

## **Digital Transformation in Tourism Destination Promotion: A Case Study on Tourism Actors in Yogyakarta**

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to examine the application of digital transformation in promoting tourist destinations in Yogyakarta, with a focus on tourism actors who utilize digital technology in their marketing strategies. The approach employed is qualitative, using a case study design. Data were collected through semi structured interviews with hotel managers, travel agents, restaurant owners, and managers of tourist attractions. Questionnaires were distributed to employees, and the digital promotion practices implemented were observed. The results showed that the use of social media and online booking platforms is the most common among hotel managers and travel agents. In contrast, restaurants and tourist attraction managers still underutilize digital platforms. The main obstacles faced are limited human resources skilled in digital technology and high costs for advertising on digital platforms. The practical implication of this study is the need for more intensive training and diversification of digital platform use among tourism actors in Yogyakarta to enhance the competitiveness of these tourist destinations.*

**Keywords:** *digital transformation, tourism destination promotion, yogyakarta tourism*

### **1. Introduction**

In the rapidly evolving digital era, technology has had a significant impact on various sectors, including tourism. Digitalization has changed the way tourist destinations are promoted and received by the global community. According to a report from the World Economic Forum, the international tourism sector now faces a significant challenge in harnessing the potential of digital to attract tourists. Changes in traveler habits, which increasingly rely on the internet for destination research and booking, require tourism industry players to adapt digital based promotional strategies.

Yogyakarta, one of Indonesia's leading tourist destinations, faces similar challenges. Despite having many tourist attractions, such as rich culture and natural beauty, the promotion of tourist destinations in Yogyakarta is still relatively conventional and limited to traditional media. Many local tourism players have yet to fully leverage digital technology for promotion, resulting in them missing out on opportunities to reach a broader global market. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated the shift towards digital promotion in tourism, but most tourism players in Yogyakarta are not yet fully prepared for effective digital transformation.

Several previous studies have discussed the importance of digitalization in the tourism sector. For example, research by Dube (2020) revealed that digital marketing has a major influence on tourists' decisions in choosing destinations. Additionally, research by Hidayat (2019) indicates that the use of digital platforms by tourism actors in Bali has significantly enhanced the destination's competitiveness. However, more in depth research on the application of digital transformation in tourism promotion in Yogyakarta is still limited.

This research is essential for providing a deeper understanding of how tourism actors in Yogyakarta can utilize digital technology to enhance the attractiveness and visibility of their tourist destinations. Additionally, this research is expected to provide insight into the challenges and opportunities faced by local tourism players in implementing digital transformation.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on mapping the readiness and application of digital strategies among diverse tourism stakeholders in Yogyakarta, including MSMEs, cultural heritage managers, and community based tourism groups. This approach allows for a contextualized understanding of digital transformation efforts within a specific regional tourism ecosystem, which has been underrepresented in existing literature.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how tourism actors in Yogyakarta utilize and implement digital technology in promoting their destinations, and to assess the effectiveness of these applications in enhancing tourist attraction and visit frequency. In particular, this research will examine the use of digital tools, including social media, websites, digital storytelling, and virtual tours, as part of tourism marketing strategies.

The practical benefit of this research is to provide clear, data-driven recommendations for enhancing digital adoption among Yogyakarta tourism stakeholders. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of digital tourism models adapted to local contexts in developing regions. Furthermore, it provides insights for local policymakers in formulating digital friendly tourism strategies that are inclusive, sustainable, and economically viable

This study suggests that by better utilizing digital technology, tourism players in Yogyakarta can enhance their competitiveness in the global market. Additionally, this research may encourage more tourism players in Indonesia to adopt digital platforms, which in turn can increase the national tourism sector's revenue.

## 2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the main objective of this research is to gain a deep understanding of how tourism actors in Yogyakarta utilize digital technology

in promoting their tourist destinations. The case study design enables researchers to explore this phenomenon in a real world context and provide more specific insights into the challenges, opportunities, and strategies employed by local tourism players.

### **Location and Research Subjects**

This research was conducted in Yogyakarta, a renowned tourist destination in Indonesia. This location was chosen because it has great tourism potential; however, the implementation of digital transformation in promoting tourist destinations is still limited. The research subjects consisted of tourism actors involved in promoting tourist destinations in Yogyakarta. The research subjects include hotel managers, travel agents, restaurant managers, and other managers of tourist attractions who use or have the potential to use digital technology in their promotions.

