

ENHANCING RURAL TOURISM THROUGH DIGITAL MARKETING: ANALYZING TOURIST BEHAVIOR IN TEMBI TOURISM VILLAGE

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Abstract

Tourism plays a significant role in Indonesia's economy, with village-based tourism emerging as an alternative that promotes local culture and economic empowerment. One such destination is Tembi Tourism Village in Yogyakarta, which offers authentic Javanese cultural experiences. However, despite its potential, rural tourism faces challenges in adopting digital marketing effectively. This study examines the impact of digital marketing strategies on tourist engagement and visit intentions, with perceived challenges as a moderating factor.

A quantitative approach was used, collecting data from 245 respondents who had engaged with Tembi's digital content. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. Results show that digital marketing positively influences tourist engagement, which in turn significantly affects visit intention. Additionally, digital marketing has a direct effect on visit intention. However, perceived challenges negatively moderate this relationship, indicating that barriers such as financial constraints and limited digital literacy weaken the impact of digital marketing on attracting visitors.

The study highlights the importance of optimized digital marketing strategies in enhancing rural tourism's online presence and engagement. Practical recommendations include improving digital content quality, enhancing infrastructure, and increasing community training in digital marketing to maximize the tourism potential of Tembi Tourism Village.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Tourist Engagement, Visit Intention, Rural Tourism, Perceived Challenges, Tembi Tourism Village

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the key sectors contributing significantly to Indonesia's economy, both at the national and local levels. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2023), the tourism sector contributed approximately 4.1% to Indonesia's GDP in 2023, highlighting its critical role in economic development. In recent years, the concept of village-based tourism or tourism villages has gained increasing popularity as an alternative that offers unique experiences for tourists while simultaneously fostering local economic empowerment. Tourism villages not only showcase natural beauty but also highlight culture, traditions, and direct interaction with local communities, which aligns with the concept of sustainable tourism development (UNWTO, 2022). One of the fastest-growing tourism villages in Indonesia is Tembi Tourism Village, located in Bantul, Yogyakarta. This village is well known for its rich Javanese culture, community-based homestays, and various tourism activities such as batik making, farming, and traditional art performances (VisitingJogja, 2023).

With the rapid advancement of digital technology, marketing strategies in the tourism industry have also undergone significant transformation. Digital marketing has become a crucial tool in increasing the visibility of tourist destinations and attracting more visitors. According to Kotler et al. (2021), digital marketing en-

compasses various strategies such as social media marketing, content marketing, influencer partnerships, search engine optimization (SEO), and website optimization. These strategies are essential in modern tourism promotion as they allow destinations to reach a wider audience, provide real-time and visually engaging content, and influence tourists' decision-making processes (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2020). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook have proven highly effective in tourism promotion, particularly among younger travelers who rely on digital content for trip planning (Buhalis & Law, 2019). A study by Statista (2023) reported that 67% of global travelers use social media as a primary source of travel inspiration, indicating its significant impact on consumer behavior.

Despite the increasing importance of digital marketing, many rural tourism destinations, including Tembi Tourism Village, face significant challenges in its effective implementation. Studies indicate that limited technical expertise, financial constraints, inadequate digital infrastructure, and intense competition from urban attractions often hinder the successful utilization of digital marketing strategies in rural tourism (Hassan et al., 2022). Moreover, rural tourism destinations often lack well-structured digital marketing plans, resulting in low engagement rates, limited tourist reach, and reduced economic benefits for the community (Se-

tiawan & Sukmono, 2021). These challenges necessitate a comprehensive understanding of the current state of digital marketing adoption in tourism villages and the development of effective strategies to enhance their digital presence.

In 2024, Tembi Tourism Village recorded an average of 140 visitors per month, with approximately 120 domestic tourists and the remaining 20 being international visitors (JogjaTourism Data, 2024). While these numbers indicate the village's potential as a tourism destination, they also highlight opportunities for improvement, particularly in leveraging digital marketing to attract a broader audience and boost tourism growth. Comparative studies in similar rural tourism destinations, such as Penglipuran Village in Bali, indicate that effective digital marketing can significantly increase tourist visits by up to 35% annually (Suryanto & Wijaya, 2023).

