinations while marginalizing peripheral and Indigenous regions that may remain outside dominant digital tourism discourse.

Within slow tourism scholarship, slowness is frequently operationalized through explicit platform-based representations such as #slowtourism, aestheticized imagery, and self-identified tourism practices (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2020). As a result, slow tourism has increasingly been associated with visible, individualized, and often Western lifestyle-oriented experiences. Such approaches risk overlooking spatially embedded forms of socio-ecological life that are not formally articulated through tourism-oriented narratives or algorithmically amplified representations. Consequently, the absence of explicit digital visibility may not necessarily indicate the absence of slow practices, but rather reflect uneven structures of representation and recognition within platform-mediated tourism systems (Conway & Timms, 2012).

Recent studies have also highlighted how social media tourism representations are geographically concentrated around globally visible destinations, particularly within Western contexts (Busque et al., 2021). This creates important spatial inequalities in tourism visibility, where peripheral regions of the Global South remain comparatively underrepresented despite possessing rich ecological, cultural, and community-centered landscapes. Such uneven representation raises broader questions regarding how digital platforms spatially organize tourism knowledge and which regions become visible within dominant tourism imaginaries.

This study addresses these concerns through an analysis of Instagram representations associated with Jharkhand, India. Characterized by forest landscapes, Indigenous communities, localized mobility systems, and ecologically embedded everyday practices, Jharkhand provides an important spatial context for examining alternative forms of tourism representation that circulate outside dominant tourism branding frameworks. Unlike highly commodified tourism destinations, representations associated with Jharkhand are often embedded within regional identity narratives, ecological imagery, and everyday social practices rather than explicit tourism-oriented discourse.

Using visual discourse analysis and geotag interpretation, this study examines 600 publicly available Instagram posts associated with hashtags including #Jharkhand, #Ranchi, #Adivasi, and #IncredibleIndia. The study investigates how spatial patterns of digital visibility reproduce uneven regional representation while simultaneously revealing embedded forms of socio-ecological slowness that remain epistemically marginalized within mainstream tourism discourse.

To interpret these patterns, the study develops the concept of Embedded Slowness, which conceptualizes slowness as a spatially grounded socio-ecological condition emerging through ecological rhythms, collective temporalities, and infrastructural conditions rather than solely through explicitly branded tourism practices. By shifting analytical attention from visibility to spatial embeddedness, the study contributes to debates on digital spatial inequality, tourism representation, and peripheral regional visibility within platform-mediated environments.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

- How do Instagram representations spatially distribute tourism visibility across regions and destinations within Jharkhand?
- How do visual and textual representations associated with Jharkhand reflect embedded forms of socio-ecological slowness despite the absence of explicit slow tourism labeling?
- How do platform-mediated visibility systems contribute to uneven spatial recognition of peripheral and Indigenous regions within tourism discourse?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Slow Tourism and Spatial Representation

Slow tourism emerged as a response to accelerated and consumption-oriented forms of mobility associated with mass tourism. Rooted in the Slow Food and Cittaslow movements, the concept emphasizes environmental sustainability, local engagement, and meaningful experiences of place (Miele, 2008). Existing scholarship generally characterizes slow tourism through low-speed mobility, ecological awareness, and immersive place-based experiences that prioritize the journey over rapid destination consumption (Conway & Cawley, 2016).

However, much of the literature conceptualizes slowness as a voluntary and individualized lifestyle orientation enabled by leisure time, mobility access, and economic privilege (Klarin et al., 2023). Empirical studies have largely focused on Western tourism settings where tourists consciously adopt slower forms of travel for experiential, ethical, or wellness-related motivations (Busque et al., 2021). Consequently, dominant understandings of slow tourism frequently reflect culturally specific assumptions regarding time, mobility, and tourism consumption.

Recent tourism scholarship has also emphasized the spatial dimensions of tourism representation, particularly through digital platforms and social media environments. Spatial visibility increasingly shapes how destinations become recognized within global tourism discourse, privileging visually attractive, commercially marketable, and algorithmically amplified locations. Peripheral and Indigenous regions often remain comparatively underrepresented despite possessing strong ecological and cultural characteristics associated with slow tourism practices.

This raises important questions regarding whether slowness is inherently dependent on explicit tourism representation or whether it may also emerge through everyday socio-spatial conditions embedded within local environments and community life.

2.2 Platform-Mediated Tourism Visibility

Social media platforms such as Instagram have become increasingly important in shaping tourism imaginaries, destination branding, and regional visibility (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2020). Tourism research has increasingly relied on hashtag-based analyses and geotagged content to identify and interpret tourism practices online. In slow tourism studies, hashtags such as #slowtourism are frequently used to identify representations associated with slower mobility, sustainability, and experiential travel (Busque et al., 2021).

These approaches, however, create a visibility-driven framework in which tourism phenomena become analytically recognizable primarily when they are explicitly labeled, digitally circulated, and spatially visible within dominant platform systems. Existing studies demonstrate that slow tourism representations are geographically concentrated around highly visible European destinations characterized by aestheticized landscapes and leisure-oriented mobility practices (Chauhan, 2024). Consequently, platform-mediated tourism visibility often privileges curated and commercially recognizable forms of tourism while marginalizing less visible peripheral contexts.

Such visibility asymmetries have important spatial implications. Regions that do not conform to dominant tourism aesthetics or formal tourism branding may remain digitally underrepresented even when everyday socio-ecological practices align closely with principles associated with slow tourism. Peripheral and Indigenous regions are particularly affected because representations associated with these spaces frequently circulate through identity-based narratives, local practices, and ecological imagery rather than tourism-oriented discourse.

The reliance on explicit platform visibility therefore risks reproducing uneven geographies of tourism recognition while obscuring forms of tourism-related spatial experience embedded within ordinary community life and localized mobility systems.

