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The Strategic Role of Digital Marketing and Tourist Experience in Indonesia's Tourism Competitiveness

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's tourism sector is undergoing significant transformation driven by digital disruption and the growing shift toward experience-oriented travel. This study aims to examine the strategic role of digital marketing and tourist experience in enhancing tourism competitiveness in Indonesia. An integrative literature review approach is employed to synthesize findings from relevant peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2024. The analysis is conducted through thematic synthesis to identify key patterns and relationships among digital marketing strategies, experiential value, and tourism performance. The findings indicate that digital marketing, particularly through social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and user-generated content (UGC), plays a significant role in shaping destination image, enhancing tourist engagement, and influencing travel decision-making. In parallel, tourist experience—especially memorable and immersive experiences—emerges as a critical determinant of satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intention. The integration of advanced technologies and human-centric approaches under the Marketing 5.0 paradigm further strengthens value creation by enabling personalized and data-driven tourism marketing strategies. In addition, integrated marketing communication (IMC) and event-based tourism are identified as strategic mechanisms that ensure message consistency and reinforce destination branding. Based on the synthesis, this study proposes an integrative conceptual framework that connects technological (digital marketing and Marketing 5.0), experiential (memorable tourism experience), and strategic communication (IMC) dimensions in explaining tourism competitiveness. The findings contribute to the advancement of tourism marketing literature and provide practical implications for policymakers, destination managers, and industry practitioners in developing more competitive and sustainable tourism strategies in Indonesia.

Keywords: digital marketing; tourist experience; tourism competitiveness; IMC; Marketing 5.0

** Penulis Korespondensi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's tourism sector plays a crucial role in driving national economic growth, contributing significantly to gross domestic product (GDP), employment, and regional development. According to data from Badan Pusat Statistik, the tourism sector has shown a steady recovery in the post-pandemic period, with international tourist arrivals reaching over 11 million visits in 2023 and continuing to grow in 2024. Furthermore, reports from Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif highlight that tourism contributes substantially to foreign exchange earnings and supports millions of jobs across hospitality, transportation, and creative industries. Beyond its economic significance, tourism also functions as a strategic instrument for cultural diplomacy and destination branding in the global arena.

In recent years, the tourism paradigm has shifted from mass tourism toward quality tourism, emphasizing sustainability, experience, and value creation for tourists (Fauzi & Sumirat, 2023). This transformation requires stakeholders to redesign marketing strategies that are not only promotional but also experiential, personalized, and customer-oriented. The growing competition among global destinations further intensifies the need for countries like Indonesia to strengthen their tourism competitiveness through innovative and integrated approaches.

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed tourist behavior. Modern travelers are increasingly dependent on digital platforms to search for information, compare destinations, read reviews, and share their travel experiences. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Threads, TikTok, X, and YouTube have become dominant channels influencing travel decisions. Previous studies indicate that social media marketing activities significantly affect tourist satisfaction, destination image, and revisit intention (Wilopo & Nuralam, 2024). Moreover, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and user-generated content (UGC) enhance trust and credibility, which are essential in shaping tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes (Putri et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, this transformation aligns with the concept of Marketing 5.0, which integrates advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and predictive analytics with a human-centric approach (Kotler et al., 2021). Marketing 5.0 enables organizations to deliver personalized experiences, optimize customer engagement, and create value-driven interactions. Within the tourism industry, this approach allows destination managers to better understand tourist preferences, anticipate demand patterns, and design more targeted and effective marketing campaigns.

Furthermore, the concept of experiential marketing has become increasingly relevant in tourism studies. Tourists today are not merely seeking destinations but meaningful and memorable experiences. The concept of memorable tourism experience (MTE) emphasizes emotional engagement, cultural authenticity, and social interaction as key drivers of satisfaction and loyalty (Karo et al., 2024). Destinations that successfully create unique and immersive experiences are more likely to generate positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits, ultimately strengthening their competitive positioning.

