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Persuasive Language Strategies in Instagram Captions: A Study of The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali

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Abstract

The increasing use of social media in hospitality marketing has encouraged hotels to employ persuasive language to influence consumer perceptions and engagement. However, limited studies have specifically examined how persuasive language is utilized in Instagram captions within the hospitality industry, particularly through the lens of Cialdini's principles of persuasion. This study aims to identify the types of persuasive language used in Instagram captions posted by The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali and analyze their functions in delivering promotional messages. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzed 27 Instagram captions collected from the hotel's official account over a seven-month period. The data were examined using Cialdini's principles of persuasion, including liking, unity, reciprocity, commitment and consistency, and scarcity. The findings reveal that five types of persuasive language are present, with liking emerging as the most dominant strategy, indicating a strong emphasis on emotional and experiential appeals. Each persuasive principle serves a distinct function: liking fosters emotional engagement, unity promotes a sense of togetherness, reciprocity highlights added value, commitment and consistency encourage customer participation, and scarcity enhances perceptions of exclusivity. These findings demonstrate that persuasive communication in hospitality marketing is conveyed more through subtle and experience-oriented messages than direct promotional appeals. This study contributes to digital marketing and hospitality literature by providing insights into how persuasive strategies are applied in hotel Instagram captions and offers practical guidance for developing more engaging and effective social media promotional content.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing; Hospitality Industry; Instagram Captions; Persuasive Language*

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, social media has become an important marketing tool that enables businesses to communicate directly with consumers and build brand engagement (Tafani, 2009; Yanar & Tütüniş, 2016). Among various social media platforms, Instagram is particularly valuable for marketing communication due to its visual orientation and high user engagement (Serafinelli, 2018; Katai, 2021). In the hospitality industry, Instagram allows hotels to promote services, showcase experiences, and strengthen brand identity through visual content and accompanying captions. As a result, Instagram has become an essential platform for attracting and influencing potential guests.

Language plays a central role in marketing communication, particularly through the use of persuasive language. Persuasive language refers to the strategic use of words to influence audience

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attitudes, beliefs, and actions (Aristotle, 2007). In promotional contexts, persuasive language is used not only to provide information but also to encourage positive responses from consumers, such as making purchases, reservations, or engaging with a brand. Losi and Rosida (2022) argue that social media captions are carefully designed to be informative and engaging while incorporating persuasive elements that are easily understood by audiences. Therefore, persuasive language has become a crucial component of digital marketing communication, especially on platforms where concise yet impactful messages are required.

Previous studies consistently indicate that persuasive communication in digital media relies on emotional appeal, creativity, and audience engagement. Mar'atus et al. (2025), Rahayu et al. (2025), and Daristin and Dewi (2024) found that hyperbole, humor, and relatable language are frequently used to attract attention and encourage audience interaction. Similarly, Romanova and Smirnova (2019), Huseynova et al. (2022), Ramadhan (2022), and Auliya and Hastuti (2022) reported that persuasive strategies such as emotional appeals, uniqueness, figurative expressions, and everyday language effectively influence audience perceptions and responses. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that persuasive language serves not only as a means of delivering information but also as a strategic tool for creating emotional engagement and shaping consumer behavior.

Despite the growing body of research on persuasive language in advertising, limited attention has been given to persuasive strategies employed in Instagram captions within the hospitality industry. Most previous studies have focused on traditional advertisements or non-hospitality sectors such as cosmetics, food, and retail. Consequently, the linguistic strategies used by hotels on social media remain relatively underexplored. Furthermore, only a limited number of studies have applied persuasion theories to examine how hotel Instagram captions influence audience perceptions and promotional effectiveness.

To address this gap, the present study investigates Instagram captions posted by The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali. As part of an internationally recognized hotel brand, the resort actively utilizes Instagram as a marketing platform to promote its services, communicate its brand image, and engage with potential guests. The captions accompanying promotional posts serve as an important medium for delivering persuasive messages and encouraging customer interaction and booking intentions.

This study employs Cialdini's (2021) Principles of Persuasion as the analytical framework. The framework consists of reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, liking, scarcity, and unity. These principles explain how persuasive communication influences human behavior and decision-making processes. They are particularly relevant to hospitality marketing because hotel services are intangible and experience-based. Before making reservation decisions, potential guests often rely on persuasive communication to evaluate service quality, exclusivity, trustworthiness, and emotional value. Therefore, Cialdini's framework provides a useful lens for understanding how hotels strategically influence consumer perceptions through social media content.