2.3 Embedded Slowness and Peripheral Spatiality

To address these limitations, this study develops the concept of Embedded Slowness to explain how slowness may emerge as a spatially grounded socio-ecological condition rather than solely as an explicitly branded tourism practice. Existing slow tourism literature generally portrays slowness as an intentional choice associated with individual agency and experiential consumption (Duignan & Wilbert, 2017). In contrast, Embedded Slowness conceptualizes slowness as emerging through the interaction of ecological rhythms, collective temporalities, infrastructural conditions, and localized place relations.

From this perspective, slowness is not necessarily pursued as a tourism lifestyle but may instead constitute an ordinary condition of socio-spatial life. Ecological embeddedness reflects temporal rhythms shaped by forests, agriculture, seasonal cycles, and environmental interdependence. Collective temporality refers to socially organized forms of time structured through festivals, shared labor, and community interaction. Infrastructural embeddedness relates to localized mobility systems characterized by walking, cycling, village pathways, and low-speed transport practices shaped by material and spatial conditions. Finally, epistemic invisibility refers to the absence of explicit recognition of such practices within dominant tourism discourse despite their alignment with principles commonly associated with slow tourism.

The concept is particularly relevant for peripheral regions where socio-ecological rhythms and community-centered practices remain weakly represented within global tourism visibility systems. Rather than interpreting the absence of formal tourism labeling as evidence of absence, Embedded Slowness highlights how digital visibility systems selectively structure spatial recognition and tourism knowledge production.

By linking tourism representation with spatial inequality and regional visibility, the concept contributes to broader discussions on how digital platforms unevenly organize tourism imaginaries across peripheral and highly visible destinations.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Epistemological Position

In this study, the epistemological perspective adopted is a constructivist approach where meanings are seen as socially constructed, relationally constructed, and contextually constructed. In line with this outlook, the study uses interpretive qualitative research design with the aim of investigating the way that forms of slowness are not only formulated as a tourism classification but are also hidden in the daily socio-ecological and cultural practices. The methodological approach is directly aligned with the study's overall theoretical intervention, namely, Embedded Slowness Theory, a theory that has been developed to look at slowness as a condition that might be structurally and relationally embedded in other phenomena such as everyday mobilities, ecological rhythms, and community life, rather than as a declared 'tourism identity' (Calzati & de Salvo, 2017).

This study takes a different approach from those that only recognised slow tourism by explicit discursive markers (hashtags or self-labelling practices), but explores how slowness can be indirectly expressed through the visual and textual representations linked to the place-based identity narratives. The research undermines, in this way, the representation of slowness as something visible and formally recognized, that is, visible and present in platforms, and which ignores other slowness that is embedded in other practices and epistemically unmarked.

Thus, the study adopts the visual discourse analysis approach (Rose, 2012), to analyzing the meanings being created and circulated in images on Instagram along with captions, hashtags, and geotagged representations. In this context, the use of visual discourse analysis is particularly suitable since the study aims to reveal how socio-cultural meanings are formulated and made visible in the normal processes of everyday visual interactions. Digital images do not just reflect reality, they place it, move it, time it and make its identities. As the empirical identification of slow tourism scholarship has been relying more and more on visible and self-identified representations, visual discourse analysis allows for the study of unspoken and relational forms of slowness, as they appear in the common representations of everyday life (Caton, 2019).

Instagram was chosen as the main platform of study due to its image-focused design and the fact that it increasingly impacts imagination of the tourist, destination visibility and cultural representation. The platform offers a glimpse of the visual storytelling and propagation of regions in highly visible and ubiquitous user-generated content (Manthiou et al., 2022). Significantly, the study does not consider Instagram posts as an objective reflection of social reality, but as culturally constructed representations that make some things visible, yet others invisible. Instagram is not just any data source, but a platform where epistemic visibility can be critically examined itself.

3.2 Image Selection and Coding Procedure

Images were sampled from those shared by public users on the social media website, Instagram. The posts were identified by searching on Instagram using the hashtag #Jharkhand and the hashtags related to it. The hashtags #Jharkhand, #Ranchi, #Adivasi, #IncredibleIndia, #Netarhat, #HundruFalls,

#PatratuValley and others that were contextually relevant were chosen as part of the purpose of this research was to explore how forms of slowness can be visually articulated in a peripheral and Indigenous context, even without the explicit #slowtourism tagging. The tags were selected to include place-based identity narratives, ecological destinations and cultural representations in relation to Jharkhand.

The top 600 images (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018), that were published on Instagram's "top posts" and "recent posts" sections from 1 January 2025 to 31 March 2025 were analyzed. The top posts were selected for their highly engaged and algorithmically visible representations and the recent posts were integrated to represent more ordinary and contemporary visual narratives. It was a combination of two that enabled to have both dominant and everyday depictions of Jharkhand in the dataset.

Following a similar procedure to Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2018), images were added when they showed landscapes, everyday mobilities, community activities and settlement environments, cultural practices and leisure and travel experiences related to Jharkhand, relevant to the interpretive objectives of the study. Posts that were just commercials, or only had personal content, or duplicate uploads, or imagery with no contextual connection to the region were not included. Accompanying text to each image, such as captions, hashtags and geotag data, were also noted if available for interpretation.

Inductive and theory-informed coding were used in the analysis. The first phase was open coding, which was performed inductively to discover patterns and similarities regarding the images and text, without any prior tourism categories. Through this exploratory process, recurring representations of landscape, mobility, community interaction and settlement environment and livelihood practices arose directly from the data set.

After the initial coding, the categories were gradually more aggregated into thematic groups such as Landscapes, Built Environment, People and Community Life, Mobility and Cultural and Livelihood Activities. Other minor categories (Food and Beverage and Wildlife and Animals) were kept if they were analytically relevant. Images often had several elements in common meaning that images could be classified into more than one category.

