

Conservation Efforts through Instagram by the Indian Wildlife Photographers: A Study on Portrayal and Users' Engagement of Endangered Species

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Abstract

Wildlife photography is one of the genres among photography which primarily focuses on animals in their natural surroundings, such as forests or oceans. Wildlife photographers routinely capture images of animals in motion or action, such as when they are flying, fighting, or feeding. However, this area of photography is still least worked on. This study looks at how the top wildlife photographers in India have captured and portrayed endangered species through social media (Instagram). Here, endangered species is referred as any animal species that faces extinction because of a sharp drop in population or the loss of a vital habitat. The research undertakes quantitative research approach by using content analysis method. Photographs of endangered species captured by the India's top wildlife photographers uploaded on Instagram feed during the two years (2022-23) from a wide range of 11 states in India has been studied. The study has focused on their portrayal pattern, user engagement strategies and how the awareness is spread for conservation of wildlife and endangered species. The research discovered a strong emphasis on terrestrial species with prime focus on land animals and little focus on birds and reptiles.

Keywords: Wildlife photographers, endangered species, Instagram, Conservation, Photography.

Wildlife Photography in India

There is a popular phrase, 'A picture is worth than a thousand words', and that emphasizes the strong communicative power of pictures. The art of capturing and recording picture are called photography. The main goal of photography is to record pictures or capture the moments.

A picture or image enhances and simplifies our comprehension on a subject matter. Throughout human history, photography has been extremely important. The advent of photography provided the only way to replicate images of what occurred with accuracy and without alteration, embellishment, or distortion. It was most likely

one of the biggest technological advances ever accomplished by humans (Fiona, 2021).

The genesis of photography in India can be traced back to the early 16th century, when a device known as a camera obscura was used to project images. These early camera simply projected images onto a wall aperture in a completely dark room, turning it into a large pinhole camera, as opposed to fixing a picture. Later, when experiments were conducted, photography evolved into a more sophisticated art. However, as the colonial powers reclaimed their territory, India had a notable influx of photographic art. Though there was not instantaneous conveyance, apparatus photography was available in India as early as the 1850s. Since then, color film and cameras with automated focus and exposure have become norms and these days, digital picture recording is becoming more and more popular in India with the introduction of digital cameras, SLRs, DSLRs, and other equipment.

Photography of animals in their natural environments, such as forests or oceans, is categorized as wildlife photography. Wildlife photographers routinely capture images of animals in motion or action, such as when they are flying, fighting, or feeding. There are also many different kinds of organism such as plants, animals, rodents, insects, and other invertebrates. However, it can also record detailed information about an animal's appearance or its interactions with the environment (Fiona, 2021).

There are many genres of photography, one of which is wildlife photography. And this area of photography is the least worked on. Photography came into existence in India around 1840, and because of its monuments, varied animals, and varied culture, it quickly rose to the top of the travel destination list for budding photographers. However, at the time, the cameras and other photography gear were not quite compatible enough to provide content for wildlife photography that was of any quality. During this period, zoos, plush animals, and domestic animals constituted the majority of the animal imagery. It stayed basically unchanged until the 1880s, when quick photography emulsions and much faster shutters were developed. This made wildlife photography far simpler than it had been previously, and many people started doing it for passing time or even a permanent career. When National Geographic became the first significant publication to publish wildlife images in July 1906, this became even more apparent.

This study focuses on endangered species, which is referred as any animal species that faces extinction because of a sharp drop in population or the loss of a vital habitat is considered

endangered (Dublin, 2023). According to the WWF-India's Threatened Species Conservation Program, the following animals have been chosen endangered animals due to their illegal hunting and trading; Sarus Crane, Common Leopard, Great Indian Bustard, Nilgiri Thar, Gharial, Asiatic Lion, Brow Antlered Deer, Ganges River Dolphin & Indian Pangolin etc.

The study looks at how those endangered animals are captured and portrayed by the top Indian wildlife photographers through Instagram in order to preserve and spread public awareness. Prominent wildlife photographers have been chosen on the basis of their Instagram followers. Those include: Varun Aditya, Shaaz Jung, Sudhir Shivaram, Jayanth Sharma, Rathika Ramasamy, Shivang Mehta, Sandesh Kadur, Dhirtiman, and Sunjoy Monga. In today's scenario, Instagram is one of the fastest growing social networking sites which has been widely used globally to connect, influence and spread awareness by uploading text, reels, photos and videos. Users can text each other in real time, connect via live streaming, and make video calls on this platform. Filters, hashtags, tagging, location display and captioning etc. are its unique features.