In addition, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) plays a vital role in ensuring consistent and effective messaging across multiple channels. The integration of digital campaigns, events, and destination branding initiatives has proven to enhance awareness and strengthen positioning in competitive tourism markets (JER, 2024). Event-based tourism, in particular, has emerged as a strategic tool to attract visitors while

simultaneously promoting local culture and economic development.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital marketing and tourism, most studies tend to examine these variables in isolation. Existing research often focuses either on digital marketing performance, tourist satisfaction, or destination image, without fully integrating these elements into a unified framework of tourism competitiveness—particularly in the context of developing countries like Indonesia. Moreover, limited literature explicitly connects technological advancement (Marketing 5.0), experiential value (MTE), and strategic communication (IMC) within a single conceptual perspective.

This study addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive literature review that integrates digital marketing and tourist experience as key strategic drivers of tourism competitiveness in Indonesia. While prior studies have examined these constructs independently, limited research has systematically combined technological (Marketing 5.0), experiential (memorable tourism experience), and strategic communication (integrated marketing communication) perspectives within a single framework, particularly in the context of emerging tourism destinations. Therefore, this study offers a more holistic and integrative conceptualization. This integrative approach not only enriches theoretical development in tourism marketing literature but also offers strategic insights for policymakers, destination managers, and industry practitioners in enhancing Indonesia's global tourism competitiveness.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the landscape of the tourism industry, reshaping how destinations create, communicate, and deliver value to tourists. Digital marketing has evolved from a supporting tool into a strategic enabler that facilitates real-time interaction, global reach, and data-driven decision-making (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Buhalis et al., 2023). In the tourism context, where information search and evaluation are critical stages of the customer journey, digital platforms such as search engines, social media, travel blogs, and online travel agencies play a central role in influencing tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions (Leung et al., 2022). The increasing reliance on these platforms highlights the importance of digital presence as a key determinant of destination competitiveness.

Social media, in particular, has emerged as a dominant force in tourism marketing, functioning not only as an information source but also as a persuasive communication channel. Through visual storytelling, influencer content, and peer interaction, social media platforms shape tourists' expectations and decision-making processes (Tajvidi & Karami, 2021; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2022). Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and user-generated content (UGC) have become critical components of digital marketing, as they enhance credibility and trust in high-involvement decisions such as travel (Cheung et al., 2020). Compared to firm-generated content, UGC is often perceived as more authentic and reliable, thereby exerting a stronger influence on destination image, perceived value, and behavioral intention (Filieri et al., 2021). Moreover, digital marketing enables a shift from mass communication toward personalized engagement through big data analytics and AI-driven segmentation, allowing tourism stakeholders to better understand tourist preferences and deliver tailored experiences (Gretzel et al., 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, this transformation aligns with the concept of Marketing 5.0, which emphasizes the integration of advanced technologies with a human-centric approach (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2021). Marketing 5.0 incorporates artificial intelligence, machine learning, and predictive analytics to enhance customer experience while maintaining emotional and social relevance. In the tourism industry, this perspective is particularly important because travel experiences are inherently subjective and emotionally driven (Rather, 2021). While technology enhances efficiency and personalization, human-centered values such as authenticity, empathy, and cultural connection remain essential in creating meaningful experiences. Therefore, Marketing 5.0 provides

a conceptual bridge that connects technological capabilities with experiential value creation in tourism.

In parallel, experiential marketing has gained increasing attention due to the intangible and experience-based nature of tourism products. Tourists are no longer merely seeking destinations, but meaningful and memorable experiences that provide emotional, cultural, and social value (Pine & Gilmore, 2019; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2019). The concept of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) emphasizes that dimensions such as novelty, hedonism, involvement, local culture, and refreshment contribute to the formation of lasting memories, which subsequently influence satisfaction, revisit intention, and positive word-of-mouth (Kim et al., 2019; Zatori et al., 2021). Destinations that are able to create immersive and authentic experiences are more likely to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market and build long-term relationships with tourists.

Importantly, digital marketing and tourist experience are not independent constructs but are dynamically interconnected across the tourist journey. Digital marketing shapes tourists' expectations in the pre-visit stage, while actual tourist experiences influence post-visit evaluations and content-sharing behavior (Hudson & Thal, 2020). This interaction creates a continuous feedback loop in which experience-driven content, particularly in the form of UGC and e-WOM, reinforces digital marketing effectiveness. As a result, the integration of digital engagement and experiential value becomes a critical factor in strengthening tourism competitiveness.