Subcategories were consequently created under each of the main themes to express the variety and complexity of the representations. For instance, landscape imagery featured forests, waterfalls, agricultural fields, hills, plateau land, wildlife areas and monsoonal landscapes. Village settlements, townscapes, and local markets were some of the built environment imagery. Walking, bicycles, public transport, utility vehicles and village and forest paths were all included as mobility-related imagery. Cultural and livelihood imagery encompassed farming activities, handicrafts, cooking, festivals, dances, and markets held once a week.

The second analytical step focused on interpretive coding, in which the social-ecological relations, temporal rhythms and mobility structures were explored through the visual and textual representations. Specifically, there is a particular emphasis on:

- pace and rhythm of activity,
- forms of relational interaction,
- ecological embeddedness,
- localized mobility practices,
- community-centered temporalities, and
- non-commodified engagements with place.

The final analytical stage involved systematically mapping emergent patterns onto the four dimensions of Embedded Slowness Theory:

- ecological embeddedness,
- collective temporality,
- infrastructural embeddedness, and
- epistemic invisibility

The process allowed the study to engage with the notion of slowness as a not-solely-identified tourism identity, but as a structural state, as everyday representations of mobility, ecology and community life.

3.3 Theory-to-Data Analytical Mapping

To strengthen analytical transparency, the dimensions of Embedded Slowness Theory were linked to empirically observable visual indicators identified during coding. Table 1 represents the dimensions of the Embedded Slowness Framework identified through visual discourse analysis.

Table 1
Dimensions of the Embedded Slowness Framework identified through visual discourse analysis of Instagram representations of Jharkhand

Embedded Slowness Dimension	Empirical Indicators	Representative Visual Features
Ecological Embeddedness	Ecological rhythms and environmental interdependence	Forests, waterfalls, agricultural landscapes, monsoon imagery
Collective Temporality	Shared and community-oriented temporal structures	Festivals, gatherings, collective labour, community interaction
Infrastructural Embeddedness	Low-speed and materially embedded mobility systems	Walking, bicycles, village pathways, shared transport
Epistemic Invisibility	Absence of explicit slow tourism discourse despite alignment with slow tourism principles	Place-based hashtags, identity-centered narratives, non-tourism framing
Source: Compiled by authors		

This framework ensured that the interpretation of slowness emerged through systematic theoretical engagement rather than post-hoc conceptual association.

3.4 Spatial Interpretation

Instagram geotags were analysed, wherever available, in order to focus on the representation's spatial distribution. If a post did have geotagging information, the destination or District in Jharkhand was noted. If there were no geotags, the location was indicated only when it was explicitly mentioned in captions or hashtags (Bartlett & Camba, 2021).

A spatial analysis was used to identify concentrations of digital visibility at locations that are scenic, urban, ecological, and cultural, and to analyze the relative lack of visibility in certain areas of the platform-mediated discourse.

3.5 Reflexivity and Limitations

To ensure interpretative consistency, 10% of this data sample (n = 60) was independently examined by second researcher, who was also well-acquainted with qualitative visual analysis (Caton, 2019). Coding was used to compare the results and led to a high degree of interpretive convergence (94.8%). Some minor differences were explored and negotiated, and differences in category definitions and interpretive criteria were refined, leading to increased clarity and consistency in concepts and analysis.

The study also recognizes positionality and contextual understandings as interpretive factors. Reflexive engagement was thus observed throughout the analysis process, in order to be attuned to Indigenous and periphery representations, and to ensure that analysis of community life was not reductive or extractive.

Several limitations of the present study warrant explicit acknowledgement. First, the dataset is platform-specific, drawing exclusively from Instagram, which privileges visually curated, algorithmically amplified content; platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or regional social media may yield different representational patterns and should be explored in future research. Second, the sampling window is temporally constrained, covering posts published between January and March 2025 only; seasonal variation in tourism-related content, particularly in a monsoon-affected region such as Jharkhand, means findings may not fully capture the year-round representational landscape. Third, as a qualitative interpretive study, the findings are not generalisable in the statistical sense; they offer conceptual and theoretical insights rather than population-level conclusions about tourist behaviour or destination image. Fourth, visual discourse analysis does not permit causal inference- the study identifies patterns of representation and alignment with slow tourism principles but cannot establish that embedded slowness translates into actual tourism activity or visitor experience. Fifth, Instagram's algorithmic architecture may introduce systematic selection bias, favouring posts with higher engagement and thus over-representing content from visually iconic or frequently visited locations, which may partially account for the spatial concentration observed around nodes such as Ranchi and Netarhat. Future

research employing longitudinal sampling, multi-platform analysis, or complementary methods such as interviews with local communities would strengthen and extend the findings of this study.

Interpreting Embedded Slowness in Jharkhand

The analysis of various Instagram posts related to Jharkhand and its hashtags showed that the region is being branded not so much through traditional tourism branding but also through ecological landscape, everyday mobilities and community life (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2010). While visibility of clearly branded ‘slow tourism' content is ubiquitous across the globe, the hashtag #slowtourism was not often used in posts related to Jharkhand. Place-based identity markers like #Jharkhand, #Ranchi, #Adivasi, #Netarhat, #HundruFalls and #IncredibleIndia, were more commonly used, indicating that sense of place is mediated by meanings that flow through place-based identities and not through the formal tourism lexicon (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

Across the dataset, visual content consistently emphasized forests, waterfalls, village life, festivals, and routine mobility practices. These patterns indicate that slowness in the Jharkhand context is represented as an ordinary socio-ecological condition rather than a consciously marketed tourism lifestyle. Two key dimensions of the findings are discussed below: **Location** and **Key Features of the Images**.

Location

A substantial proportion of the Instagram posts included geotagged or identifiable location information, allowing the spatial concentration of representations to be examined shown in Fig. 1. Most geotagged posts were concentrated in well-known scenic, cultural, and urban nodes within Jharkhand. The highest proportion of posts were associated with Ranchi, followed by nature-based destinations such as Hundru Falls, Dassam Falls, Jonha Falls, Netarhat, Patratu Valley, Deoghar, and Betla National Park. Additional posts referenced smaller towns, village settings, forest zones, and pilgrimage sites.