Wildlife conservation is one of the significant tasks in order to balance the natural ecosystem and wildlife photographers do their jobs by risking their life. This study primarily focuses on the portrayal pattern of endangered species by the wildlife photographers and their user engagement & awareness strategies through Instagram in order to put efforts for the conservation of wildlife and endangered species.

Review of Literature

Shaw, et.al; (2022) mentioned that the wildlife photography has become more and more popular all around the world in the last 20 years. They examined that a significant number of animal species face extinction. The study employed quantitative approach by doing content analysis to identify the most common and captivating elements of wildlife photographs published on Instagram in 2020 and 2021. The scientist categorized and assessed 670 animal photos from 160 Instagram accounts that support conservation. This study sets a hypothesis that social media platforms like Instagram through pictures of wildlife can reach a wider audience than words. The study has shown that viewers' reactions to different animal photos can be either positive or negative. Wherein they foster a favorable opinion of the animal and the conservation group.

Hanisch, et.al; (2019) demonstrated the relationship between photographing wildlife and participating in biodiversity and the natural world. Combining wildlife photography with other activities to increase cognitive engagement may help to foster a more emotional bond between people and biodiversity and the natural world. This study is exploratory in nature in which the researcher examined whether it would be effective to use wildlife photographs to increase participation in the following four categories using an online survey: 1. Emotional bond to the environment. 2. Knowledge and awareness of biodiversity 3. Concerns about the environment.

The study suggests that photographing wildlife causes people to feel more strongly, which may encourage support for the preservation of biodiversity. Additionally, people's awareness of biodiversity is expanding because to numerous internet platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Hanisch (2017) explored the relationship between photographing animals and engaging in biodiversity using two methods: professional photographer interviews and a survey of the general people by undertaking both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Interview with 11 seasoned nature and wildlife photographers and survey for three different comparisons in order to determine the possible effects of wildlife photography on the general population conducted. The study concludes that the fields of biodiversity, nature, and communication techniques are expanding. Taking pictures of animals has the power to increase awareness, empathy, interest, and emotional connection. Raising awareness of wildlife photography, biodiversity, and biodiversity degradation is important because biodiversity is vital to the survival of life.

Nankey (2022) pointed out social media selfies of wildlife animals that has become common practice these days. It can be detrimental to both people and the species when animals are photographed with the goal of utilizing them as props for pictures. This study finds that employing source familiarity and reputation can effectively deter people from taking pictures of wildlife and posting them to Instagram. This study's hypothesis is supported by exploratory research design and the survey strategy, which involves creating questionnaires for various categories.

Nijam, et.al. (2022) analyses the decline in the wild animals' population over time as a result of the illegal trade. This study focuses on Indonesia's

illegal bird trafficking from 2016 to 2021. It consists of 194 visits to 12 bird marketplaces, 19 Instagram vendor accounts, and 11 Facebook open groups. It links species predominance and asking prices to body size, abundance, and geographic distribution. Smaller species are more frequently exchanged in bird marketplaces than they are online. Only 10% of those involved in the illegal bird trade are successfully convicted, despite the fact that it is fairly widespread.

Blaney (2023) analyzed that how public react when images of tigers are shared on social media sites like Instagram and Facebook. The imaginary separation between civilization and environment is also examined. This study highlighted the growth and popularity of nature and animal pictures on social media, largely attributing ecotourism globally to people's yearning for outdoor experiences. #Nature, which regularly ranks among the top 10 hashtags on Instagram, is also examined. It had been tagged 741 million times. The study's premise is to employ the survey method, which involves tracking audience usage behaviors on Instagram through use of hashtags and emoji's while sharing any photos of Tigers.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the portrayal pattern of endangered species by the wildlife photographers through Instagram posts.
- To analyze user engagement strategies through frequency of posts and types of engagement (likes, comments, followers etc.) generated by such posts.

Methodology of the Study:

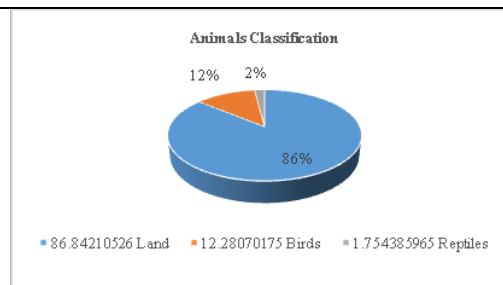
The study undertakes quantitative research approach and employs content analysis method to analyze Instagram posts on endangered species by the prominent nine Indian wildlife photographers based on their followers, popularity, and contribution in photography. The study has examined portrayal patterns, user engagement and awareness strategies through Instagram posts' of wildlife photographers during the period of two years 2022 and 2023. Various components/variables like species depiction, context, narrative style, content, conservation messages, and personal anecdotes etc. have been examined and analyzed on the subject matter.

