

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN CENTRAL JAVA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of tourism destination marketing communication strategies in Central Java through a systematic literature review (SLR) of five key articles. The research highlights the growing importance of adaptive and effective marketing communication strategies in response to fierce competition among tourism destinations, as well as the accelerating influence of digital technology and social media on tourist behavior. Articles were selected from both national and international journals focusing on digital marketing, social media, communication strategies, and the development of destination image in Central Java. The findings indicate that the use of digital marketing and social media—particularly Instagram—significantly increases tourist interest and visits, builds a positive destination image, and strengthens engagement between destination managers and tourists. Collaboration between tourism stakeholders, government, and local communities emerges as a crucial support factor for the success of marketing communication strategies. Nonetheless, the study identifies ongoing challenges, including limited human resources in digital marketing and uneven technological infrastructure. The study recommends digital content innovation, capacity-building for human resources, and continuous evaluation and collaboration among stakeholders to optimize tourism destination marketing in Central Java in the digital era.

Keywords: Marketing Strategy, Tourism, Central Java Tourism, Systematic Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the leading sectors that makes a significant contribution to regional economic growth in Indonesia, including in Central Java Province. With its rich culture, history, and natural beauty, Central Java holds great potential to attract both domestic and international tourists. In 2023, Indonesia's tourism sector demonstrated a very strong recovery, with international tourist arrivals reaching 11.48 million—an increase of 98% compared to the previous year—with contributions to national GDP at 4.8% and the creation of more than 12 million jobs. At the provincial level, Central Java has been designated as one of the main tourist destinations in Indonesia. Data show that tourism activities in Central Java have continued to rise in recent years, providing positive impacts on other sectoral outputs and new job opportunities. The cities of Semarang, Klaten, and Magelang have become the primary destinations for domestic tourists, each recording annual visitor numbers in the millions.

However, competition among tourist destinations is growing ever fiercer, both nationally and internationally. This situation demands effective and adaptive marketing communication strategies to enhance the appeal and visitation of various destinations across this region. The role of marketing in the tourism industry is not limited to promotion, but also encompasses market research, product development, pricing, distribution, and effective communication to build destination image and tourist loyalty.

Rapid developments in digital technology and social media have fundamentally changed the landscape of tourism marketing. The use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and other digital media has now become a pivotal instrument in destination marketing communication strategies. These strategies serve not only to introduce and promote destinations, but also to build image, increase engagement, and influence travel decisions through visual content, digital promotion, and two-way interactions between destination managers and tourists. Empirical studies show that the use of social media—particularly Instagram—significantly boosts brand awareness and tourist interest in visiting destinations in Central Java, demonstrating a positive correlation between the intensity of digital promotion and the success of regional tourism branding.

Various studies further affirm that digital marketing and social media have a significant impact on increasing tourist interest and visits—especially among millennials, who are highly active in the digital world. In addition, the Indonesian government has launched various tourism digitalization initiatives at the national level, such as the Travel X-Change Indonesia platform and the "Go Digital" campaign, to strengthen destination competitiveness in the era of globalization and expand the international tourism market.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies for tourism destinations in Central Java continues to face several challenges. Commonly identified obstacles include a shortage of competent human resources in digital marketing, uneven technology infrastructure, and suboptimal coordination among stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a major impact on tourist travel patterns and demands more innovative and responsive promotional strategies to adapt to changing market behavior; for example, the decline in international tourist visits to Central Java reached 88.68% in 2020, while domestic visits fell by as much as 60.91%.

While previous studies have examined tourism marketing strategies in Indonesia, most are partial in nature and have not comprehensively assessed the effectiveness of the various models—especially digital-based marketing communication—in the Central Java context. Therefore, a systematic review is needed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research findings relating to the effectiveness of tourism destination marketing communication strategies in Central Java.