By focusing on persuasive language in hotel Instagram captions, this study offers a novel contribution to the fields of persuasive language, digital marketing, and hospitality studies. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined traditional advertising media or non-hospitality industries, this research specifically analyzes persuasive language in Instagram captions of a luxury hotel using Cialdini's persuasion framework. The study aims to identify the types of persuasive language used and analyze their functions in delivering promotional messages. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of persuasive language are used in The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali Instagram captions?
2. What are the functions of each type of persuasive language used in The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali Instagram captions?

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METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to analyze the use of persuasive language in Instagram captions posted by The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables the researcher to describe and interpret how persuasive strategies are constructed and communicated in digital marketing contexts. The analysis followed a deductive approach using Cialdini's (2021) Principles of Persuasion as the main analytical framework.

The data were collected from the official Instagram account of The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali (@westinbali). The study focused on captions posted between 30 August 2025 and 13 February 2026. This seven-month period was selected to capture recent promotional practices and ensure consistency in the analysis. During this period, 42 captions were identified. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 27 captions were selected for analysis.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) captions posted within the selected period, (2) captions containing promotional or marketing-related messages, (3) captions written in English or predominantly English, and (4) captions containing at least one persuasive element based on Cialdini's principles. The exclusion criteria were: (1) captions containing only operational information without persuasive intent, (2) reposted content from other accounts, (3) duplicate promotional messages, and (4) captions consisting mainly of hashtags, emojis, or event announcements without persuasive language.

A coding sheet developed by the researcher served as the primary research instrument. The coding categories were based on Cialdini's seven principles of persuasion: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, liking, scarcity, and unity. Each caption was assigned to the dominant persuasive category that best represented the main persuasive strategy used. In addition, the researcher identified the communicative function of each persuasive strategy within the caption.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019). The analysis involved four stages. First, all captions were collected and documented. Second, the captions were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Third, persuasive expressions were identified and coded according to Cialdini's persuasion categories. Finally, the coded data were interpreted to determine the functions of each persuasive strategy and their role in hospitality marketing communication.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, peer checking was conducted with a lecturer experienced in discourse and content analysis. The coding sheet and classification results were reviewed and discussed to ensure consistency between the persuasive categories and the identified data. Any coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion until agreement was reached. In addition, an audit trail of the coding process was maintained to improve transparency and dependability.

RESULT

Types of Persuasive Language

A total of 27 Instagram captions posted by The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali between 30 August 2025 and 13 February 2026 were analyzed using Cialdini's (2021) Principles of Persuasion. The analysis identified five persuasive principles in the dataset, namely liking, unity, reciprocity, commitment and consistency, and scarcity. In contrast, authority and social proof were not identified in any of the analyzed captions. Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of persuasive principles found in the dataset.

Table 1. Frequency of Persuasive Principles in Instagram Captions

Persuasive Principle	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Liking	15	55,6%

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Unity	8	29,6%
Reciprocity	2	7,4%
Commitment and Consistency	1	3,7%
Scarcity	1	3,7%
Authority	0	0%
Social Proof	0	0%
Total	**27**	**100%**

As shown in Table 1, liking emerged as the most dominant persuasive principle, accounting for 55.6% of all captions. This finding indicates that The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali primarily relies on emotional and experiential appeals to communicate with potential guests. Unity represents the second most frequent principle (29.6%), suggesting that togetherness and shared experiences are also important themes in the resort's promotional communication. Meanwhile, reciprocity, commitment and consistency, and scarcity appear less frequently, indicating that these principles function as supporting persuasive strategies. Authority and social proof were not identified in the dataset, suggesting that the resort does not rely on testimonials, expert endorsements, awards, or popularity indicators in its Instagram marketing communication. To provide a clearer illustration of how each persuasive principle is realized linguistically, representative examples from the dataset are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Representative of Persuasive Principles