Portrayal Patterns of Endangered Species: The study exhibits that how Indian wildlife photographers portrayed endangered species such as land animals, birds and reptiles on Instagram between 2022 and 2023. It shows that total 114 endangered species have been portrayed

through Instagram posts in which land animals (99, 86.84%) leads followed by birds (14, 12.28%) and reptiles (1, 1.74%). In the land animal category, Sudhir(27, 23.68%) leads in capturing

and portraying through Instagram Feed, followed by Jayant Sharma (21, 18.42%), Shivang Mehta (17, 14.91%), Varun Aditya (16, 14.04%) and ShaazZung (11, 9.65%) etc.

Sl. No.	Photographers	Land Animals	Birds	Reptiles
1.	Varun Aditya	16 (14.04%)	2 (1.75%)	0 (0%)
2.	ShaazZung	11 (9.65%)	1 (0.88%)	0 (0%)
3.	SudhirShivaram	27 (23.68%)	3 (2.63%)	0 (0%)
4.	Jayanth Sharma	21 (18.42%)	4 (3.51%)	0 (0%)
5.	RathikaRamaswamy	3 (2.63%)	1 (0.88%)	0 (0%)
6.	Shivang Mehta	17 (14.91%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
7.	Sandesh Kadur	1 (0.88%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
8.	Dhirtiman Mukherjee	2 (1.75%)	1 (0.88%)	1 (0.88%)
9.	SunjoyMonga	1 (0.88%)	2 (1.75%)	0 (0%)
	Total (114)	99 (86.84%)	14 (12.28%)	1 (1.75%)

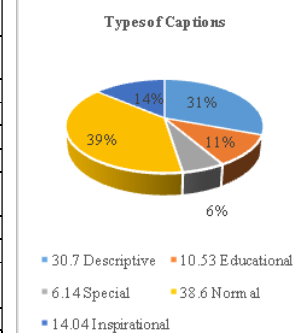


In the bird category, Jayant Sharma, a wildlife photographer (4, 3.51%) leads in capturing and portraying it through Instagram Feed, followed by Sudhir (3, 2.63%), Varun Aditya and SunjoyMonga (2 each, 1.75%), ShazZung, RathikaRamaswamy&Dhirtiman Mukherjee (1each, 0.88%) and ShaazZung (11, 9.65%) etc. Reptile category (1) is the least paid attention in capturing and portraying. The study shows that the photographers' patterns of portrayal had a notable bias in favor of land animals. Although these photographers regularly shoot endangered species, the quantitative data indicates that they primarily focus on land animals (99, 86.84%), perhaps because of their attraction and exposure, followed by birds (14, 12.28%) and reptiles (1, 1.75%). This information is essential for comprehending the story that is being constructed on social media about endangered

species and emphasizes the need for a more equitable portrayal of different species too.

The study exhibits the caption patterns in which Indian wildlife photographers portray endangered species through their Instagram posts. Captions used by nine photographers during the year 2022 and 2023 has been divided into five categories: Descriptive, Educational, Special Day, Normal, and Inspirational. Out of 114 posts, the most prevalent type of caption is Normal (44, 38.6%), followed by Descriptive captions (35, 30.7%), Inspirational captions (16, 14.04%), Educational captions (12, 10.53%) and Special Day captions (7, 6.14%). Photographers who have a greater propensity to describe their images in detail, like Sudhir and Jayanth Sharma, are those who exhibit Descriptive captions.

Sl. No.	Photographers	Photo	Descriptive	Educational	Special	Normal	Inspirational
1.	Varun Aditya	18	1	0	4	13	0
2.	ShaazZung	12	0	0	0	2	10
3.	SudhirShivaram	30	20	6	2	2	0
4.	Jayanth Sharma	25	9	3	0	10	3
5.	RathikaRamaswamy	4	0	0	1	3	0
6.	Shivang Mehta	17	1	3	0	10	3
7.	Sandesh Kadur	1	0	0	0	1	0
8.	Dhirtiman Mukherjee	4	3	0	0	1	0
9.	SunjoyMonga	3	1	0	0	2	0
	Total	114	35 (30.7%)	12 (10.53%)	7 (6.14%)	44 (38.60%)	16 (14.04%)



On the other hand, Inspirational captions are preferred by the photographers Shaaz Jung and Shivang Mehta, who hope to elicit an emotional response from their viewers. The prevalence of

typical and descriptive captions is highlighted in the table and graph, which graphically supports these tendencies. This distribution indicates about the hybrid approach of portrayal, with a strong

emphasis on narrative and factual descriptions with an important role for emotive and motivating elements. The variety of caption formats on Instagram reflects the range of approaches used to increase engagement and awareness of endangered species.