The geographic spread of posts in Table 2 suggests that representations of Jharkhand are not restricted to a single iconic tourism center but are distributed across urban, rural, ecological, and cultural landscapes. Urban locations such as Ranchi often appeared as gateways or everyday cityscapes, while destinations such as Netarhat, Patratu Valley, and the waterfall circuit were visually framed through scenic immersion, tranquility, and open natural space (Rose, 2012).

Unlike the Eurocentric concentration identified in earlier slow tourism hashtag studies, the Jharkhand dataset reflects a more localized representational geography centered on regional identity and domestic mobility. The absence of explicit global slow tourism labels does not imply an absence of slow practices; rather, it indicates that slowness is embedded in locally meaningful destinations and routines that circulate outside dominant international tourism discourse (Perano et al., 2019).

Key Features of the Images

Table 3 shows Subcategories of dominant visual themes identified in Instagram representations of Jharkhand, illustrating the ecological, communal, and everyday foundations of locally embedded slowness. Most of the Instagram images prominently featured natural landscapes (72%), while community and cultural life (46%) and built or settlement environments (38%) were also strongly represented. Categories with greater than 10% frequency were further divided into sub-categories to capture the diversity of visual portrayals. Explicitly commercial tourism imagery, including luxury hotels or branded hospitality spaces, appeared only rarely.

A wide range of landscapes were depicted in **Fig. 2**, indicating that no single environmental setting defines Jharkhand's visual identity. Among the most frequently represented landscapes were forest environments (24%), waterfalls and freshwater bodies (21%), greenery and agricultural fields (17%), hills and plateau terrain (14%), and village natural surroundings (11%). Other recurring elements included wildlife zones, sunrise scenes, caves, and seasonal monsoon imagery (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). These findings suggest that ecological settings are central to how Jharkhand is imagined and shared online.

Regarding built environments, village settlements and traditional housing structures (32%) were the most frequently represented, followed by urban public spaces and townscapes (26%), heritage or religious sites (18%), and local markets or commercial streetscapes (12%). This indicates that Jharkhand is visually represented more through lived and inhabited spaces than through formal tourism infrastructure.

Human presence was visible in 44% of the images, most commonly featuring small groups or community gatherings, followed by individual portraits and family interactions. Festival scenes, shared labor, and collective celebrations were common, suggesting that communal participation forms an important component of the region's visual narrative.

Mobility-related content appeared in 19% of the images. The most common forms included walking, two-wheelers or bicycles, local buses or shared transport, and movement along village roads or forest paths. Such representations emphasize everyday mobility rather than leisure-oriented travel, indicating that slow movement in Jharkhand is structurally embedded in local spatial realities.

Cultural and livelihood activities were visible in 27% of the images, including traditional dances, weekly markets, farming practices, handicrafts, and food preparation. Collectively, the findings indicate that representations of Jharkhand align with slow tourism principles—ecological immersion, community connection, low-speed mobility, and place-based experience—even in the near absence of explicit #slowtourism labeling.

Source: Compiled by authors

Source: Compiled by authors

Figure 2. *Key visual themes and sub-categories identified in Instagram representations of Jharkhand, illustrating the dominance of ecological landscapes and community-centered practices over conventional tourism imagery*.

Table 2
Spatial distribution of Instagram posts associated with Jharkhand, based on available geotags

Percent of Posts	Location / Destination
26%	Ranchi
14%	Netarhat
12%	Hundru Falls
10%	Patratu Valley
8%	Dassam Falls
7%	Deoghar
6%	Betla National Park / Palamu
4%	Jonha Falls
3%	Jamshedpur
2%	Hazaribagh
1%*	Bokaro; Gumla; Khunti; Simdega; Chaibasa; Latehar
0%**	Lohardaga; Dumka; Sahibganj; Giridih; Ramgarh; Pakur; Godda; Chatra; Koderma
7%	Did not include a geotag
Source: Compiled by authors	
Note:	

*1% indicates approximately one to three Instagram posts for each location.

**0% indicates isolated mentions with fewer than one percent of total geotagged posts.

Percentages are rounded and may not total 100%.

Table 3
Subcategories of the Common Themes Identified in the Content Analysis

Landscapes (total 72%)	**Built Environment (total 38%)**	**People / Community Life (total 46%)**	**Mobility (total 19%)**	**Cultural / Livelihood Activities (total 27%)**
Of the 72%:	**Of the 38%:**	**Of the 46%:**	**Of the 19%:**	**Of the 27%:**
Forest environments (24%)	Village settlements & traditional housing (32%)	Community gatherings (41%)	Walking / village paths / trails (36%)	Traditional dances & rituals (28%)
Waterfalls & freshwater bodies (21%)	Urban public spaces & townscapes (26%)	Festivals & celebrations (25%)	Bicycles / two-wheelers (29%)	Handicrafts & artisanship (24%)
Greenery & agricultural fields (17%)	Heritage / religious sites (18%)	Daily life & livelihood scenes (21%)	Local buses / shared transport (18%)	Farming & forest-based livelihoods (24%)
Hills & plateau terrain (14%)	Local markets & commercial streets (12%)	Family / individual portraits (13%)	Agricultural / utility vehicles (10%)	Markets & trade (14%)
Wildlife areas / parks (5%)	Educational / civic buildings (7%)	Children / youth recreation (8%)	Boats / water crossings (4%)	Food preparation & local cuisine (10%)
Sunrise / sunset landscapes (4%)	Tourism facilities / resorts (3%)	Pilgrimage / spiritual gatherings (6%)	Rail transport (3%)	Seasonal harvest activities (8%)
Caves / rock formations (3%)	Others (2%)	Others (4%)	Others (0%)	Others (6%)
Seasonal monsoon imagery (3%)				

Source: Compiled by authors

Note: Percentages within each column refer to the share of images within that major category. Percentages are rounded and may not total exactly 100%. Images could be coded into more than one category where relevant.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Analysis of Instagram posts associated with Jharkhand-related hashtags revealed that representations of the region are strongly shaped by ecological landscapes, community-centered social life, and localized mobility practices rather than conventional tourism branding. Unlike dominant platform-mediated representations of slow tourism that frequently rely on explicit hashtags such as #slowtourism, the Jharkhand dataset was primarily organized around regional and identity-based

hashtags including #Jharkhand, #Ranchi, #Adivasi, #Netarhat, #HundruFalls, and #IncredibleIndia. This indicates that slower socio-spatial practices circulate through regional identity narratives and everyday representations rather than formal tourism discourse.