The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling, where participants are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria include: (1) having worked in the tourism sector in Yogyakarta for at least one year; (2) being actively involved in digital based promotional activities; and (3) being willing to participate in interviews and observations. This technique is appropriate in qualitative research to ensure the inclusion of information rich participants.

### **Research Instruments**

The main instruments used in this research are semi structured interviews and questionnaires. Semi structured interviews were chosen to gather in depth data regarding the experiences and views of tourism actors related to the use of digital technology in promoting tourist destinations. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data regarding the frequency and types of digital technology used by tourism actors. Other instruments include documentation in the form of digital promotional materials used by tourism operators in Yogyakarta, such as websites, social media, and other digital platforms.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The data in this study were collected through several techniques, namely:

#### **1. Semi Structured Interview**

Interviews were conducted with tourism actors selected based on specific criteria, such as experience in utilizing digital technology for promoting tourist destinations. These interviews enabled researchers to gather in depth information about the understanding, strategies, and obstacles encountered by tourism players during the digital transformation process. These interviews were conducted either

face to face or through online platforms, depending on the availability of the respondents in terms of time and place.

## 2. Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed to tourism operators to collect quantitative data on the use of digital media in tourism promotion. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information on the types of digital platforms used, frequency of use, and the extent to which digital media plays a role in attracting tourists.

## 3. Observation

Researchers also made direct observations of the promotion process carried out by tourism actors in Yogyakarta, both through observing the content published on social media, official websites, and other digital platforms. This observation aims to assess the extent to which digital promotional techniques are actually applied.

## 4. Documentation

Documentation is conducted by collecting various promotional materials used by tourism actors, including digital brochures, social media posts, promotional videos, and other relevant materials. This documentation helps researchers to understand how digital technology is used in marketing communication and promotion of tourist destinations.

Data analysis in this study employs the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This model is commonly used in qualitative research to systematically analyze textual data from interviews, observations, and documentation.

1. Data Reduction: After data collection, the researcher transcribes interview recordings, organizes observation notes, and selects relevant documents. The initial data is then coded manually to identify essential themes related to digital promotion strategies, challenges, and impacts on tourism performance.

2. Data Display: The coded data is then organized into a visual format, such as tables, matrices, and narrative summaries, to help identify patterns, relationships, and comparisons across tourism actors. This allows for a more straightforward interpretation of recurring themes and anomalies.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: The researcher interprets the meanings behind the data, connects the findings with theoretical frameworks (such as digital marketing adoption and innovation diffusion theory), and re validates them through triangulation. Triangulation is done by comparing results across different data sources

(interviews, observations, and documents) and confirming them with selected participants (member checking) to ensure credibility.

### 3. Results & Discussion

This research involved 15 tourism actors promoting tourist destinations in Yogyakarta. The research subjects consisted of hotel managers, travel agents, restaurants, and tourist attraction managers. A total of 8 respondents came from hotel managers, 4 from travel agents, 2 from restaurants, and 1 from tourist attraction managers. The majority of respondents have more than 5 years of experience in the tourism industry, with an age range between 30 to 50 years. Most of them have used digital technology in their tourism destination promotion activities, although with varying levels of application.

**Table 1.** General Description of Respondents

Types of Tourism Actors	Number of Respondents	Experience (Years)	Digital Usage (Yes/No)
Hotel Manager	8	5 15	Yes
Travel Agent	4	3 10	Yes
Restaurant	2	2 8	No
Attraction Manager	1	6	Yes

Interviews with management revealed that most tourism actors in Yogyakarta have recognized the importance of utilizing digital technology for promoting their tourist destinations. However, there is a notable disparity in the level of digital adoption among different types of actors. Hoteliers and travel agents demonstrate a more mature integration of digital tools, leveraging social media platforms, websites, and online booking applications to improve their market visibility and tourist engagement. These actors often have access to more structured resources, dedicated marketing staff, and a stronger commercial orientation, which collectively support their digital transformation.

In contrast, restaurants and tourist attraction managers, especially those with smaller operational scales, often face multiple constraints. The use of digital platforms remains minimal, primarily due to the absence of specialized personnel and inadequate digital literacy. Although these actors acknowledge the potential of digital tools in attracting a broader audience, they are hindered by limited internal capacity and a lack of organizational readiness to execute digital strategies effectively.