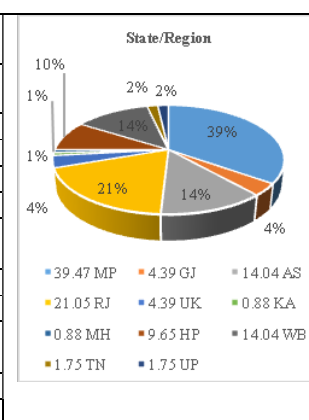
Further, the study has also investigated space provided for endangered animals by the Indian wildlife photographers out of total Instagram posts during the year of 2022 and 2023. It means the number of posts focused on endangered animals out of total Instagram posts by the photographers during the two years. Jayanth Sharma, having the highest number of Instagram posts (3978) on wildlife, but only (25 posts, 0.62%) were dedicated to endangered animals,

followed by Varun Aditya (18 on endangered animals out of 2745 Instagram posts, 0.65%), Sudhir Shivaram's (30 on endangered animals out of 2,314 posts, 1.29%), Sujoy Monga (3 on endangered animals out of 88 Instagram posts, 3.40%) and Shaaz Jung (12 on endangered animals out of 891, 1.34%).

Rathika Ramaswamy and Shivang Mehta had similar number of posts, but Shivang has posted more on endangered animals (1.18% vs. 0.27%). Sandesh Kadur and Dhritiman Mukherjee had very low engagement with (0.12% and 0.72%) respectively. These statistics point out that photographers paid very less attention on endangered animals while doing wildlife photography.

Portrayal of Endangered Animals Through Instagram: State Wise Analysis
Table 3

Sl. No.	Photographers	Total	MP	GJ	AS	RJ	UK	KA	MH	HP	WB	TN	UP
1.	Varun Aditya	18	8	0	6	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.	Shaaz Jung	12	9	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
3.	Sudhir Shivaram	30	15	1	4	7	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
4.	Jayanth Sharma	25	5	2	1	11	2	0	0	3	1	0	0
5.	Rathika Ramaswamy	4	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
6.	Shivang Mehta	17	5	0	0	2	0	0	0	8	1	1	0
7.	Sandesh Kadur	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8.	Dhritiman Mukherjee	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
9.	Sunjoy Monga	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	114	45	5	16	24	5	1	1	11	2	2	2



Further, the study has also examined endangered animals that has been captured in different states and posted by the Indian wildlife photographers during the year 2022 and 2023. The states includes Madhya Pradesh (MP), Gujarat (GJ), Assam (AS), Rajasthan (RJ), Uttarakhand (UK), Karnataka (KA), Maharashtra (MH), Himachal Pradesh (HP), West Bengal (WB), Tamil Nadu (TN), and Uttar Pradesh (UP).

The study shows that the quantity of photographs of endangered animals captured by each photographer. Sudhir Shivaram leads with 30 photographs, with significant contributions from Madhya Pradesh (15), Rajasthan (7) and Assam (4) followed by Jayanth Sharma (25 photographs), primarily from Rajasthan (7), Madhya Pradesh (5), and Himachal Pradesh (3), Varun Aditya (18 photographs), predominantly from Madhya Pradesh (8), Assam (6) and Rajasthan (4), Shivang Mehta (17 photographs), mainly from Himachal Pradesh (8) and Madhya Pradesh (5) and Shaaz Jung (12 photographs), majorly from Gujarat (9) etc.

The study exhibits state wise analysis. Madhya Pradesh (45, 39%) is the leading destination for wildlife photographers, followed by Rajasthan

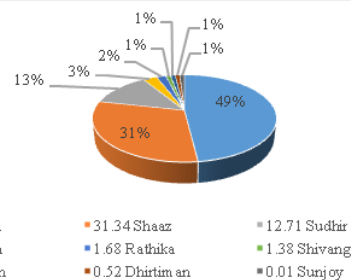
(24, 21%), Assam (16, 14%), Himachal Pradesh (10%), Uttarakhand and Gujarat (5, 4.5%) each, West Bengal, Tamilnadu and Uttar Pradesh (2, 1.75%) and Karnataka and Maharashtra (1, 0.87%) etc. The study indicates that photographers have a preference for specific areas with abundant biodiversity and better visibility of endangered species.