Across the dataset, visual representations consistently emphasized forests, waterfalls, agricultural environments, village settlements, festivals, and everyday mobility practices. These representations suggest that slowness within the Jharkhand context emerges less as a consciously branded tourism lifestyle and more as an embedded socio-ecological condition associated with ordinary community life. The findings are interpreted through the dimensions of Embedded Slowness: ecological embeddedness, collective temporality, infrastructural embeddedness, and epistemic invisibility.

4.1 Ecological Embeddedness

Ecological landscapes constituted one of the most dominant visual themes within the dataset. Forest environments accounted for 24% of the posts, followed by waterfalls and freshwater bodies (21%), agricultural and green landscapes (17%), and hills and plateau terrains (14%). Monsoon imagery, sunrise scenes, caves, and wildlife environments further reinforced the ecological orientation of regional representations.

Unlike conventional tourism imagery that often prioritizes destination consumption and commercial attractions, the representations associated with Jharkhand emphasized environmental coexistence and lived interaction with landscapes. Forest pathways, rivers, agricultural fields, and village surroundings were frequently represented as ordinary spaces of livelihood, mobility, and social interaction rather than isolated tourism sites. These findings suggest that environmental immersion in Jharkhand is embedded within everyday socio-spatial life rather than framed as an intentional tourism experience.

The findings support the dimension of ecological embeddedness within Embedded Slowness. Temporal rhythms appeared closely associated with ecological cycles, environmental dependence, and continuous interaction with natural landscapes rather than individualized leisure practices. In contrast to highly curated representations commonly associated with European slow tourism discourse on Instagram, the Jharkhand dataset emphasized ordinary environmental coexistence and collective ecological rhythms rather than wellness-oriented retreat or aestheticized leisure consumption.

These patterns indicate that slower socio-ecological temporalities may emerge through ongoing environmental relations embedded within peripheral regional contexts rather than through consciously branded tourism practices.

4.2 Collective Temporality

Community-centered social life emerged as another major theme across the dataset. Human activities appeared in 44% of the posts and primarily included community gatherings, festivals, agricultural labor, village interaction, handicrafts, local markets, and food preparation practices. Cultural and livelihood-related activities were represented in 27% of the images.

These visual narratives represented time as a socially organized and relational process rather than as individualized consumption or productivity. Festivals, rituals, shared labor, and village interactions reflected temporal rhythms structured through collective participation and community relationships. Rather than portraying slowness as an individualized search for mindfulness or experiential authenticity, the dataset highlighted slower temporalities emerging through shared social practices and community-centered forms of life.

The findings therefore challenge dominant slow tourism frameworks that frequently conceptualize slowness as a personal lifestyle choice associated with self-reflection, leisure mobility, and individual well-being. In the Jharkhand context, slower temporal rhythms appeared embedded within collective organization of social life rather than voluntary withdrawal from accelerated modernity.

Importantly, cultural activities were not represented primarily through commodified tourism performances. Instead, festivals, crafts, and everyday village practices appeared integrated within ordinary community life. This distinction is theoretically significant because it suggests that slower temporalities can exist independently of formal tourism staging or destination branding.

The findings therefore extend slow tourism discussions by shifting analytical attention from individualized tourism consumption toward collectively organized socio-spatial temporalities embedded within community structures.

4.3 Infrastructural Embeddedness

Representations associated with mobility appeared in 19% of the dataset and primarily included walking, bicycles, two-wheelers, village pathways, local buses, and shared transport systems. Rural roads, forest pathways, agricultural routes, and localized transport networks were represented more frequently than high-speed mobility infrastructure commonly associated with mainstream tourism systems.

These representations indicate that mobility within Jharkhand is materially embedded within local spatial conditions and infrastructural arrangements. Walking and shared transport appeared less as conscious sustainable tourism practices and more as ordinary forms of movement shaped by accessibility, geography, and regional infrastructure.

The findings support the dimension of infrastructural embeddedness within Embedded Slowness. Slower mobility patterns in the dataset were not primarily represented as ethical tourism choices but as structurally embedded forms of everyday movement emerging through socio-material conditions. This differs significantly from dominant slow tourism literature, which often associates slow mobility with consciously chosen leisure practices such as cycling tourism, train journeys, or long-distance walking experiences.

In the Jharkhand context, slower mobility appeared linked to ordinary infrastructural realities including village pathways, localized transport systems, and spatial accessibility conditions. These findings

suggest that slower spatial rhythms may emerge structurally through regional material conditions rather than solely through voluntary tourism behavior.

The results therefore broaden existing understandings of slow mobility by demonstrating how slower forms of movement may function as embedded spatial conditions within peripheral regional contexts.

4.4 Epistemic Invisibility

One of the most significant findings of the dataset was the near absence of explicit slow tourism labeling despite strong alignment with principles commonly associated with slow tourism. Although the dataset consistently reflected ecological immersion, collective social rhythms, localized mobility, and place-based engagement, posts rarely used hashtags such as #slowtourism or other formal tourism-oriented labels.