Persuasive Principle	Example Caption Excerpt	Type of Persuasive Appeal
Liking	"Immerse yourself in the art of slow living in the heart of Nusa Dua."	Emotional and sensory appeal
Liking	"Wellness unfolds when the body relaxes, the mind slows, and the moment settles into calm."	Emotional and wellness-oriented appeal
Unity	"Travel is always better as a member."	Sense of belonging
Unity	"Make this month about the two of you."	Relationship and togetherness appeal
Reciprocity	"Enjoy exclusive perks with Marriott Bonvoy."	Additional benefit
Reciprocity	"Enjoy complimentary daily breakfast for two adults."	Reward-based appeal
Commitment and Consistency	"Secure your escape and we'll help you make it unforgettable."	Commitment and action-oriented appeal
Scarcity	"Discover a sense of calm you won't find anywhere else."	Exclusivity and uniqueness appeal

Table 2 demonstrates that each persuasive principle is realized through different linguistic features. The principle of liking is primarily expressed through emotionally appealing and sensory language related to wellness, relaxation, and personal well-being. Unity is realized through expressions emphasizing togetherness, belonging, and interpersonal relationships. Reciprocity appears through the communication of additional benefits and rewards, while commitment and consistency encourage audiences to take initial actions. Scarcity is represented through language emphasizing uniqueness and exclusivity.

The principle of liking is characterized by descriptive language that creates positive emotional associations with the resort experience. Captions frequently employ expressions related to serenity,

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balance, relaxation, wellness, and comfort. Through these linguistic choices, audiences are encouraged to imagine themselves experiencing the peaceful atmosphere offered by the resort. This finding suggests that emotional attraction serves as the primary persuasive strategy in the analyzed Instagram captions.

The second most dominant principle, unity, is reflected through language emphasizing relationships and shared experiences. Several captions focus on family bonding, romantic relationships, and membership affiliation. Through expressions such as “being together,” “the two of you,” and “moments shared together,” the captions position the resort as a place where meaningful social connections can be strengthened.

Reciprocity appears in captions that communicate additional value and rewards. The promotional messages emphasize exclusive perks and complimentary services that guests may receive when making reservations. This strategy highlights tangible benefits that may increase audience interest and booking intentions.

Commitment and consistency are reflected through messages encouraging audiences to take initial actions. The phrase “secure your escape” serves as a subtle invitation to make a reservation while maintaining a supportive tone. This strategy seeks to encourage decision-making without appearing overly aggressive.

Scarcity appears only once in the dataset and is realized through references to uniqueness and exclusivity. Rather than emphasizing limited quantities or time restrictions, the caption focuses on the distinctive nature of the experience offered by the resort. This strategy enhances the perceived value of the promoted service.

Functions of Persuasive Language

The analysis revealed that each persuasive principle serves a distinct function in delivering promotional messages. Although all identified principles aim to influence audience perceptions and encourage positive responses, they contribute differently to the overall communication strategy of The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali.

The primary function of liking is to create emotional attraction and positive perceptions of the resort experience. Through descriptive and sensory language, the captions encourage audiences to imagine feelings of relaxation, comfort, wellness, and tranquility. Expressions such as “slow living,” “serenity,” and “restful rhythm” help construct positive imagery that strengthens emotional engagement with the brand. As a result, liking functions as a strategy for enhancing the attractiveness of the resort through emotional appeal.

Unity functions to emphasize togetherness and social connection. Captions categorized under this principle frequently highlight family bonding, romantic relationships, and shared experiences through expressions such as “being together,” “the two of you,” and “moments shared together.” These captions position the resort as a destination where meaningful interpersonal relationships can be strengthened, thereby creating a sense of belonging among audiences.

The function of reciprocity is to highlight additional value and benefits offered to guests. Captions employing this principle communicate rewards such as “exclusive perks” and “complimentary daily breakfast,” which provide audiences with tangible reasons to consider making reservations. Through these benefits, the promotional messages become more attractive and value-oriented.

Commitment and consistency function to encourage audiences to take initial action. The phrase “secure your escape,” for instance, serves as a gentle invitation for audiences to make reservations or plan future stays. Rather than applying direct pressure, the captions encourage decision-making through supportive and reassuring language.

Scarcity functions to emphasize uniqueness and exclusivity. The caption categorized under this principle highlights an experience that audiences “won’t find anywhere else,” creating a perception

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that the resort offers something distinctive and valuable. This strategy enhances the perceived attractiveness of the promoted experience by emphasizing its uniqueness.