Furthermore, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) provides a strategic mechanism to ensure consistency and coherence across multiple communication channels. IMC emphasizes the alignment of digital campaigns, social media engagement, public relations, and event-based activities to deliver a unified brand message (Keller, 2020). In the tourism context, where multiple stakeholders such as government agencies, local communities, and private sector actors are involved, IMC plays a crucial role in coordinating communication strategies and strengthening destination branding (Gretzel et al., 2020). Event-based tourism, as part of IMC, has also emerged as an effective tool for attracting visitors while simultaneously enhancing destination image and cultural positioning.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital marketing and tourism, existing studies remain largely fragmented. Many studies have examined digital marketing in relation to destination image and behavioral intention (Kim & Lee, 2022), while others have focused on tourist experience and its impact on satisfaction and loyalty (Sharma et al., 2022). However, limited research has comprehensively integrated these constructs within a unified framework of tourism competitiveness. In addition, although the concept of Marketing 5.0 has gained attention in the broader marketing literature, its application in tourism studies remains relatively underexplored (Kotler et al., 2021). Similarly, the role of IMC in connecting digital strategies with experiential value creation has not been sufficiently examined, particularly in emerging tourism destinations such as Indonesia.

To further synthesize prior studies and identify existing research gaps, Table 1 presents a structured overview of recent literature.

Table 1.
State of the Art (2020–2024)

Author(s)	Focus	Key Findings	Limitations	Research Gap
Dwivedi et al. (2021)	Digital marketing & consumer behavior	Digital engagement influences trust and decision-making	General marketing context	Limited tourism integration
Buhalis et al. (2023)	Smart tourism & digitalization	Technology enhances competitiveness and personalization	Technology-focused	Lacks experiential dimension
Cheung et al. (2020)	e-WOM	e-WOM influences perception and intention	Context-specific	No IMC integration
Sharma et al. (2022)	Customer experience	Experience quality affects satisfaction and loyalty	Limited tech integration	Lacks digital linkage
Kim & Lee (2022)	Social media marketing	Influences destination image and revisit intention	Pre-visit focus	Limited post-visit analysis
Hudson & Thal (2020)	Digital tourism behavior	Online engagement shapes travel decisions	Behavioral focus	Limited experiential synthesis

Kim et al. (2019)	Memorable tourism experience	Emotional value drives loyalty	Experience-centric	No digital integration
Zeng & Gerritsen (2022)	Social media tourism	Strong influence on destination branding	Single-channel focus	No IMC integration
Keller (2020)	IMC	Enhances brand consistency	Theoretical	Limited tourism application
Kotler et al. (2021)	Marketing 5.0	Tech + human-centric marketing	Conceptual	Limited tourism empirical testing

The synthesis of previous studies indicates that while digital marketing, tourist experience, and communication strategies have been widely examined, they are often treated as separate constructs rather than as an integrated system. This fragmentation limits a comprehensive understanding of how technological capabilities, experiential value, and strategic communication interact to influence tourism competitiveness.

Based on this synthesis, this study advances a conceptual perspective that positions tourism competitiveness as a multidimensional outcome resulting from the interaction between digital marketing and tourist experience, reinforced by Marketing 5.0 and IMC as integrative mechanisms. Thus, this study contributes by bridging technological, experiential, and strategic communication perspectives within a unified framework, offering a more holistic understanding of tourism competitiveness in the digital era.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an integrative literature review approach to synthesize theoretical perspectives and empirical findings related to digital marketing, tourist experience, and tourism competitiveness. Unlike systematic literature reviews that strictly follow structured protocols such as the PRISMA framework, this approach allows for a more flexible and comprehensive integration of multidisciplinary insights. Therefore, it is particularly suitable for theory development and conceptual framework construction.

The data were collected from reputable academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, and other peer-reviewed sources. The literature selection focused on publications from 2020 to 2024 to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the findings, particularly in capturing post-pandemic tourism dynamics and rapid digital transformation.

The selection process was conducted through several stages. First, relevant keywords such as “digital marketing in tourism,” “tourist experience,” “memorable tourism experience,” “destination competitiveness,” and “integrated marketing communication” were used to identify potential articles. Second, articles were screened based on relevance, focusing on studies that explicitly examine relationships between marketing strategies and tourist behavior or destination performance. Third, inclusion criteria were applied, including peer-reviewed journal articles, English-language publications, and studies directly related to the tourism context. Articles that were not accessible in full text, not peer-reviewed, or outside the defined scope were excluded.