Instead, users primarily relied on regional and identity-centered hashtags including #Jharkhand, #Adivasi, #Netarhat, #Ranchi, and #IncredibleIndia. This suggests that slower socio-spatial practices circulate through regional identity narratives and everyday cultural representation rather than through formalized tourism discourse.

These findings align with the dimension of epistemic invisibility within Embedded Slowness. The absence of explicit tourism labeling does not necessarily indicate the absence of slower socio-ecological practices, but rather reflects the selective nature of platform-mediated visibility systems. Existing tourism research that relies heavily on hashtags and explicit tourism discourse may therefore unintentionally privilege visible, commodified, and algorithmically amplified forms of tourism representation while overlooking embedded and unarticulated temporalities within peripheral regions.

The Jharkhand dataset demonstrates that strong alignment with slow tourism principles may exist even when tourism is not explicitly identified or commercially branded. Rather than positioning Jharkhand simply as an additional slow tourism destination, the findings reveal broader conceptual and methodological limitations within dominant tourism visibility frameworks.

By foregrounding epistemically underrepresented forms of slowness, the study shifts analytical attention away from Eurocentric and individual-centered tourism models toward socio-spatial conditions embedded within peripheral and Indigenous regional contexts. Collectively, the findings support the argument that slowness may function as a structurally embedded socio-ecological phenomenon whose visibility depends on the epistemological frameworks through which tourism knowledge is produced.

5.0 Theoretical Contributions and Implications

This study adds to slow tourism scholarship by creating an alternative perspective to understand slowness phenomenon that is not necessarily individualistic and explicit about the tourism lifestyle. While the slow tourism literature is mainly defined by the concept of slowness, this approach is generally a conscious decision for leisure mobility, sustainability, experiential authenticity, and wellbeing. This is

often implicit in approaches that assume that slowness is created through individual agency, with time, mobility and economic resources. The results are from Jharkhand, however, show how slower temporalities can also come about, not only as a result of lifestyle choices, but also as a result of ecological interdependence, collective social organisation and infrastructural conditions.

Slowness, in the Jharkhand context, is not a tourism ideology, but a way of life. It is a condition that is found in everyday life, environmental rhythms, local mobility systems, and community-based practices. This rethinking of slow tourism changes the analytical framework of the experience consumption of individual tourists to a form of socially embedded socio-ecological relations. Encountering slowness, then, is no longer just about slowing down, but about a relationality that emerges from ecological relationships, collective temporalities and place-based experiences. The study extends the theory of slow tourism from a lifestyle-centred, individual-focused perspective. The study broadens the theory of slow tourism, which was based mainly by lifestyle and individual.

Another major contribution of the study is to break from an Eurocentric perspective which still pervades slow tourism scholarship. Past empirical studies have been largely focused on the West and Europe and slowness has often been expressed through aestheticized and explicitly branded tourism practices. As a result, culturally specific notions, concerning leisure, mobility and individual agency, are reflected in the dominant understandings of slow tourism. The results of the Jharkhand study indicate that there are other modes of temporality and mobility that can develop within other discursive and representational contexts. Slowness in the Jharkhand context doesn't emerge in the form of the curated tourism branding or in slow tourism discourse explicitly, but rather through the ecological landscapes, community life, localized mobility and everyday social relations.

Important, the findings suggest that the relative absence of peripheral and Indigenous contexts in slow tourism scholarship does not necessarily indicate an absence of slow practice in those settings. On the contrary, its lack is indicative of a larger epistemological and representational bias in favor of forms of slowness already present in Western tourism discourse. The study aims to render the study of the tourism sector in Jharkhand as a space of theoretical understanding and not merely as an empirical exception, thus contributing to the broader efforts to diversify and provincialize tourism theory.

Perhaps the most original contribution of the study lies in its critique of visibility-based tourism epistemology. Existing platform-mediated tourism research frequently identifies slow tourism through explicit hashtags such as #slowtourism or through visible self-identification practices on social media platforms. As a result, tourism scholarships often recognize slowness only when it becomes discursively articulated and algorithmically visible (Manthiou et al., 2022). The findings challenge this assumption by demonstrating that representations strongly aligned with slow tourism principles may circulate without explicit labeling or tourism-oriented articulation. Despite the near absence of #slowtourism within the dataset, the visual narratives consistently reflected ecological immersion, collective temporal rhythms, localized mobility, and non-commodified engagement with place.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of interpretive visual discourse analysis for identifying embedded socio-cultural practices that remain unarticulated within conventional tourism discourse. Rather than treating Instagram posts as transparent reflections of reality, the study conceptualizes digital representations as culturally mediated constructions shaped by platform visibility, representation practices, and socio-spatial narratives. By moving beyond hashtag-dependent approaches, the study highlights the importance of critically examining how tourism phenomena become visible, recognizable, and analytically legitimate within contemporary tourism knowledge production.

6.0 Conclusion

This study examined how platform-mediated tourism visibility shapes the spatial representation of peripheral regions through an analysis of Instagram content associated with Jharkhand, India. Existing slow tourism scholarship has largely relied on visibility-based approaches that identify slowness through explicit labels, curated imagery, and highly recognizable tourism representations. The findings of this study suggest that forms of slowness may remain spatially and epistemically underrepresented despite being deeply embedded within everyday socio-ecological and community life.

The analysis revealed uneven spatial concentrations of digital visibility across Jharkhand, with tourism representations clustered around accessible urban and scenic locations such as Ranchi, Netarhat, Patratu Valley, and waterfall destinations, while several districts remained comparatively underrepresented. At the same time, visual narratives consistently emphasized forests, village settlements, collective social practices, localized mobility systems, and ecological landscapes despite the near absence of explicit slow tourism labeling. These findings suggest that platform-mediated tourism visibility selectively amplifies certain regional representations while marginalizing embedded forms of socio-spatial life that do not conform to dominant tourism aesthetics or branding practices.