Further, the study has chosen nine prominent Indian wildlife photographers on the basis of their Instagram followers in order to determine their influence and engagement strategies. The study exhibits that Varun Aditya leads with (3.6 Million Followers, 49.05%), followed by Shaaz Jung (2.3 Million Followers, 31.34%). With over 80% of the overall Instagram followers, these two influencers alone have a significant reach and influence to have a significant impact on their audience. Sudhir holds third position with (893,000 Followers, 12.17%), followed by Jayanth Sharma (214,000 Followers, 2.92%), Rathika Ramaswamy (123,000 Followers, 1.68%), Shivang Mehta (101,000 Followers, 1.38%), Sandesh Kadur (68,900 Followers, 0.94%),

Dhirtiman Mukherjee (38,400 Followers, 0.52%),

and SunjoyMonga (1078Followers, 0.01%).

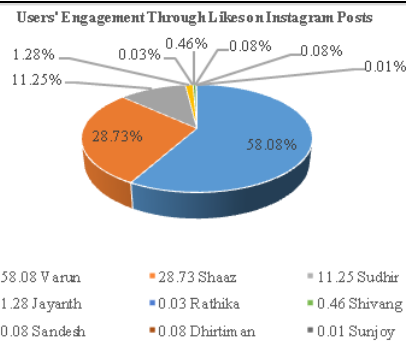
Instagram Followers of Wildlife Photographers: An Analysis of Users' Engagement				
Table 4				
Sl. No.	Photographers	Followers	Followers	Percentage
1.	Varun Aditya	3.6 M	3600000	49.05
2.	ShaazZung	2.3M	2300000	31.34
3.	SudhirShivaram	893K	893000	12.17
4.	Jayanth Sharma	214K	214000	2.92
5.	RathikaRamaswamy	123K	123000	1.68
6.	Shivang Mehta	101K	101000	1.38
7.	Sandesh Kadur	68.9K	68900	0.94
8.	Dhirtiman Mukherjee	38.4K	38400	0.52
9.	SunjoyMonga	1078	1078	0.01
	Total		7339378	100



Understanding the different types and frequency of engagement their postings could produce is important, as seen by the varying follower counts, which also signal varying levels of engagement and reach. Increased follower counts are probably associated with more significant engagement measures, such likes and comments. These data

are crucial for examining how these photographers use their Instagram posts to affect public perceptions of endangered animals. This distribution emphasizes how crucial it is to concentrate on leading influencers when evaluating social media's efficacy in conservation efforts for endangered animals.

Users' Engagement Through Likes on Instagram Posts				
Table 5				
Sl. No.	Photographers	Total Posts	Instagram Likes	Percentage
1.	Varun Aditya	18	2371434	58.08
2.	ShaazZung	12	1172863	28.72
3.	SudhirShivaram	30	459437	11.25
4.	Jayanth Sharma	25	52264	1.28
5.	RathikaRamaswamy	4	1272	0.03
6.	Shivang Mehta	17	18633	0.46
7.	Sandesh Kadur	1	3240	0.08
8.	Dhirtiman Mukherjee	4	3240	0.08
9.	SunjoyMonga	3	385	0.01
	Total	114	4082768	100



Further, the study has also examined users' engagement metrics specifically the number of likes, garnered by Instagram posts of Indian wildlife photographers featuring endangered species during the year of 2022 to 2023 in order to understand the reach and influence of these photographers as social media influencers. It exhibits that Varun Aditya leads significantly with 18 posts accumulating (23,71,434 likes, 58.08%) of the total likes, followed by Shaaz Jung with 12 posts (11,72,863 likes, 28.72%). Despite having the highest number of posts (30), SudhirShivaram, garnered (4,59,437 likes, 11.25%) of the total, followed by Jayanth Sharma with 25 posts (52,264 likes, 1.28%) and Shivang Mehta with 17 posts (18,633 likes, 0.46%) etc.