A total of 55 articles were selected for further analysis. The analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, in which each study was systematically coded and categorized into key themes:

(1) digital marketing in tourism,
(2) tourist experience and memorable tourism experience,
(3) destination image and behavioral intention, and
(4) integrated marketing communication and branding strategies.

This study adopts a qualitative synthesis method to identify patterns, relationships, and research gaps across the selected studies. The synthesis process involves comparing findings across studies, identifying recurring constructs, and evaluating inconsistencies in previous research. While the theoretical foundation incorporates both classical and contemporary literature, the analysis emphasizes recent

empirical studies to ensure contextual relevance. The findings from this process are then used to develop an integrated conceptual framework that combines technological, experiential, and strategic communication perspectives in explaining tourism competitiveness.

4. RESULT

This study synthesizes findings from 55 peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2024 to identify how digital marketing and tourist experience collectively shape tourism competitiveness. The thematic analysis reveals four interrelated dimensions: (1) digital marketing and tourist behavior, (2) tourist experience and memorable tourism experience (MTE), (3) destination image and behavioral intention, and (4) integrated marketing communication (IMC) and branding strategy. Rather than operating as isolated constructs, these themes form an interconnected system that reflects the evolving dynamics of tourism in the digital era.

The first theme demonstrates that digital marketing functions as an antecedent in shaping tourist cognitive and behavioral responses. Social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and user-generated content (UGC) consistently emerge as dominant mechanisms influencing destination awareness, perceived credibility, and travel intention. Across the literature, digital platforms are no longer conceptualized merely as promotional tools, but as interactive ecosystems where tourists actively co-create meaning and evaluate destinations. This indicates that digital marketing primarily operates at the pre-visit stage by constructing initial expectations and reducing perceived risk in travel decision-making.

The second theme highlights tourist experience, particularly Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE), as a central determinant of post-visit behavioral outcomes. Studies consistently show that emotional engagement, novelty, cultural immersion, and hedonic value contribute to the formation of memorable experiences that extend beyond functional service evaluation. Importantly, MTE does not operate independently but is shaped by prior expectations formed through digital marketing exposure. This indicates a sequential relationship in which digital stimuli influence experiential perception, which subsequently determines satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth intention.

The third theme positions destination image as a critical mediating construct linking digital marketing and tourist experience to behavioral intention. A strong destination image is constructed through both firm-generated content and experiential narratives shared by tourists. The findings suggest that destination image is dynamically formed through continuous interaction between pre-visit digital exposure and post-visit experiential sharing. In this sense, user-generated content and influencer narratives reinforce and reshape destination image in a recursive feedback loop, strengthening its role as both an outcome and an antecedent in tourism behavior.

The fourth theme emphasizes integrated marketing communication (IMC) as a strategic coordination mechanism that ensures consistency across multiple touchpoints. IMC integrates digital campaigns, social media engagement, public relations, and event-based tourism into a unified communication strategy. The literature indicates that IMC plays a crucial role in aligning stakeholder messages in complex tourism ecosystems involving government, private sector, and local communities. Rather than functioning as an isolated strategy, IMC operates as an enabler that strengthens the coherence between digital marketing efforts and experiential tourism delivery.

Overall, the synthesis reveals that digital marketing and tourist experience are not independent variables but function within a cyclical and reinforcing system. Digital marketing shapes pre-visit expectations, destination image mediates perception formation, and tourist experience determines post-visit behavioral outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, generate user-generated content that feeds back into the digital ecosystem, reinforcing future marketing effectiveness. This cyclical interaction indicates that tourism competitiveness is constructed through an integrated dynamic system in which technological engagement, experiential value, and strategic communication mutually reinforce one another.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital marketing has undergone a fundamental transformation from a promotional instrument into a strategic driver of tourism decision-making and experience formation. Rather than functioning as a one-way communication channel, digital marketing now operates within an interactive ecosystem where tourists actively participate in content creation, evaluation, and dissemination. This shift reflects the evolution of tourism communication into a data-driven and experience-oriented system, as highlighted in the digital ecosystem perspective proposed by Dwivedi et al. (2021) and Buhalis et al. (2023). However, this study extends their arguments by positioning digital marketing not only as an enabler of interaction but also as an antecedent that structurally shapes expectations prior to the tourism experience.