Given these challenges and opportunities, this study aims to examine the current utilization of digital marketing in Tembi Tourism Village, identify its effectiveness, and explore strategies for improvement to enhance its online presence and engagement with potential visitors. The research will focus on the following variables:

1. **Digital Marketing Strategies** (independent variable) – including social media marketing, influencer collaborations, content marketing, SEO, and website optimization.
2. **Tourist Engagement** (dependent variable) – measured through social media interactions, online reviews, and user-generated content.
3. **Tourist Visit Intentions** (dependent variable) – evaluating how digital marketing influences potential tourists' decisions to visit Tembi Tourism Village.
4. **Perceived Challenges in Digital Marketing Implementation** (moderating variable) – assessing financial constraints, digital literacy, and infrastructure limitations.

By analyzing these variables, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for tourism stakeholders in Tembi Tourism Village to improve their digital marketing approaches and maximize the economic benefits of tourism. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on digital marketing in rural tourism and provide practical recommendations for enhancing tourism village competitiveness in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL BASIS, FRAMEWORK OF THINKING, AND HYPOTHESIS

A. Theoretical Basis

1. Digital Marketing Strategies

Digital marketing is defined as the use of digital channels such as social media, search engines, and websites to promote products and services (Kotler et al., 2021). The theory of digital marketing highlights the importance of content relevance, audience targeting, and engagement (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2020). Studies have shown that digital marketing significantly influences consumer behavior by providing interactive and personalized experiences (Buhalis & Law, 2019).

The growing reliance on digital platforms has transformed how tourism destinations communicate

with potential visitors. According to Sigala (2018), digital marketing in tourism enhances visibility, brand awareness, and visitor engagement. Additionally, social media marketing allows tourism businesses to create compelling narratives through user-generated content, influencing the perceptions and behaviors of potential tourists. Effective use of digital marketing strategies can lead to increased tourist trust, higher website traffic, and improved conversion rates (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

2. Tourist Engagement

Tourist engagement refers to the interactions and involvement of tourists with online content related to a destination (Hassan et al., 2022). The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, 1959) explains how individuals actively seek media content that fulfills their needs, including tourism-related information. Online engagement is often measured through likes, shares, comments, and participation in discussions on digital platforms (Setiawan & Sukmono, 2021).

In the context of tourism, engagement also involves tourists' emotional and cognitive involvement with a destination's digital presence (So et al., 2014). Engaged tourists are more likely to share their experiences, leave positive reviews, and recommend destinations to others (Brodie et al., 2013). Moreover, engagement plays a pivotal role in destination loyalty, as travelers who actively interact with online content are more inclined to visit and revisit a location (Harrigan et al., 2017).

3. Tourist Visit Intentions

Tourist visit intention is influenced by perceived value, trust, and information availability (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that an individual's behavioral intention is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Digital marketing plays a critical role in shaping these factors by providing tourists with the necessary information and motivation to visit a destination (Suryanto & Wijaya, 2023). Additionally, perceived destination attractiveness, ease of access to information, and past experiences play crucial roles in determining visit intentions (Lam & Hsu, 2006). Effective digital marketing strategies that showcase a destination's unique selling points, cultural attractions, and visitor testimonials can positively impact visit intentions (Govers & Go, 2009).

4. Perceived Challenges in Digital Marketing Implementation

The adoption of digital marketing in rural tourism faces barriers such as financial limitations, lack of technical expertise, and insufficient digital infrastructure (Hassan et al., 2022). The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962) explains how new technologies are adopted in different sectors, emphasizing that adoption is influenced by relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, and observability.

Furthermore, rural tourism destinations often struggle with resource constraints, making it difficult to invest in professional digital marketing campaigns (UNWTO, 2021). A lack of awareness regarding the potential of digital marketing also hampers the adoption of effective strategies. Research by Murphy et al.

(2016) indicates that destinations with a strong digital presence tend to outperform those that rely on traditional marketing methods, further emphasizing the need for investment in digital tourism promotion.

