Annual International Conference on Islamic Economics (AICIE)
P-ISSN 2964-8149, E-ISSN 2964-6116
Volume 4, January - December 2025
https://prosiding.iainponorogo.ac.id/index.php/aicie

Optimization of Social Media as a Digital Marketing Strategy: Implications for Tourist Interest

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Article Info

Article history:
Received July 11, 2025
Revised August 12, 2025
Accepted October 22, 2025

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Keywords:
Digital Marketing Optimization, Digital Marketing, Social Media, Digital Marketing Innovation, Increased Tourist Interest

Abstract

This study investigates the optimization of social media as a digital marketing strategy to enhance tourist interest, focusing on the "Den Bagus" food court in Trenggalek, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research highlights the effectiveness of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook in increasing visibility, engagement, and conversions. The findings reveal that visual content, interactive communication, and digital innovations—such as SEO and live event promotions are key drivers in attracting tourists. This study offers practical insights for small-scale tourism destinations seeking to improve their digital marketing strategies. However, it acknowledges limitations, including the focus on a single case study and the absence of direct tourist feedback. Future research should incorporate multiple case studies and direct input from tourists to expand these findings.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the digital world has brought significant changes in various sectors, one of which is the tourism sector. In Indonesia, this sector has grown rapidly, as evidenced by the increase in the tourism sector's contribution to the national economy. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) recorded that in 2019, the tourism industry absorbed more than 13 million workers, with a significant increase in both domestic and international tourists. However, in 2020, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a drastic decline in the number of visitors and a sharp drop in labor absorption in this sector.

As the tourism sector recovers post-pandemic, digital marketing has become one of the effective solutions to attract tourists once again. The use of social media as a marketing platform has proven to be an effective tool in reaching a wider consumer base and building two-way communication between service providers and tourists. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, which are used extensively, function not only to spread information but also to shape perceptions and attract interest in tourist destinations.

The rapid development of information technology, particularly the internet, has transformed the marketing landscape in various sectors, including tourism. With the increasing ease of access to information, social media has become the primary channel for effective digital marketing strategies. Social media is not only a communication tool but also a promotional tool that enables companies or tourist destinations to build direct relationships with their audiences, increase engagement, and expand their market reach. In this context, optimizing digital marketing has become essential to enhance marketing effectiveness and attract tourists.

The tourism sector in Indonesia, as one of the key contributors to the country's economy, continues to strive to develop and maximize its potential. In 2019, Indonesia's tourism sector contributed around 15% to the country's GDP, with more than 17 million international tourists visiting. However, despite Indonesia's vast tourism potential, many local tourist destinations have not fully utilized the potential of digital marketing, especially through social media. This is evident in the many small and medium-sized businesses, including the "Den Bagus" food court in Trenggalek, which have not optimized the use of social media in marketing their products and services.

The use of social media in digital marketing has proven effective in increasing tourists' interest. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok allow destination managers to promote their products in a more engaging and interactive way, as more than 70% of tourists now choose their destinations based on information found on social media. However, despite its great potential, social media management in many local tourist destinations remains limited. "Den Bagus" food court, for example, despite having a strategic location and a variety of culinary products, has not fully optimized the use of social media. Unattractive content and infrequent updates have resulted in low tourist interest in this food court.

Digital marketing innovation becomes a key factor in overcoming these challenges. Innovations in content creation, such as short videos, attractive photos, and direct interactions with visitors, can enhance visibility and attract more visitors. In addition, a more coordinated marketing strategy through official social media accounts and the use of new features on social media platforms can expand market reach and increase engagement. Therefore, it is crucial for "Den Bagus" food court to adopt more innovative digital marketing strategies, which not only involve promotions but also create engaging experiences for visitors digitally.

Penelitian oleh Armutcu et al., 2023 emphasizes the role of social media in elevating lesser known destinations through creative and interactive content, including short-form videos and direct engagement. Similarly, Dewi et al., 2022 highlight the power of responsive, two-way digital communication in influencing tourist decision-making findings that strongly align with the focus of this study.

This study aims to explore how the optimization of digital marketing through social media can increase tourist interest in the "Den Bagus" food court. The focus of this research will analyze how proper content management, the implementation of digital marketing innovations, and digital communication strategies can improve visitor engagement and increase sales or service bookings at this food court. The research will also explore the challenges faced in implementing digital marketing and provide solutions to overcome these barriers, thus expanding the market reach and enhancing the appeal of "Den Bagus" food court in the eyes of tourists.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the managers of local tourist destinations in optimizing their digital marketing strategies and provide insights into how social media can be used effectively to increase tourist attraction and boost the sales of products or services in the tourism sector.

This research therefore aims to analyze how digital marketing particularly via social media can be optimized to elevate Pujasera “Den Bagus” as a compelling destination. It will examine content strategy, platform engagement, innovation, and digital responsiveness as tools to increase visibility, strengthen brand appeal, and enhance sales or bookings. The results are expected to provide both theoretical insights and practical strategies for other local destinations facing similar challenges.

As digital transformation reshapes the tourism landscape, this study comes at a critical moment. With the right tools and strategies, even modest destinations like “Den Bagus” can thrive in a crowded digital marketplace. Through attractive content, timely interaction, and platform-specific engagement, social media can serve not just as a megaphone but as a bridge between businesses and the audiences they hope to reach.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Informants were selected via purposive sampling, involving five individuals with direct

engagement in digital marketing efforts at Den Bagus. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, observation of social media activity (Instagram, TikTok), and documentation. Data analysis involved manual coding to identify emerging themes. To ensure data validity, triangulation across methods (observation, interviews, documentation) was conducted.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected through observations and in-depth interviews with the managers of tourist destinations shows that the use of social media, particularly Instagram, has proven to be effective in increasing visibility and attracting tourists, both domestic and international.