Overall, the findings indicate that persuasive language in The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali's Instagram captions performs multiple complementary functions. Liking primarily creates emotional attraction, unity strengthens social connection, reciprocity highlights additional value, commitment and consistency encourage action, and scarcity enhances exclusivity. Together, these functions contribute to the delivery of persuasive promotional messages that emphasize emotional and experiential engagement.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that liking is the dominant persuasive principle employed in The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali's Instagram captions, accounting for more than half of the analyzed dataset. This dominance suggests that persuasive communication in hospitality marketing is primarily constructed through emotional engagement rather than direct promotional persuasion. Unlike tangible products that can be evaluated through physical features, hotel services are largely experiential and intangible. Potential guests cannot fully assess the quality of a stay before making a reservation; therefore, marketers must rely on language that stimulates imagination and creates desirable expectations. The frequent use of wellness-oriented, sensory, and emotionally appealing expressions in the captions demonstrates an attempt to bridge this experiential gap by helping audiences mentally experience the resort before arrival. In this context, persuasive language functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a mechanism for reducing uncertainty and increasing the perceived attractiveness of the service.

The prominence of liking also reflects broader trends in contemporary digital marketing, particularly within social media environments. Instagram is a platform characterized by visual storytelling, lifestyle branding, and emotional engagement. Consequently, promotional communication on Instagram tends to be less direct and more experience-oriented than traditional advertising. Rather than explicitly persuading audiences to make reservations, the captions encourage them to imagine desirable emotional states associated with relaxation, wellness, balance, and personal fulfillment. This finding suggests that persuasion in hospitality marketing increasingly relies on creating aspirational experiences rather than emphasizing product attributes alone. Therefore, the effectiveness of persuasive communication may depend on the ability of marketers to establish emotional resonance with audiences rather than merely presenting factual information about services and facilities.

The findings also reveal the significant presence of unity as the second most frequently occurring persuasive principle. This result highlights the importance of social relationships and shared experiences in hospitality promotion. Travel and tourism activities are often associated with companionship, family bonding, romantic relationships, and collective experiences. As a result, marketing communication within the hospitality sector frequently extends beyond the promotion of accommodation services and focuses instead on the social value generated through travel experiences. The emphasis on togetherness observed in the captions suggests that The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali positions itself not only as a provider of hospitality services but also as a facilitator of meaningful interpersonal connections. This finding reinforces the notion that contemporary hospitality marketing increasingly promotes emotional and relational benefits rather than functional attributes alone.

When compared with previous studies, the findings demonstrate both similarities and important distinctions. The dominance of liking is consistent with Romanova and Smirnova (2019), who identified emotional appeal as one of the most influential persuasive strategies in advertising communication. However, while Romanova and Smirnova examined conventional commercial advertisements that often relied on explicit persuasive appeals, the present study demonstrates that

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emotional persuasion in Instagram-based hospitality marketing is conveyed more subtly through experiential descriptions and lifestyle-oriented narratives. This distinction suggests that persuasive strategies are not only influenced by marketing objectives but also by the characteristics of the communication medium. In social media contexts, where audiences are frequently exposed to promotional content, indirect and emotionally engaging communication may be perceived as more authentic and less intrusive than direct advertising approaches.

The findings also partially support Huseynova et al. (2022), who found that uniqueness and confidence-based language frequently appeared in commercial advertisements. While elements of uniqueness are present in the current study through the principle of scarcity, they occur much less frequently than emotional and relational appeals. This difference may indicate that hospitality marketing prioritizes the creation of emotional experiences over competitive differentiation. Unlike many commercial products that emphasize superiority and uniqueness to gain competitive advantage, hospitality services often rely on emotional value, atmosphere, and customer experience as their primary selling points. Consequently, persuasive strategies within hospitality marketing may differ substantially from those observed in other advertising contexts.

Furthermore, the findings differ from studies conducted by Ramadhan (2022) and Auliya and Hastuti (2022), which highlighted figurative language and everyday expressions as dominant persuasive devices. Although figurative and descriptive language is present in the analyzed captions, the persuasive force appears to originate primarily from experiential and emotional visualization rather than linguistic creativity itself. This distinction suggests that the effectiveness of persuasive language may vary according to the nature of the product or service being promoted. In hospitality marketing, the ability to evoke emotions and construct mental images of desirable experiences appears to be more influential than the use of stylistic language features alone.