A deeper thematic analysis reveals that one of the most pervasive structural challenges is the human capital gap in digital competence. Respondents highlighted the shortage of trained staff who can design, manage, and optimize digital content,

particularly content that aligns with current consumer behavior, which favors immersive, visually appealing, and interactive formats. This deficit affects not only operational execution but also strategic planning, as many actors are unsure of how to align their promotional goals with appropriate digital channels and content types.

Another critical finding is the perception of cost as a barrier to digital advertising. While the digital landscape offers low cost entry points (e.g., organic social media), actors tend to associate effective promotion with paid ads, which they view as financially burdensome. However, this view reflects a limited understanding of digital marketing ROI and optimization strategies. The lack of analytical tools and digital performance tracking among respondents further exacerbates the issue, making it difficult for them to evaluate which campaigns are most effective and cost efficient.

The disparity in digital adoption also suggests the existence of a digital divide within Yogyakarta's tourism ecosystem, where larger, better funded actors benefit disproportionately. In contrast, smaller or traditional actors fall behind. This fragmentation not only limits individual performance but also weakens the collective brand identity of Yogyakarta as a digitally integrated destination. If left unaddressed, this gap may lead to unequal growth patterns and ultimately reduce the region's overall competitiveness in the long term.

Strategically, the findings underscore the need for targeted digital capacity building, particularly among underrepresented actors, such as small scale restaurants and local attractions. Public private partnerships could play a key role in offering accessible training programs, content development support, and shared digital marketing infrastructure. Moreover, peer learning initiatives among tourism actors who are already successful in digital adoption can foster local knowledge exchange and accelerate transformation.

Key Findings from Interviews:

1. The use of social media (Facebook, Instagram) is the most common among hoteliers and travel agents.
2. Digital platforms, such as Traveloka and Booking.com, are used to expand market reach.
3. There are challenges in creating content that is both engaging and has a significant impact.
4. Some tourism players feel hampered by limited human resources in terms of technological expertise.

The questionnaire was distributed to 20 employees working in the tourism sector in Yogyakarta. According to the questionnaire results, 85% of employees reported using digital media to support promotional activities, with the majority utilizing social media and company websites. 75% of respondents stated that they received training



on the use of digital technology, but 30% felt that they still lacked an understanding related of digital marketing techniques.

**Table 2.** Findings from the Licensed Employee Questionnaire

Aspects	Percentage (%)
Social Media Usage	90%
Use of Company Website	80%
Digital Training Received	75%
Insufficient Digital Understanding	30%

Observation of digital promotion techniques employed by tourism players in Yogyakarta reveals that social media is the primary platform for promotion. Most hotel managers and travel agents actively post photos, videos, and information about tourist destinations on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. On the other hand, restaurant and tourist attraction managers are still limited in their ability to utilize these platforms.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that most tourism actors have widely adopted digital technology in promoting tourist destinations in Yogyakarta. However, some challenges remain, particularly related to limited human resources and digital promotion costs. Social media and company websites are the most widely used platforms by hotel managers and travel agents. However, restaurant and tourist attraction managers are still lagging behind in utilizing digital technology to its fullest potential. These findings provide important insights for tourism players seeking to develop digital based promotion strategies to enhance the attractiveness of their tourist destinations.

### **Interview Data and Interpretation of Interview Results**

Interviews with tourism players in Yogyakarta revealed that although digitalization is increasingly considered necessary, the level of implementation of digital promotions varies. Hoteliers and travel agents show greater adoption of digital platforms compared to restaurants and tourist attraction managers. Most hoteliers and travel agents acknowledged that the use of social media and online booking platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Traveloka, has increased their exposure to both domestic and international tourists. One hotel manager, for example, stated that they have used Instagram to promote vacation packages and offer attractive discounts, which helps them reach a wider audience.

However, the biggest obstacle faced is the lack of human resources with digital expertise. Most tourism managers revealed that, although they are aware of the importance of digital promotion, they face difficulties in managing and creating

engaging content, as well as optimizing the use of paid advertisements on platforms such as Facebook Ads. Additionally, the cost of advertising on digital platforms is considered relatively high, especially for tourism destination managers with limited budgets.

The interpretation of the interview results shows that, although there is a good understanding of the importance of digital technology, its maximum implementation is still hindered by limitations in terms of knowledge and skills. This highlights the importance of training and support for tourism actors in utilizing the full potential offered by digital technology in promoting tourist destinations.