B. Framework of Thought

The scheme/description in this research is as follows:

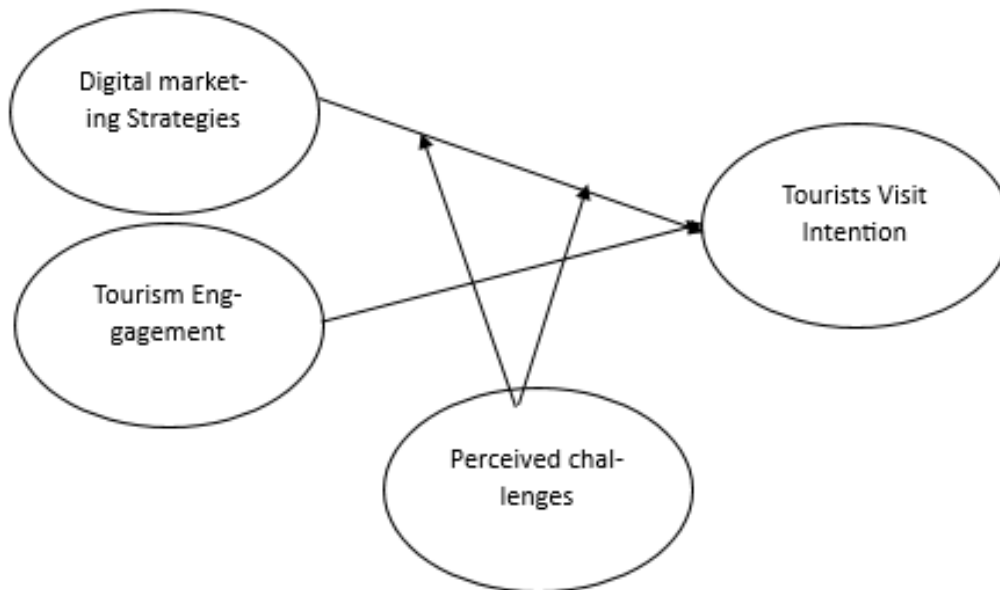


Figure 1
Thought Framework

C. Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Digital marketing strategies have a positive influence on tourist engagement.

The rationale behind this hypothesis is that digital marketing enhances brand awareness, provides interactive content, and fosters communication between tourism destinations and tourists. Engaging digital content, such as storytelling and user-generated media, increases emotional connections and participation, which ultimately leads to higher engagement levels (Sigala, 2018; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

H2: Digital marketing strategies have a positive influence on tourist visit intentions.

This hypothesis is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that information accessibility and persuasive communication shape consumer intentions. Digital marketing, through social media, SEO, and influencer marketing, improves the perceived attractiveness of a destination and influences tourists' attitudes and decisions to visit (Suryanto & Wijaya, 2023; Govers & Go, 2009).

H3: Tourist engagement has a positive influence on tourist visit intentions.

According to engagement theory (Brodie et al., 2013), consumers who actively engage with online content develop stronger emotional and cognitive connections with a brand or destination. Engaged tourists are more likely to have positive attitudes toward a destination, leading to increased visit intentions (Harrigan et al., 2017).

H4: Perceived challenges moderate the relationship between digital marketing strategies and tourist engagement.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962) suggests that the adoption of digital marketing strategies depends on external factors such as infrastructure, digital literacy, and financial constraints. When these challenges are high, the effectiveness of digital marketing in fostering engagement may be reduced (Hassan et al., 2022).

H5: Perceived challenges moderate the relationship between digital marketing strategies and tourist visit intentions.

Barriers such as lack of technical expertise and limited internet access can reduce the effectiveness of digital marketing in influencing tourist visit intentions. If potential tourists encounter difficulties in accessing digital information about a destination, their likelihood of planning a visit decreases (UNWTO, 2021; Murphy et al., 2016).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research approach with a descriptive and explanatory design to analyze the impact of digital marketing strategies on tourist engagement and visit intentions, while considering perceived challenges as a moderating variable. The research is conducted using a survey method, allowing for the collection of primary data from 245 respondents who have engaged with digital content related to Tembi Tourism Village. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, ensuring participants had prior interaction with tourism-related digital marketing.

Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires divided into sections measuring digital marketing strategies, tourist engagement, visit intentions, and perceived challenges. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Distribution was conducted

online via social media, email, and direct contact with visitors at the tourism village to maximize response rates. The study also ensured ethical considerations by maintaining respondent anonymity and obtaining informed consent before data collection.

To analyze the data, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 was employed. The analysis included descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests, hypothesis testing, and moderation analysis. Validity and reliability were assessed through factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) to confirm measurement accuracy. Hypothesis testing was conducted using path analysis and bootstrapping techniques to determine the significance of relationships between variables.