To interpret these patterns, the study developed the concept of Embedded Slowness, which conceptualizes slowness as a spatially grounded socio-ecological condition shaped through ecological rhythms, collective temporalities, infrastructural conditions, and place-based relations. Rather than viewing slowness solely as an individualized tourism lifestyle, the study provides evidence to suggest how slower temporalities may emerge through ordinary environmental and community practices embedded within peripheral regions.

The study also contributes to broader discussions on digital spatial inequality and tourism representation. By relying heavily on explicit hashtags and algorithmically visible tourism discourse, existing tourism research may unintentionally reproduce uneven geographies of recognition that privilege highly visible destinations while obscuring peripheral and Indigenous contexts. In this sense, the absence of formal slow tourism labeling does not necessarily indicate the absence of slow practices, but rather reflects broader structures of platform-mediated visibility and spatial recognition.

Methodologically, the study illustrates the value of combining visual discourse analysis with spatial interpretation of geotagged social media data to examine how tourism imaginaries are unevenly distributed across regions. Rather than treating social media representations as neutral reflections of reality, the study conceptualizes digital platforms as spatially selective systems that may shape visibility, recognition, and tourism knowledge production.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of examining peripheral regions not merely as empirically underrepresented spaces but as important sites for understanding alternative socio-spatial forms of tourism representation. By shifting analytical attention from explicit visibility toward embedded socio-ecological practices, the study contributes to emerging debates on spatial inequality, digital representation, and regional visibility within contemporary tourism research.

Declarations

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Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

The authors declare that AI-assisted technologies were used only for minor language editing and grammatical refinement to improve the clarity and readability of the manuscript. All conceptual development, research design, data analysis, interpretation of results, and final content preparation were carried out solely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and originality of the work.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets and supporting materials underpinning this study are available as supplementary files submitted alongside this manuscript. These include: (1) the anonymised image corpus metadata log (Supplementary File S1); (2) the full coding manual with operational definitions and decision rules (Supplementary File S2); (3) the theory-to-data analytical mapping protocol for the Embedded Slowness Framework (Supplementary File S3); (4) the spatial geotag classification record corresponding to Table 2 (Supplementary File S4); and (5) the inter-rater reliability documentation with a final convergence rate of 94.8% (Supplementary File S5). The primary dataset (Instagram post images) cannot be deposited in a public repository owing to Instagram's Terms of Service governing user-generated content; however, the full anonymised metadata log (S1) and all analytical documentation (S2–S5) are available without restriction. Referees and editors requiring additional materials beyond what is provided in the supplementary files are invited to contact the corresponding author directly at nehacdbg@gmail.com.

Authors Contribution

Dr. Mona Ratnesh: Conceptualization, theoretical development, supervision, critical review and editing, and overall intellectual guidance of the study.

Neha Choudhary: Data collection, visual discourse analysis, coding and interpretation, methodology development, literature review, drafting of the manuscript, and coordination of revisions.

Dr. Julie Vardhan: Theoretical refinement, analytical validation, interpretation of findings, manuscript editing, and contribution to discussion and implications sections.

Dr. Abhishek Tripathi: Methodological support, data interpretation, review of analytical framework, and manuscript proofreading and refinement.

All authors contributed substantially to the conception, development, revision, and final approval of the manuscript.

Ethical Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed Consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

