

The Influence of Digital Marketing Use with Electronic Word Of Mouth (E-Wom) as Mediation in Tourist Visit Interest at Taman Balekambang Surakarta

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Abstract. This study aims to explore and analyze the influence of digital marketing usage on tourists' visit intention, with electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) as a mediating variable at the Taman Balekambang tourism destination in Surakarta. Taman Balekambang is one of the city's iconic tourist attractions with historical, cultural, and ecological value, yet it still faces challenges in attracting an optimal number of visitors amid increasingly intense competition among tourist destinations. Alongside the development of information technology and changes in tourists' information consumption patterns, digital marketing strategies have become essential tools to reach a broader market. On the other hand, E-WOM serves as a vital element that strengthens the credibility of promotional messages through reviews and experiences shared by previous visitors via social media and other digital platforms. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques including direct observation of digital promotion activities conducted by the management, documentation from social media, and relevant literature analysis. The results show that digital marketing significantly contributes to increasing destination visibility through the dissemination of visual content, event information, and interaction with prospective tourists. Furthermore, E-WOM proves to play a mediating role in strengthening the influence of digital marketing on tourists' visit intention, through testimonials, comments, and positive reviews that encourage visitation decisions. These findings support previous research indicating that the synergy between digital promotion and consumer communication positively impacts tourist visitation behavior. The implications of this study not only enrich the digital marketing literature in the tourism context but also provide practical recommendations for tourism destination managers to develop more participatory and responsive digital strategies to meet tourists' informational needs.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), Visit Intention, Taman Balekambang, Tourism Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors in regional economic development because it can create jobs, encourage the growth of small and medium enterprises, and increase local revenue. The city of Surakarta, as a cultural city, has several potential tourist destinations to be developed, one of which is Taman Balekambang. This destination not only offers natural beauty and historical value but also serves as an educational and recreational public space for the community. However, based on visit data from recent years, there has been a fluctuation in visit levels, indicating the need for new strategies in tourism promotion and marketing efforts. Along with the development of information and communication technology, consumer behavior patterns in accessing information and making travel decisions are experiencing a shift. Modern consumers rely more on digital information such as social media, user reviews, and travel websites when determining their travel destinations. This requires tourism destination managers to utilize digital technology as an effective and efficient promotional medium. Digital marketing serves as the answer to this need by providing platforms that can reach a wide, fast, and interactive audience. Digital marketing in the context of tourism is not just a one-way promotion; it involves active user participation in sharing their experiences through various digital platforms. In this case, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) plays an important role in shaping public opinion. E-WOM refers to consumer communication that occurs online, whether in the form of comments, reviews, or recommendations through social media and review sites. Information conveyed through E-WOM is often considered more objective and convincing because it comes from fellow users, not from the managers or owners of the product.

Balekambang Park, as one of the premier destinations in Surakarta, has great potential to be developed through digital marketing strategies integrated with E-WOM. However, the utilization of digital marketing and E-WOM management at this destination still needs to be improved in order to compete with other destinations that are more aggressive in digital promotion. Therefore, in-depth research is needed to understand how digital marketing affects tourist interest and how E-WOM can strengthen that relationship. This research is focused on exploring how digital marketing can influence tourist interest in visiting Taman Balekambang, and to what extent E-WOM can mediate that

relationship. By understanding the interaction between these variables, it is hoped that more effective and relevant marketing strategies can be found in line with current dynamics. In addition, the results of this research are also expected to contribute theoretically to the development of digital marketing science in the tourism sector, as well as provide practical recommendations for tourism industry players in facing the challenges of the digital era. Tourism is one of the important sectors in regional economic development, capable of creating jobs and increasing local community income. In the city of Surakarta, Taman Balekambang has become one of the tourist icons that holds historical, cultural, and natural beauty values. However, the low level of tourist visits in recent years has become a challenge that needs to be addressed immediately. The increase in competition among tourist destinations, changes in consumer behavior, and the development of digital technology require tourism managers to adapt. One of the strategic approaches that can be taken is through digital marketing, which is the use of internet-based media to reach and influence potential tourists. On the other hand, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) or digital word-of-mouth communication has become one of the main forces in shaping consumer opinions and decisions. This research focuses on exploring how digital marketing can influence tourists' interest in visiting Taman Balekambang, as well as the extent to which E-WOM can mediate that relationship. By understanding the interaction between these variables, it is hoped that more effective and relevant marketing strategies can be found.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

Digital marketing is a form of promotion that uses digital technology and online platforms as a means to convey information and attract consumer attention. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), digital marketing encompasses all marketing activities that utilize electronic devices, including the internet, to promote products or services to consumers. This strategy includes various channels such as websites, social media, email marketing, search engines, and mobile applications that enable real-time two-way communication between service providers and consumers.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) explain that social media, as part of digital marketing, can build more personal relationships with consumers and create loyal online communities for a brand or destination. In the context of tourism, the use of social media

can help introduce tourist destinations, showcase reviews and testimonials from visitors, and build the destination's image both visually and emotionally.

Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) is a form of consumer communication regarding a product, service, or experience conducted through digital media. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define E-WOM as any form of positive or negative statements made by potential customers, active customers, or former customers regarding a product or company, which are available to the public via the internet. E-WOM plays a crucial role in tourist decision-making because it is considered more honest, trustworthy, and based on the real experiences of other users.

In the world of tourism, user reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, Google Review, or social media often serve as the primary reference for potential travelers before deciding to visit a destination. Research by Govers and Go (2009) shows that the destination image formed through E-WOM has a significant influence on tourists' intention to visit.

The interest in visiting tourists themselves is a psychological variable that reflects a person's desire and urge to visit a tourist destination. Aaker and Jacobson (1987) state that interest is a cognitive and affective response to received information and becomes an important predictor of consumer behavior. In the context of tourism, the intention to visit is influenced by various factors such as the attractiveness of the destination, ease of access, others' experiences, and promotions conducted by destination managers.

The relationship between digital marketing, E-WOM, and visit interest has also been proven in various previous studies. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) found that effective digital marketing can create strong positive E-WOM, which in turn influences consumer decisions to purchase or visit a product or place. Li and Zhang (2014) added that E-WOM not only strengthens the impact of digital marketing but also serves as a credibility bridge that connects promotion with consumer trust.

Thus, it can be concluded that digital marketing and E-WOM are two important elements in shaping tourists' visit interest. The combination of the two becomes a marketing strategy that is not only effective in terms of reach and cost but also capable of building consumer trust and loyalty sustainably. Digital marketing is defined by Kotler and Keller (2016) as all marketing activities that utilize digital media such as websites, social media, email, and online applications. Digital marketing enables more personal,

efficient, and measurable interactions between companies and their consumers. In the context of tourism, digital marketing serves as a communication bridge between tourism operators and potential travelers.

Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) is a form of communication between consumers that is disseminated through digital platforms. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) mention that E-WOM has a significant power in influencing consumer decisions because reviews and testimonials are considered more authentic and trustworthy compared to conventional advertisements. In the context of tourism, reviews from previous travelers often become a primary consideration for prospective visitors. Tourist interest refers to a person's desire and psychological drive to visit a particular destination. According to Aaker and Jacobson (1987), the intention to visit can be influenced by positive perceptions of the destination, the quality of promotions, and the experiences of others. Govers and Go (2009) added that the destination image formed through E-WOM greatly influences the intention to visit.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to obtain an in-depth understanding of the influence of digital marketing on tourist visit interest, with electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) as a mediating variable at Taman Balekambang Surakarta. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand.

Location and Time of Research

The research was conducted at Balekambang Park, Surakarta, as a relevant study object with a focus on digital marketing activities and tourist interactions through social media and other digital platforms. Data collection was conducted from January to April 2025 to ensure representative observation of content variation and audience responses.

Data Collection Techniques

1. Observation

Observations were conducted directly on the digital promotion activities carried out by the managers of Taman Balekambang. The focus of the observation includes

content published on social media such as Instagram and Facebook, posting frequency, interaction with followers (comments, likes, shares), as well as events advertised online.

2. Documentation

Documentation in the form of digital data collection from various sources such as the official website of Taman Balekambang, travel review platforms (Google Review, TripAdvisor), as well as social media owned by the management and the tourist community. This documentation is used to analyze the types of messages conveyed and the audience responses that form in the form of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM).

3. Literature Review and Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from scientific journals, books, articles, and official reports related to digital marketing, E-WOM, and tourist visit interest to strengthen the theoretical framework and support the interpretation of primary data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is conducted using the triangulation method, which involves combining data from observations, documentation, and literature studies to obtain a comprehensive and valid picture. The analysis process includes data collection, data reduction to select relevant information, presentation of data in the form of descriptive narratives, and drawing conclusions based on theoretical interpretation and field findings. Additionally, content analysis of digital user interactions is conducted to identify E-WOM communication patterns and their relationship with tourist visit interest. This analysis includes the frequency of both positive and negative comments, themes that frequently appear in reviews, and their impact on public perception of the destination.

Validity and Reliability of Data

To maintain data validity, the researchers conducted cross-checks against various data sources and held discussions with several key informants who understand digital marketing activities at Taman Balekambang. The reliability of the data is also enhanced through detailed recording and visual documentation during the data collection process.

Limitations Research

This research has limitations such as focusing on a single location and a limited observation period, so the research results may not be widely generalizable. Additionally, the data collection is qualitative without quantitative support that can statistically measure the magnitude of the influence. However, this approach provides important depth of understanding for the development of future digital marketing strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research shows that the managers of Balekambang Park actively utilize various digital media to promote the tourist destination. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and the official website are the main media used to disseminate information about the beauty of the park, the available facilities, and various events and activities that are regularly held. The uploaded content includes captivating panoramic photos of the park, activity documentation videos, and event announcements designed to attract widespread public interest. The consistent posting frequency, around three to four times a week, demonstrates a serious effort to maintain audience engagement and build public awareness of this destination.