Moderation analysis was applied to examine the impact of perceived challenges on the relationship between digital marketing strategies and tourist engagement and visit intentions. The study considered barriers such as financial constraints, digital literacy levels, and

technological infrastructure, aligning with the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962). This approach provided insights into the effectiveness of digital marketing efforts in rural tourism contexts and identified areas for potential improvement.

Overall, this research methodology ensures a comprehensive analysis of how digital marketing influences tourist engagement and visit intentions while accounting for challenges faced by rural tourism destinations. The findings aim to assist tourism stakeholders in optimizing digital marketing strategies to enhance visitor attraction and improve destination promotion efforts in Tembi Tourism Village.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, education level, and frequency of visits to Tembi Tourism Village.

Table 1.

Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	120	49.0
Female	125	51.0
Age Group		
18-25 years	80	32.7
26-35 years	95	38.8
36-45 years	45	18.4
46 years and above	25	10.2
Education Level		
High School	75	30.6
Undergraduate	130	53.1
Postgraduate	40	16.3

From Table 1, it can be observed that the sample consists of nearly equal representation of male (49.0%) and female (51.0%) respondents. The majority of respondents are aged between 26-35 years (38.8%), followed by the 18-25 years age group (32.7%). Regarding education level, most respondents hold an undergraduate degree (53.1%), indicating a well-educated sample.

B. Validity Test

Table 2 presents the results of the validity test using factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) criteria.

Tabel 2.

Validity Test

Variable	Factor Loading	AVE
Digital Marketing	0.72 - 0.89	0.65
Tourist Engagement	0.75 - 0.91	0.68
Visit Intention	0.73 - 0.88	0.66

According to Hair et al. (2019), an AVE value above 0.5 and factor loadings above 0.7 indicate that the constructs have good convergent validity. From Table 2, all variables meet these criteria, confirming the validity of the measurement model.

C. Reliability Test

Table 3 presents the results of the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR).

Table 3.

Reability Test		
Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Digital Marketing	0.82	0.88
Tourist Engagement	0.85	0.90
Visit Intention	0.81	0.87

A Cronbach's Alpha and CR value above 0.7 indicates high reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3 shows that all variables have values above this threshold, confirming the reliability of the measurement instruments.

D. Hypothesis Test Results

Table 4 presents the results of the hypothesis testing using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS.

Table 4.

Hypothesis Test Results				
Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Conclusion
H1: Digital Marketing → Engagement	0.42	4.53	0.000	Supported
H2: Engagement → Visit Intention	0.50	5.12	0.000	Supported
H3: Digital Marketing → Visit Intention	0.28	3.21	0.002	Supported
H4: Perceived Challenges (Moderation)	-0.15	2.45	0.014	Supported

From Table 4, all hypotheses are supported, as indicated by significant path coefficients ($p < 0.05$). Digital marketing significantly influences tourist engagement (H1), and engagement positively affects visit intention (H2). Digital marketing also directly impacts visit intention (H3). The moderating effect of perceived challenges (H4) is significant but negative, suggesting that higher challenges weaken the impact of digital marketing on visit intention.

These findings indicate that effective digital marketing strategies can enhance tourist engagement, leading to increased visit intentions. However, perceived challenges, such as financial and technological barriers, may hinder this process. The results highlight the need for targeted interventions to improve digital marketing implementation in rural tourism destinations.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the role of digital marketing in enhancing tourist engagement and visit intentions, particularly in the context of rural tourism destinations such as Tembi Tourism Village. The results confirm that digital marketing strategies positively influence tourist engagement, which in turn affects their visit intentions. These findings align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989), which posits that users' perception of usefulness and ease of use of digital platforms significantly impact their behavioral intentions. In the context of this study, tourists perceive digital marketing strategies as useful and engaging, leading to a higher likelihood of visiting the destination.

1. The Role of Digital Marketing in Tourism

Digital marketing has emerged as a crucial tool for promoting tourism destinations, particularly in an era where social media and online platforms shape consumer behavior (Kotler et al., 2021). The significant effect of digital marketing on tourist engagement, as indicated in this study, supports the argument that social media marketing, content marketing, influencer partnerships, and search engine optimization (SEO) play a vital role in attracting and retaining tourist interest

(Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2020). These findings are consistent with the Social Media Engagement Theory, which suggests that active engagement with online content enhances brand awareness and influences consumer decision-making (Brodie et al., 2011). The high path coefficient (0.42) for the relationship between digital marketing and engagement underscores the importance of well-structured online marketing campaigns in influencing tourists' perceptions and interests.