The dominance of social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and user-generated content (UGC) further reinforces the transition toward participatory communication in tourism. Unlike traditional marketing communication, which is firm-controlled, contemporary tourism marketing is increasingly co-created by tourists themselves. This finding is consistent with Cheung et al. (2020) and Filieri et al. (2021), who emphasize the role of peer-generated content in shaping trust and behavioral intention. However, the results of this study suggest a deeper implication: UGC does not merely influence perception but actively reconstructs destination meaning through continuous social validation processes. This indicates that credibility in tourism is no longer institutionally driven but socially constructed.

Tourist experience, particularly in the form of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE), emerges as a central mechanism that translates expectations into behavioral loyalty. Consistent with Kim et al. (2019) and Zatori et al. (2021), experiential and emotional dimensions are found to outweigh functional attributes in determining satisfaction and revisit intention. However, this study advances the discussion by highlighting the sequential dependency between digital exposure and experiential formation. In other words, MTE is not solely created at the destination but is partially pre-conditioned by digital interactions prior to travel. This finding positions tourist experience as a hybrid construct shaped by both physical and digital environments.

The integration of Marketing 5.0 provides a conceptual bridge between technological advancement and human-centric tourism marketing. Kotler et al. (2021) argue that artificial intelligence and predictive analytics enable hyper-personalization in marketing processes. In the tourism context, this study suggests that such technological capabilities are meaningful only when they are embedded within emotionally resonant experiences. Therefore, the value of Marketing 5.0 in tourism lies not in technological sophistication per se, but in its ability to balance algorithmic efficiency with emotional authenticity, as also implied by Rather (2021).

Furthermore, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) functions as a structural enabler that ensures coherence across fragmented tourism communication channels. In line with Keller (2020), IMC strengthens brand consistency by aligning multiple stakeholder communications. However, this study extends IMC's role beyond coordination, positioning it as a mechanism that integrates pre-visit digital narratives, on-site experiential delivery, and post-visit content sharing. This expanded view is particularly relevant in the Indonesian tourism context, where destination branding is shaped by multi-actor collaboration involving government institutions, private sector actors, and local communities.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by proposing that tourism competitiveness is not the outcome of isolated factors, but rather the result of an interconnected system involving digital marketing, tourist experience, Marketing 5.0, and IMC. These elements operate in a continuous feedback loop in which digital engagement shapes expectations, experiences generate meaning, and shared content reinforces future marketing effectiveness. This systemic perspective offers a more holistic understanding of how competitiveness is constructed in contemporary tourism ecosystems.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This study concludes that tourism competitiveness in Indonesia is shaped by an integrated system of digital marketing and tourist experience. Digital marketing plays a

pivotal role in influencing tourist decision-making by enhancing destination visibility, credibility, and engagement through social media platforms, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and user-generated content (UGC). These digital interactions primarily shape pre-visit perceptions and behavioral intentions.

In parallel, tourist experience—particularly in the form of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE)—emerges as a key determinant of post-visit outcomes, including satisfaction, emotional attachment, and loyalty. The findings confirm that experiential value plays a more dominant role in sustaining long-term tourist relationships compared to functional service attributes.

Furthermore, Marketing 5.0 provides a strategic framework that integrates technological advancement with human-centered value creation, while Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) ensures coherence and consistency across multiple communication channels and stakeholders. The interaction of these elements forms a dynamic and interconnected system through which tourism competitiveness is constructed in the digital era.

Recommendation

For theoretical development, future research is encouraged to empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework using quantitative approaches such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS). Further studies should also examine potential moderating variables, including destination typology, cultural context, and tourist segmentation, to enrich model generalizability.

From a practical perspective, destination managers and policymakers should prioritize the development of integrated digital marketing strategies that are aligned with experiential tourism design. Strengthening stakeholder collaboration between government, private sector, and local communities is essential to ensure consistent destination branding. In addition, investment in digital infrastructure, data analytics capabilities, and smart tourism systems is critical to support personalized, data-driven, and sustainable tourism development in Indonesia.

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