Results from a questionnaire distributed to 20 tourism employees in Yogyakarta revealed that the majority of employees (85%) use social media to help promote tourist destinations. According to the results, 75% of the respondents reported receiving training on the use of digital media. However, despite the training, 30% of the respondents felt less confident and admitted that their understanding of digital marketing techniques was still limited.

This questionnaire data illustrates that although many tourism operators already have access to training, there are still gaps in terms of technical skills that can affect the effectiveness of their digital promotions. This aligns with the findings from the interviews, which indicate that limited human resources competent in digital marketing are a major limiting factor in the optimal implementation of digital promotion.

It is essential to note that although many employees claimed to have received training, 30% of them felt that the existing training had not provided a sufficient in depth understanding of how to optimize various digital platforms for marketing purposes. Therefore, tourism destination managers must provide more intensive and thorough training, with materials that are more applicable and relevant to their needs in the field.

Direct observation of digital promotion activities carried out by tourism players in Yogyakarta shows that social media is the most widely used platform. Hotel managers utilize Instagram to showcase visually appealing photos of hotel rooms and other facilities. Most travel agents utilize Facebook Ads to promote tour packages, while restaurants and attractions are still not maximizing the use of social media as a promotional tool.

During the observation, it was found that most content posted on social media focuses on highlighting the natural and cultural beauty of Yogyakarta, which is a main attraction for tourists. This indicates that although many tourism players utilize social media, they still lack a diverse range of content that can appeal to various tourist segments. For example, tourism attraction managers are less likely to use promotional videos that can provide a more vivid picture of the tourism experiences they offer. By



utilizing more engaging video content, such as virtual tours or interviews with tourists, tourism operators can increase the appeal of their destinations on digital platforms.

Overall, observations indicate that although tourism actors in Yogyakarta have begun to utilize digital promotion, they are still primarily limited to common platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Not many are utilizing other platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, or travel blogs, which can further expand their promotional reach.

Previous research by Dube (2020) indicates that digital marketing has a significant impact on tourists' decisions regarding destination choices. This finding aligns with the results of this study, which demonstrates that the use of social media and online booking applications increases the number of tourists interested in visiting Yogyakarta. Research by Hidayat (2019) also noted that the use of digital platforms in Bali can increase the competitiveness of the tourist destination, a finding that is also relevant to this study. However, the implementation in Yogyakarta is still in its early stages.

However, in contrast to the research conducted in Bali, where tourism managers have been more mature in utilizing digital platforms, this study reveals that tourism actors in Yogyakarta still face several barriers, including limited digital knowledge and high costs. This indicates that, although Yogyakarta has great potential as a tourist destination, the implementation of digital promotion still requires further support, both in terms of training and more supportive policies.

Based on the results of this study, several practical implications can be applied by tourism actors in Yogyakarta to enhance the effectiveness of their digital promotions. First, it is crucial for tourism players to improve their digital skills through more intensive training. This training should include practical instruction on the use of various digital platforms, ranging from social media to paid marketing apps, as well as guidance on creating engaging and relevant content for a global audience.

Second, tourism destination managers need to utilize a broader range of digital platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, and travel blogs, to reach a broader segment of travelers. Given the younger generation's increasing reliance on visual and video content, utilizing these platforms can help attract a larger audience.

Third, tourism managers in Yogyakarta should collaborate with government agencies and tourism associations to receive support in terms of training and joint promotion. This collaboration can accelerate digital transformation and improve the competitiveness of Yogyakarta's tourist destinations in the global market.

Although this study offers valuable insights into the implementation of digital promotion in Yogyakarta, several limitations should be noted. First, the sample used

in this study was limited to 15 tourism operators, so the results cannot be generalized to all tourism operators in Yogyakarta. Secondly, this study relies solely on qualitative and quantitative data from interviews, questionnaires, and observations, and therefore does not consider external factors such as government regulations or global economic changes that may impact the effectiveness of digital promotion.

In addition, this study did not delve into the long term impact of digital promotion on traveler decisions, which should be the focus of further research. Therefore, this research can be expanded by involving more samples and considering external factors that may affect the results.

#### 4. Conclusion

Overall, this study reveals that although tourism actors in Yogyakarta have begun to utilize digital technology for promotion, numerous challenges remain, particularly related to limited digital knowledge and skills. To increase the effectiveness of digital promotion, more intensive training is needed for tourism players, as well as diversification of the digital platforms used. Thus, Yogyakarta can utilize the potential of digital technology to attract more tourists and increase its competitiveness as a global tourist destination.

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