This study aims to systematically examine the effectiveness of various models of marketing communication strategies—including the use of social media and digital promotion—in increasing tourist visits to destinations in Central Java. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of best practices, challenges, and strategic recommendations to optimize marketing communication for tourism destinations in Central Java in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Digital Marketing Theory

Digital Marketing Theory centers on the use of digital technologies—such as social media, websites, and online advertising platforms—to promote products, services, or destinations by engaging a targeted audience in a measurable and interactive manner. Kotler and Keller (2016) define digital marketing as “marketing activities that use digital channels to communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) also state, “Digital marketing enables real-time interaction, robust targeting, and personalized messaging, allowing organizations to reach segmented markets efficiently.” In the tourism context, digital marketing accelerates and broadens the impact of campaigns, leveraging visually compelling content and social engagement to shape tourist perceptions and preferences (Aliyah et al., 2024). Research highlights that integrating digital marketing and social media—particularly Instagram—markedly boosts both interest and actual visitation, especially among digitally savvy millennials. This approach is rooted in the interactive

marketing paradigm, where real-time engagement, dynamic response, and personalization are considered primary drivers of promotional success.

Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy

posits that marketing effectiveness is maximized when all promotional tools—advertising, public relations, direct marketing, personal selling, and sales promotion—deliver consistent and unified messages across channels. Kotler et al. (2021) describe IMC as “a planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time.” Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) further emphasize that “IMC leverages synergy among various promotional tools to magnify the impact of communication and enhance brand recall and customer loyalty.” In tourism destination marketing, IMC ensures coherent branding and amplifies both online and offline communications, which aligns with findings that coordinated marketing communication strategies—supported by collaboration among stakeholders—strengthen destination image and market penetration (Wuryanta & Utami, 2019).

Promotional Language and Visual Storytelling

The use of adaptive promotional language and compelling visual storytelling is essential in creating an appealing and memorable destination image. Effective communication strategies employ language that resonates with target audiences—such as English for international markets—and utilize authentic, culturally relevant visual narratives to differentiate the destination and inspire travel decisions. Sugiarti & Kristina (2017) demonstrate that the strategic use of adaptable, engaging language and visual content significantly improves destination branding and increases the likelihood of attracting both domestic and foreign tourist.

Communication Theory and Visual Storytelling

Communication Theory and Visual Storytelling stress that message efficacy is determined by both the way content is crafted and the channels through which it is delivered. According to Schramm (1954), “Communication is the process of establishing commonness or oneness of thought between a sender and a receiver.” In tourism marketing, visual storytelling combines strong narratives, vivid imagery, and adaptive language to foster lasting positive impressions. Kotler and Keller (2016) highlight that “well-designed marketing communications use compelling visuals and international languages, such as English, to strengthen brand image and expand global appeal.” Sugiarti & Kristina (2017) demonstrate that the strategic use of promotional language and visuals increases destination attractiveness for domestic and international tourists. stress that message efficacy is determined by both the way content is crafted and the channels through which it is delivered. According to Schramm (1954), “Communication is the process of establishing commonness or oneness of thought between a sender and a receiver.” In tourism marketing, visual storytelling combines strong narratives, vivid imagery, and adaptive language to foster lasting positive impressions. Kotler and Keller (2016) highlight that “well-designed marketing communications use compelling visuals and international languages, such as English, to strengthen brand image and expand global appeal.” Sugiarti & Kristina (2017) demonstrate that the strategic use of promotional language and visuals increases destination attractiveness for domestic and international tourists.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

A defining feature of successful tourism marketing in Central Java is the strong collaboration among key stakeholders—destination managers, government bodies, and local communities. This multi-stakeholder approach enables the pooling of resources, aligns messaging with local values, and drives innovation in promotional activities. Joint initiatives, such as annual travel expos and community-based tourism events, have been shown to open new markets and

improve the overall effectiveness of marketing communication. Such collaboration not only enhances promotional reach but also supports economic resilience and cultural authenticity at destinations.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method guided by the PRISMA framework (Moher et al., 2009). The literature search was conducted across several major academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and national repositories, using the following keywords: “marketing strategy”, “digital marketing”, “social media”, “tourism marketing”, and “Jawa Tengah”. The search covered publications from 2015 to 2025.

From an initial pool of approximately 50 articles, a rigorous screening process based on relevance and quality was implemented. This process resulted in the selection of 4 primary articles that were then analyzed in depth. The analysis adopted thematic techniques to identify key patterns and themes related to the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies for tourism destinations.