The Most Effective Social Media Used in Digital Marketing Strategies to Attract Tourist Interest

The most effective social media platforms used in digital marketing strategies to attract tourist interest is Instagram, followed by TikTok and Facebook. Based on the data collected, Instagram has proven to be the most dominant platform in terms of capturing audience attention. This platform provides "Den Bagus" food court with the opportunity to display appealing visuals through Instagram Stories, Reels, and Feed based on images and videos. Strong and customizable visual content, along with relevant hashtags, enhances the appeal to tourists. Instagram was identified as the dominant platform influencing tourist engagement, based on observations and interviews. TikTok also plays a key role in attracting younger generations who are more active in using short videos to seek travel inspiration. Facebook, although more dominant among older audiences, is also effective in spreading information and promotions to local communities.

How Digital Communication Strategies Affect Tourist Engagement and Interest in Choosing Tourist Destinations

The digital communication strategy implemented at "Den Bagus" food court significantly influences audience engagement and their decision to choose the destination. By using a personal and interactive communication approach through WhatsApp, Instagram DM, and comments on Instagram posts, the management can build closer relationships with the audience. Many tourists interviewed in 2023 cited fast responses on Instagram and WhatsApp as a major reason for choosing to visit “Den Bagus” (Wahyuni et al., 2023), highlighting how personal digital engagement can directly impact destination appeal. Additionally, the use of Instagram Stories containing information about promotions, events, and previous customer experiences has proven to spark curiosity and interest in tourists. This communication strategy creates continuous interactions, which strengthen tourists' decisions to choose the destination based on the direct and relevant information they receive from the social media.

The Impact of Digital Conversions from Social Media Platforms on Ticket Sales or Bookings

Digital conversions from social media platforms have a significant influence on increasing ticket sales or bookings. Based on interviews with management, the “Den Bagus” food court was reported to have experienced a notable increase in sales conversions in 2023 compared to 2022.

This improvement was attributed to the implementation of a more focused digital marketing strategy through social media platforms. Visitors who were first exposed to content through Instagram and TikTok then proceeded to book tickets directly via WhatsApp or the link provided in their Instagram bio. This conversion rate further increased with clear call-to-action (CTA) offers, such as "Book Now" or "DM for More Information," directing visitors to make purchases or bookings. According to reported patterns observed during the study, a large proportion of customer bookings occurred after initial engagement via Instagram or WhatsApp, reinforcing social media's function as both an outreach and transaction facilitator. (Arofah & Achsa, 2022)

How Digital Evaluation and Innovation Can Enhance the Effectiveness of Tourism Marketing in Today's Digital Era

Digital evaluation and innovation play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of tourism marketing. In 2023, "Den Bagus" food court began using analytic tools to monitor the performance of ads and posts on Instagram, helping them identify the types of content that most attracted the audience. The evaluation results showed that short videos featuring tourist experiences and live events had higher interaction rates. Based on these findings, they began innovating with more Instagram Reels and Stories, frequently featuring tourist testimonials and live event broadcasts. Additionally, the use of SEO (Search Engine Optimization) on their website, connected with Instagram and TikTok, helped them appear more often in searches related to culinary tourism and local tourism. These innovations, along with the consistency of regularly updating content, allowed them to stay relevant and attract new audiences.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the optimization of social media as a digital marketing strategy significantly enhances tourist interest in local destinations, as evidenced by the case of the "Den Bagus" food court in Trenggalek. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook serve not only as promotional tools but also as interactive communication channels that foster direct engagement between destination managers and potential visitors. The strategic use of visually appealing content, responsive digital communication, and data-informed innovation contributes meaningfully to increasing destination visibility, tourist engagement, and ultimately, sales conversions. These findings affirm that even small-scale tourism actors can compete in the digital landscape if they adopt creative, targeted, and consistent marketing approaches. In practical terms, the strategies implemented at "Den Bagus" offer a replicable model for other local tourism destinations, particularly those operating with limited resources or digital literacy. By leveraging platform-specific strengths—such as Instagram Reels for storytelling, TikTok for virality, and Facebook for local community outreach—destinations can effectively reach and influence a broader audience. Furthermore, the emphasis on two-way digital communication through WhatsApp and direct messaging fosters trust and encourages tourist decision-making, reinforcing the role of responsiveness as a critical factor in digital tourism marketing. From an academic perspective, this research contributes to the expanding body of knowledge on digital marketing in tourism, particularly within the context of emerging

markets. The study highlights the relevance of personalized engagement and culturally relevant content in shaping tourist behavior, offering valuable insights that enrich existing theoretical frameworks. It also emphasizes the importance of context-specific digital strategies, positioning localized marketing practices as essential components in the broader discourse on tourism development and digital transformation. However, the study is not without limitations. The research is confined to a single case study and primarily reflects the perspectives of internal stakeholders, thereby limiting the generalizability of its findings. The absence of data from tourists themselves restricts a more comprehensive understanding of user experience and satisfaction. Additionally, the fast-paced evolution of digital platforms may render certain strategies obsolete over time, underscoring the need for continual adaptation.

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating comparative case studies from diverse geographical and cultural settings, as well as employing mixed-method approaches that include surveys and quantitative analysis of user engagement. Investigating the long-term impacts of digital marketing strategies, and their sustainability, would further strengthen the academic discourse. Moreover, examining emerging platforms and technologies—such as AI-driven content generation, augmented reality tourism, or platform algorithm shifts—could provide deeper insight into the future trajectories of digital tourism marketing.

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