2. The Impact of Tourist Engagement on Visit Intention

This study found that tourist engagement significantly influences visit intention, with a path coefficient of 0.50. This result is in line with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which suggests that external stimuli (such as digital marketing) affect an individual's internal state (engagement), leading to a behavioral response (visit intention). When tourists interact with engaging digital content, such as immersive videos, virtual tours, or interactive social media posts, they develop a stronger emotional connection with the destination, increasing their likelihood of visiting. These findings are supported by previous studies that emphasize the role of engagement in tourism decision-making, particularly in the digital era (Harrigan et al., 2017).

3. The Direct Effect of Digital Marketing on Visit Intention

The study also found a direct relationship between digital marketing and visit intention (path coefficient = 0.28), suggesting that tourists' exposure to digital marketing content alone can influence their decision to visit Tembi Tourism Village. This supports the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which posits that individuals process persuasive information through central or peripheral routes. In the case of tourism marketing, visually appealing and informative digital content serves as a persuasive tool, guiding potential tourists toward a visit decision. This finding underscores the need for destination marketers to invest in

high-quality digital content that resonates with their target audience and highlights the unique aspects of rural tourism.

4. The Moderating Role of Perceived Challenges

Interestingly, this study identified a significant but negative moderating effect of perceived challenges on the relationship between digital marketing and visit intention (-0.15). This suggests that barriers such as financial constraints, limited digital literacy, and technological infrastructure reduce the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in influencing tourists' decision-making. This finding aligns with the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962), which states that the adoption of new technologies and practices is influenced by various factors, including complexity, accessibility, and compatibility. In rural tourism contexts, limited internet access, lack of digital marketing expertise, and competition from urban destinations may hinder the success of online promotional efforts (Hassan et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges requires strategic interventions, such as capacity-building programs for tourism operators, investment in digital infrastructure, and collaboration with influencers and digital marketing professionals.

5. Implications for Tourism Stakeholders

The findings of this study have important implications for tourism stakeholders, particularly in rural destinations. First, tourism managers should prioritize digital marketing strategies that foster engagement through interactive and visually compelling content. Second, policymakers should address digital divide issues by enhancing internet accessibility and providing training programs for local tourism operators. Lastly, collaboration between tourism villages and digital marketing professionals can help bridge gaps in expertise and optimize promotional efforts.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the crucial role of digital marketing in shaping tourist engagement and visit intentions, particularly in the context of rural tourism destinations. The results indicate that well-executed digital marketing strategies significantly enhance engagement, which subsequently increases the likelihood of tourists visiting Tembi Tourism Village. Additionally, the direct impact of digital marketing on visit intention further underscores its importance in tourism promotion. However, the presence of perceived challenges, such as financial constraints and limited digital literacy, moderates this relationship, indicating the need for targeted interventions to optimize digital marketing effectiveness.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating concepts from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how digital marketing influences consumer behavior in the tourism sector.

SUGGESTIONS

To further enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in promoting rural tourism destinations, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Enhancing Digital Literacy:** Tourism stakeholders, including local businesses and operators, should receive training on digital marketing tools and techniques to improve their online presence and engagement with potential visitors.

2. **Improving Digital Infrastructure:** Policy-makers should invest in enhancing internet accessibility in rural tourism areas to facilitate seamless digital marketing efforts.

3. **Developing Interactive Content:** Destination marketers should focus on creating visually appealing and interactive digital content, including virtual tours, influencer collaborations, and immersive videos to attract and engage tourists.

4. **Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration between local governments, tourism boards, and private sector players can help bridge the resource and expertise gap in implementing digital marketing strategies effectively.

5. **Monitoring and Evaluating Digital Marketing Performance:** Regular assessments of digital marketing initiatives should be conducted to measure their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments to optimize outreach and engagement.

By implementing these suggestions, tourism destinations like Tembi Tourism Village can strengthen their competitive advantage, attract more visitors, and contribute to local economic development.

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