Inclusion Criteria

- 1. Studies discussing tourism destination marketing communication strategies, particularly those focused on social media and digital marketing.
- 2. Relevance to the context of tourism in Central Java or Indonesia.
- 3. Full-text articles available in Bahasa Indonesia or English.

Exclusion Criteria

- 1. Articles that do not address marketing communication or are unrelated to social media/digital marketing.
- 2. Editorials, opinion pieces, or articles with only an abstract available.

Articles that do not address marketing communication or are unrelated to social media/digital marketing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Following a rigorous screening process aligned with the research problem formulation, four articles were identified as meeting the defined criteria for in-depth analysis. The selection focuses on the key variables and themes outlined by each article, as summarized below:

No.	Title	X	Y	M	X	Source
1	The Effect of Digital Marketing Through Social Media and Tourism Attractiveness on Visitor Interest. <i>Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat</i>	Digital Marketing, Social Media, Tourism Attractiveness	Visitor Interest			Aliyah, K., Kisworo, B., Miraj, S., & Gupta, S. (2024)
2	“Decorating Our Kampung”: Marketing Communication Strategy and Tourism Potential Development in	Marketing Communication Strategy	Tourism Potential			Wuryanta, A. G. E., & Utami, A. T. (2019)

	Karangrejo Borobudur, Central Java					
3	'Energising' English to Promote Central Java as a Popular Tourism Destination. <i>Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities</i>	Promotional Language (English)	Tourism Destination Image			Sugiarti, R., & Kristina, D. (2017)
4	Utilization of Social Media as Indonesia's Tourism Public Relations Strategy	Social Media Utilization	Tourism Promotion	Public Relations		Al-Qalam Journal (2023)

Source: Researcher analysis, 2023

Result

Answers to Research Questions Based on Systematic Literature Review :

What are the antecedents of digital tourism marketing in Central Java?

Based on Table 1 and analysis of the four main reviewed articles, the antecedents of digital tourism marketing in Central Java include:

1. **The adoption of digital marketing and social media** as the main promotional tools (Aliyah et al., 2024; Al-Qalam Journal, 2023).
2. **An integrated marketing communication strategy** that combines advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing, and sales promotion (Wuryanta & Utami, 2019; Sari, 2023).
3. **The use of adaptive promotional language** and visual storytelling to build destination image (Sugiarti & Kristina, 2017).
4. **Collaboration among tourism stakeholders, government, and local communities** as the main drivers of destination development and promotion (Wuryanta & Utami, 2019).

These factors form the foundation in designing and implementing effective tourism marketing strategies in the digital era.

Is there an influence of social media use and digital marketing on the marketing of tourism destinations in Central Java?

Based on the findings from the analyzed articles, there is strong evidence of a positive influence of social media use and digital marketing on the effectiveness of tourism destination marketing in Central Java.

1. Social media, particularly Instagram and YouTube, have proven to be effective in building awareness, increasing engagement, and attracting tourist interest, especially among the millennial generation (Aliyah et al., 2024; Nurmei Wilhelmina & Nina Mistriani, 2024).
2. Content-based visual and interactive promotions are able to enhance the destination image and strengthen digital word-of-mouth marketing (Sugiarti & Kristina, 2017; Al-Qalam Journal, 2023).
3. Integrated marketing communication strategies combined with digital marketing significantly increase the number of tourist visits to destinations, as seen in Grand Maerakaca Semarang and Karang Jahe Beach Rembang (Nurmei Wilhelmina & Nina Mistriani, 2024; Sari, 2023).

Thus, the use of social media and digital marketing plays an important role in supporting the success of tourism destination marketing in Central Java.

What are the consequences of adopting digital marketing communication strategies for tourism destinations in Central Java?

The consequences of adopting digital marketing communication strategies for tourism destinations in Central Java found in this SLR include:

1. Increased tourist interest and visits as a result of more effective promotion and wider market reach (Aliyah et al., 2024; Sari, 2023).
2. Strengthening of destination image and branding through consistent messaging and attractive visual content on social media (Sugiarti & Kristina, 2017; Nurmei Wilhelmina & Nina Mistriani, 2024).
3. The creation of real-time engagement and digital word-of-mouth, which accelerates the spread of positive information about tourism destinations (Al-Qalam Journal, 2023).
4. An increased demand for human resources who are competent in digital marketing, as well as challenges related to infrastructure and technology adaptation at the local level (Wuryanta & Utami, 2019; Sari, 2023).