Interactions that occur on social media in the form of likes, comments, and content sharing indicate enthusiasm and attention from the public, especially the younger generation who are very familiar with digital technology. However, the managers still face challenges in building more active two-way interactions, such as responding to comments or questions quickly and personally. The lack of response has the potential to decrease audience engagement and loyalty.

Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) has also proven to be a very important component in shaping the perception and trust of potential visitors. Positive reviews and testimonials given by previous visitors through platforms like Google Review, TripAdvisor, and social media provide an authentic picture of the experience at Taman Balekambang. These reviews are often used as references by potential tourists who are considering a visit. The aspects most appreciated in the reviews are the natural beauty, environmental cleanliness, staff friendliness, and adequate supporting facilities. The presence of E-WOM strengthens the effectiveness of digital marketing because information coming from fellow consumers is considered more trustworthy than official

promotions. This is in line with the opinions of experts such as Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Kaplan & Haenlein (2011), who state that E-WOM has a significant influence on consumer decision-making. The synergy between engaging promotional content and positive reviews creates a strong destination image and can increase tourist interest. The interest of tourists has increased along with the expanding reach of digital marketing and the widespread dissemination of E-WOM. Easily accessible online information allows potential visitors to gain a comprehensive overview of the destination, from location and facilities to activities that can be participated in. Thus, visitors feel more confident and motivated to make a visit. This is in line with marketing theory, which states that digital marketing plays a crucial role in building market awareness and interest in products or services.

However, this research also identifies several challenges that are still being faced. One of them is the lack of variety in the types of content uploaded. Currently, the dominant content consists of standard photos and videos, while interactive content such as live streaming, virtual tours, and quizzes that can enhance audience engagement has not been widely utilized. Additionally, the response to comments or questions from users is still lacking, which can reduce user experience and decrease loyalty. Improving the capacity of human resources in management regarding digital marketing is very important. Training related to social media management, creative content creation, and online communication techniques needs to be conducted on an ongoing basis. Additionally, managers also need to encourage active participation from visitors in providing reviews and sharing their experiences. This can be done through campaigns or incentives that motivate tourists to engage in E-WOM activities. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that digital marketing and E-WOM together have a significantly positive impact on tourists' interest in visiting Taman Balekambang. Digital marketing serves as the main communication and promotion tool, while E-WOM enhances the credibility and appeal of that promotion. The synergy of the two becomes a highly effective marketing strategy in the current digital era, which can be further optimized to increase the number of visits and the sustainability of tourist destinations.

CONCLUSSION AND SUGESTION

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that the implementation of digital marketing by the managers of Taman Balekambang has a significant positive

impact on tourist interest. The use of various digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and the official website has become an effective means of disseminating information, attracting attention, and building public awareness of the uniqueness and appeal of the destination. Consistent and interactive content makes it easier for potential visitors to get to know the park, the available facilities, and the various activities held there. Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) that arises from reviews, testimonials, and positive comments from visitors on social media and travel review platforms has a very strong influence as a mediating variable. Information sourced from the real experiences of travelers enhances the credibility of digital promotions and increases the trust of potential visitors. With the presence of E-WOM, the influence of digital marketing becomes more tangible and impacts the decisions of potential tourists to visit. Nevertheless, this research also found several obstacles that need serious attention, such as the suboptimal interaction between managers and the audience on social media. The lack of response to comments and questions can reduce the level of engagement and follower loyalty. Additionally, the limited variation in digital content also poses a barrier to maintaining audience interest and attention in the long term. Overall, the research findings affirm that digital marketing strategies integrated with effective E-WOM management can enhance tourist interest. The synergy between these two elements is a key factor in addressing the dynamics of tourism marketing in the current digital era. The development and optimization of these two aspects will significantly contribute to the success of promotions and the increase in visitor numbers.

SUGGESTION

1. Development and Diversification of Digital Content

The management of Balekambang Park needs to continuously improve the quality and variety of the digital content presented. In addition to photos and videos, the use of interactive content such as live streaming, virtual tours, quizzes, and visitor experience storytelling can enrich the audience's experience and enhance the appeal of digital promotions.

2. Increased Interaction with the Audience

Managers must handle social media more actively and responsively. Responding to comments, questions, and feedback from followers quickly and warmly will strengthen emotional connections with the audience, increase loyalty, and build a solid digital

community.

3. Strategies to Encourage Visitor Participation in E-WOM

Special programs and incentives are needed to encourage tourists to actively provide reviews and testimonials voluntarily. For example, through photo contests, awards for the best reviewers, or special discounts for visitors who participate in digital promotions.

4. Development of Human Resource (HR) Capacity

Managers need to conduct training and mentoring for staff responsible for digital marketing to improve their skills in social media management, creative content creation, and effective communication strategies.

5. Further Research with a Quantitative Approach

It is recommended that future research use a quantitative approach with a broader sample scope and the use of statistical analysis tools to quantitatively measure the relationship between digital marketing, E-WOM, and visit interest. This will provide a deeper and statistically valid understanding of the influence of these variables.

6. Development of Integrated Marketing Strategies

In addition to digital marketing and E-WOM, managers also need to integrate traditional and digital marketing strategies to reach various market segments more broadly and effectively.

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