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Figures

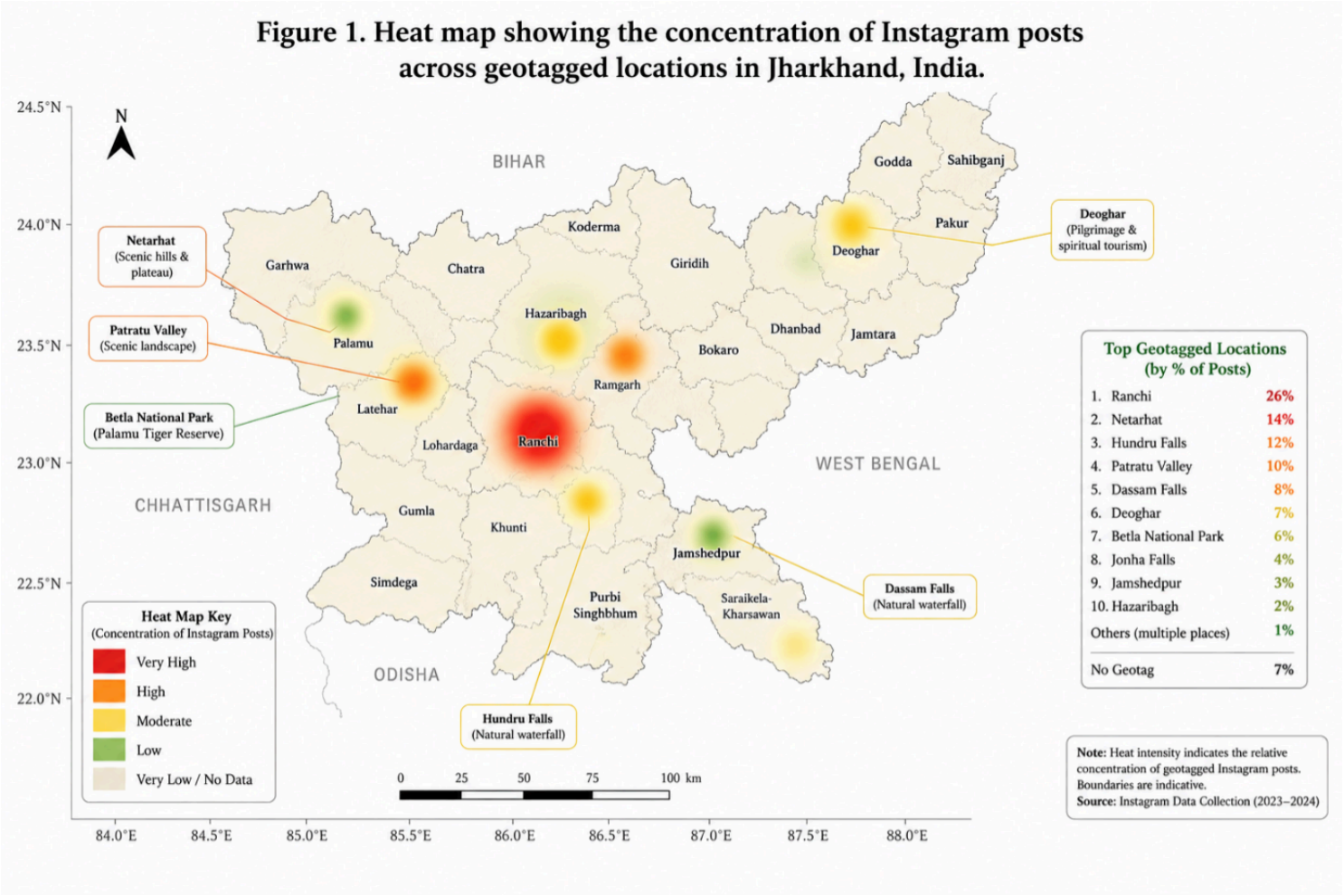


Figure 1

Heat map illustrating the spatial concentration of geotagged Instagram posts across Jharkhand, India. The distribution reveals strong digital visibility around urban, scenic, and pilgrimage nodes such as Ranchi, Netarhat, Patratu Valley, waterfall destinations, and Deoghar, while several peripheral districts remain comparatively underrepresented. This pattern suggests that social media visibility is concentrated in accessible and visually recognizable locations, whereas many everyday spaces associated with locally embedded forms of slowness remain less visible in dominant tourism discourse.

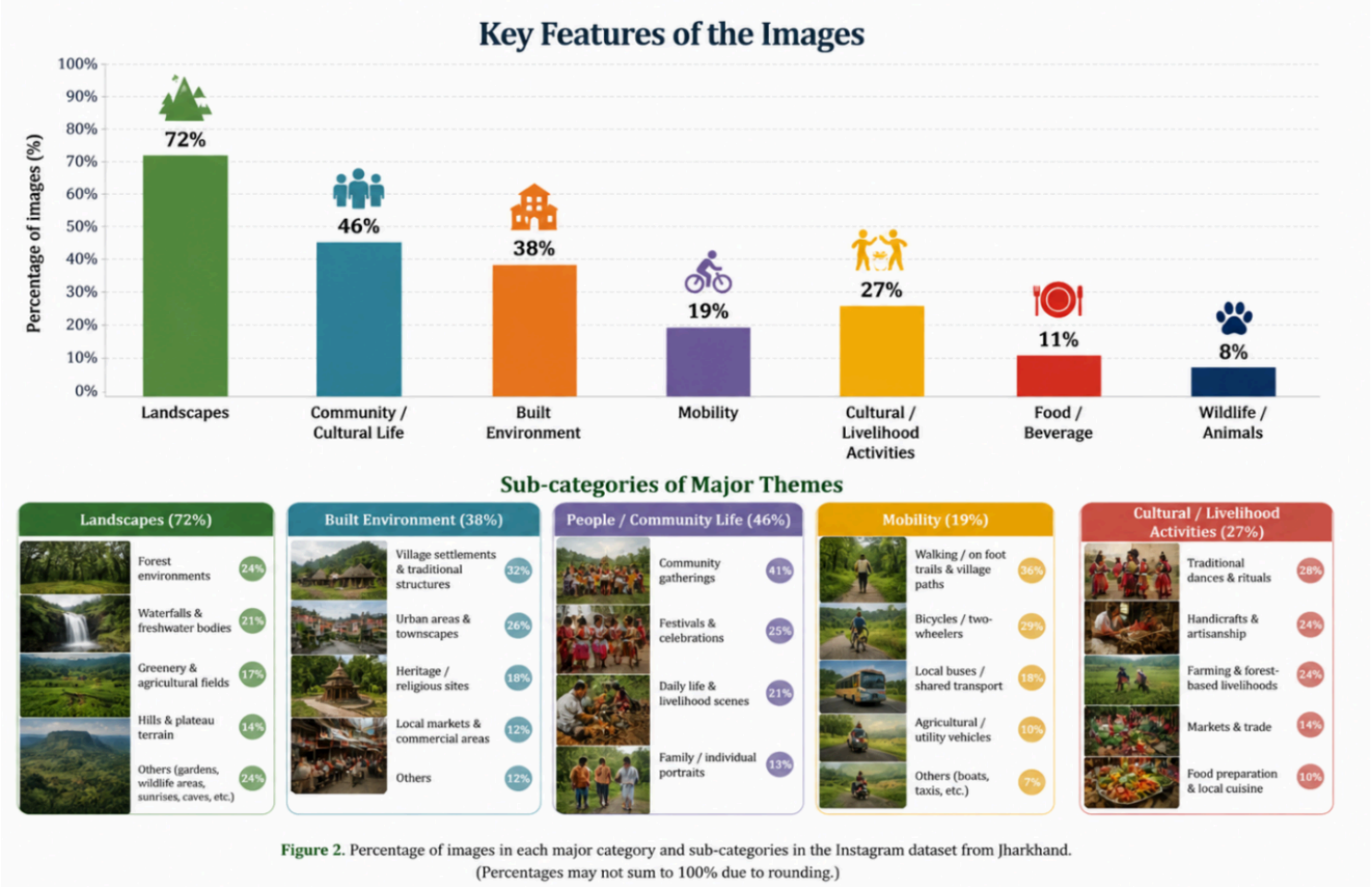


Figure 2. Percentage of images in each major category and sub-categories in the Instagram dataset from Jharkhand. (Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.)

Figure 2

Key visual themes and sub-categories identified in Instagram representations of Jharkhand, illustrating the dominance of ecological landscapes and community-centered practices over conventional tourism imagery.

Supplementary Files

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- Metadata600datasets.xlsx