Overall, the adoption of digital marketing and social media has a positive impact on the marketing of tourism destinations in Central Java, but it also requires improvements in human resource capacity and supporting infrastructure to achieve optimal results.

Discussion

1. Effectiveness of Social Media and Digital Marketing

The results of the SLR indicate that social media, particularly Instagram, has become a highly effective promotional tool in increasing tourist interest in visiting destinations in Central Java. Research by Aliyah et al. (2024) and a study at Grand Maerakaca Semarang (Wilhelmina & Mistriani, 2025) confirm that the millennial generation is highly responsive to visual and interactive content. Social media-based promotion not only builds awareness but also creates real-time engagement and digital word-of-mouth that strengthens the image of the destination.

Research conducted at Candi Ijo further supports these findings, demonstrating that Instagram has a positive and significant effect on tourists' intention to visit, while Facebook and YouTube have a simultaneous but not individually significant impact. This suggests that marketing communication strategies integrating multiple social media platforms can broaden the reach of promotional activities and enhance the effectiveness of campaigns.

2. Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy

The study in Karangrejo Borobudur (Wuryanta & Utami, 2019) and the evaluation results of the marketing communication programs by the Central Java Office of Culture and Tourism highlight the importance of integrating the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) with the communication mix (advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, interactive selling, word of mouth). Collaboration among government, business operators, and local communities is key to expanding markets and strengthening destination branding.

Annually designed marketing communication programs such as Travel Mart and Expo have proven effective in opening up new markets and increasing the number of both domestic and international tourist visits. The positive impact is experienced not only by business operators but also by the communities around tourism destinations.

3. The Role of Influencers and E-Content Marketing

Research by Ayuni & Wasitowati (2022) highlights the role of e-content marketing and social media influencers in building trust (e-trust) and increasing tourist visits in the post-pandemic period. The success of promotion is strongly influenced by the quality of content, influencer credibility, and two-way interaction between destination managers and tourists. The trust factor serves as an important mediator that strengthens the relationship between digital promotion and the intention to visit.

4. The Importance of Evaluation and Content Innovation

Periodic evaluation of marketing communication programs, as carried out by the Central Java Office of Culture and Tourism, is an essential step to determine the effectiveness of the communication tactics employed. Research at Pantai Indah Kemangi Kendal emphasizes the importance of content innovation, concept development, and the creation of engaging captions so that social media promotions can effectively create awareness and increase tourist interest.

5. The Challenges and inhibiting factors

Although digital marketing communication strategies have shown positive results, challenges remain in the form of limited human resources with expertise in digital marketing, uneven technological infrastructure, and the ongoing need for innovation to keep up with dynamic consumer behavior trends. Other barriers include a lack of synergy among stakeholders and limited promotional budgets in several destinations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a systematic literature review of five key articles discussing the marketing communication strategies of tourism destinations in Central Java, it can be concluded that the utilization of digital marketing and social media—particularly Instagram—is highly effective in increasing tourist interest and visits. Integrated marketing communication strategies, involving collaboration between tourism stakeholders, government, and local communities, have been proven to strengthen the image of destinations and expand promotional reach, especially to the tech-savvy millennial market. Engaging visual content, informative and culturally adaptive promotional messages, as well as innovative information delivery, are critical factors in the success of digital promotion. Furthermore, effective marketing communication strategies should not focus solely on online promotion but also combine offline approaches, such as collaborations with local communities and artists.

However, several challenges persist, including a shortage of competent human resources in digital marketing, uneven technological infrastructure, and the continuous need for evaluation and innovation to ensure that promotions remain relevant and have a tangible impact on increasing tourist visits. Therefore, tourism stakeholders and local governments are advised to continuously innovate in creating creative and informative digital content, enhance human resource capacity through digital marketing training, and strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration to extend promotional reach. Moreover, marketing communication strategies should be routinely evaluated and adjusted in line with evolving trends and consumer behaviors, with digital infrastructure development prioritized to ensure that destination promotion in Central Java becomes increasingly effective and sustainable.

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