An interesting finding is the complete absence of authority and social proof within the dataset. According to Cialdini (2021), both principles are commonly used to influence decision-making by relying on expert endorsement, testimonials, popularity indicators, or evidence of social approval. However, none of these strategies were identified in the analyzed captions. This finding may reflect the communication strategy adopted by luxury hospitality brands on Instagram. Rather than emphasizing awards, certifications, customer reviews, or external validation, the resort appears to prioritize emotional storytelling and experiential branding. Such a strategy may be particularly effective on Instagram because audiences often engage with content that inspires aspiration and imagination rather than content that provides factual evidence or credibility cues. The absence of authority and social proof therefore suggests that persuasive communication in digital hospitality marketing may operate differently from persuasion in traditional advertising environments.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to persuasive language research by extending the application of Cialdini's (2021) Principles of Persuasion to Instagram-based hospitality marketing. While Cialdini's framework has been widely applied in advertising, consumer behavior, and marketing research, relatively few studies have examined how these principles are linguistically realized in social media captions within the hospitality industry. The findings suggest that not all persuasion principles are equally relevant in every communication context. Specifically, liking and unity appear to play a more central role than authority and social proof in the promotion of hospitality experiences through Instagram. This finding indicates that the effectiveness of persuasion principles may be context-dependent and influenced by platform characteristics, communication objectives, and industry-specific factors.

The study also contributes to hospitality marketing literature by demonstrating how persuasive language can be strategically employed to promote experiential services in digital environments. Previous hospitality research has often focused on customer satisfaction, service quality, branding, and consumer behavior. In contrast, this study highlights the linguistic dimension of

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hospitality marketing by examining how promotional messages are constructed through specific persuasive strategies. The findings suggest that effective Instagram communication within the hospitality industry depends largely on the ability to create emotional engagement, facilitate experiential visualization, and strengthen social connection. These insights may assist hospitality practitioners in developing more effective social media content that aligns with audience expectations and platform characteristics.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused on captions from a single hotel Instagram account within a specific timeframe, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the analysis examined only textual content and did not incorporate visual elements, despite the central role of images and videos in Instagram communication. Future research could therefore explore persuasive strategies across multiple hospitality brands, compare luxury and non-luxury hotels, and investigate how visual and textual elements interact to influence audience perceptions. Such investigations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of persuasive communication in digital hospitality marketing.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the persuasive language used in Instagram captions posted by The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali by applying Cialdini's (2021) Principles of Persuasion. The findings revealed that five persuasive principles were present in the dataset, namely liking, unity, reciprocity, commitment and consistency, and scarcity. Among these principles, liking emerged as the most dominant strategy, followed by unity, indicating that the resort primarily relies on emotional and experiential appeals rather than credibility-based or popularity-based persuasion. In terms of function, liking was used to create emotional attraction and positive perceptions, unity emphasized togetherness and social connection, reciprocity highlighted additional value and benefits, commitment and consistency encouraged initial action, and scarcity enhanced perceptions of uniqueness and exclusivity.

This study contributes to persuasive language research by extending the application of Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion to Instagram-based hospitality marketing. While previous studies have largely focused on traditional advertising or product-oriented promotional contexts, the present study demonstrates how persuasive principles are linguistically realized in social media captions within the hospitality industry. The findings also show that not all persuasion principles are equally relevant in this context, with emotional and relational appeals playing a more prominent role than authority-based or social proof strategies.

The findings further contribute to social media marketing theory by highlighting the importance of emotional engagement and experiential communication in digital promotional content. Rather than relying on direct sales-oriented messages, the analyzed captions primarily encouraged audiences to imagine desirable experiences and emotional benefits. This suggests that effective social media marketing may depend not only on providing information but also on creating meaningful emotional connections between brands and audiences.

Beyond the hospitality industry, the findings have potential applications for other sectors that promote experiences, lifestyles, and services through social media platforms. Industries such as tourism, wellness, retail, beauty, and lifestyle marketing may benefit from employing similar persuasive strategies that emphasize emotional appeal, social connection, and experiential value. Therefore, this study provides practical insights for content creators, marketers, and business organizations seeking to develop more engaging and persuasive social media communication.

Despite these contributions, the study was limited to Instagram captions from a single hotel account and focused solely on textual content. Future research is recommended to examine larger datasets, compare multiple brands or industries, and incorporate visual elements and audience

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engagement metrics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of persuasive communication in digital marketing environments.

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