The study shows the disproportionate impact on audience engagement as measured by likes. This analysis highlights the variation in interaction

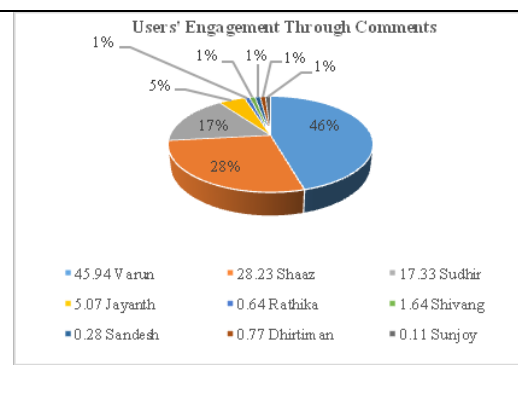
despite the volume of postings by pointing out that a small number of photographers have a disproportionate amount of social media influence. It emphasizes how crucial high-quality content is to generating user engagement on social media platforms, as well as the unique impact that photographers have in this regard. The information indicates that although the quantity of posts matters, the capacity of gaining likes differs significantly, which reflects the unique engagement styles and degrees of influence that different photographers hold. The study has investigated the level of engagement through 'Comments' that Indian wildlife photographers receive on their Instagram posts that feature endangered species during the year of 2022 to 2023. It provides information about the impact of these messages on social media and how audience engage with them.

Varun Aditya stands out prominently with 18 posts accumulating (10,352 comments, 45.94%) of the total comments, followed by Shaaz Jung with 12 posts receiving (6,361 comments 28.23%). Despite having the highest number of posts (30), Sudhir Shivaram garnered (3,905 comments, 17.33%), followed by Jayant Sharma

with 25 posts (1142, 5.07%). The remaining photographers, including Rathika Ramaswamy, Shivang Mehta, Sandesh Kadur, Dhirtiman Mukherjee and Sunjay Monga, contributed less significantly to the overall comment count, each securing less than 2% of the total engagement.

Users' Engagement Through Comments on Instagram Posts
Table 6

Sl. No.	Photographers	Total Posts	Instagram Comments	Percentage
1.	Varun Aditya	18	10352	45.94
2.	Shaaz Jung	12	6361	28.23
3.	Sudhir Shivaram	30	3905	17.33
4.	Jayanth Sharma	25	1142	5.07
5.	Rathika Ramaswamy	4	145	0.64
6.	Shivang Mehta	17	369	1.64
7.	Sandesh Kadur	1	63	0.28
8.	Dhirtiman Mukherjee	4	173	0.77
9.	Sunjoy Monga	3	24	0.11
	Total	114	22534	100



The study highlights the influence of Varun Aditya and Shaaz Jung in terms of triggering audience comments and likes. In spite of the regularity of posts, this research shows that social media engagement is concentrated on small number of photographers. It also shows that the quantity of comments, a crucial engagement indicator, varies greatly. This emphasizes how crucial material is, but it also highlights the significance of each photographer's unique social media presence and influence in fostering audience engagement. The study shows that although the frequency of posts matters, photographers' capacities to elicit comments vary greatly, indicating different approaches to interaction and varying degrees of influence.

Findings and Conclusion

The study exhibits that more than 86% of the Instagram posts are covered by endangered land animals. There is very less attention on birds and reptiles by the wildlife photographers. Photographers use different types of captions to present the endangered species. Among all captions, Normal captions are the most common, while photographers presenting endangered species, the percentage of normal captions are more than 38%. It is followed by Descriptive caption pattern, which provide detailed information about the posts on endangered animals.

Further, all nine wildlife photographers created 14,228 posts on their Instagram feed during the year of 2022 and 2023, of which 114 were about endangered species, which is only 0.80% of the

total posts; this is very less representation of endangered species. All nine wildlife photographers covered the endangered species in 11 states of India, among which Madhya Pradesh was the most visited destination for the wildlife photography, followed by Rajasthan and Assam. Among all the nine wildlife photographers, Varun Aditya, Shaaz Jung, and Sudhir Shivaram have more than 92.5% Instagram followers and they have received more than 92% likes and comments on their posts, which shows their supremacy on Instagram and audience engagement. It is important to note that all nine wildlife photographers combined 22534 diverse comments on endangered species, which shows the awareness of the audience through these posts on Instagram.

The study concludes that Instagram has become one of the most effective social media platform for portraying endangered species by the prominent Indian wildlife photographs. They collected photographs of endangered animals from 11 states of the country which show the awareness among all the wildlife influencers about endangered species. Further, analysis of the engagement metrics indicates that posts featuring endangered species generally receive high levels of users' engagement in terms of likes, comments, and followers.

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