Evaluating the Role of Social Media in Tourist Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of Instagram as a promotional tool on tourist decision-making, using Kiara Artha Park in Bandung as a case study. A quantitative survey was conducted with 122 valid respondents, and data were analysed using simple linear regression. The findings reveal a strong positive relationship between Instagram-based promotions and tourist decision-making, with 66.7% of the variance in decision-making explained by promotional activities on Instagram. Respondents agreed that Instagram is informative, visually appealing, and helpful in planning visits. However, while Instagram significantly influences interest and intent to visit, actual visit behaviour shows more variation. These results align with prior research emphasising Instagram's role in destination branding. Limitations include the single-location focus and demographic skew toward younger users. Future studies should explore diverse destinations, include more variables, and apply longitudinal methods to assess long-term behavioural impacts of social media on tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the current digital era, social media has become an integral part of modern society's daily life, significantly shaping the ways individuals communicate, interact, and make decisions (Saravanakumar & Lakshmi, 2012). Functioning as an internet-based platform, social media enables users to share information, engage in discussions, and express themselves to a broad audience (Nasrullah, 2016). Among the many platforms available, Instagram stands out for its unique focus on visual storytelling and real-time engagement. With features such as photo and video sharing, hashtag integration, and geolocation tagging, Instagram has transformed how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed (Augustinah & Widayati, 2019). It is not only a tool for entertainment and creativity but also a powerful vehicle for strategic communication in sectors such as tourism.

Tourism promotion has increasingly adopted social media, particularly Instagram, to enhance destination visibility and influence travel decisions. As a platform that thrives on visual appeal, Instagram enables destination marketers to showcase tourism sites through curated, aesthetically pleasing content that can spark the imagination and interest of potential travellers (Wijayanti, 2021). Tourism managers and destination marketing organisations (DMOs) utilise Instagram to connect emotionally with audiences and provide experiential previews of tourist attractions, particularly in leisure and cultural tourism (Wonua et al., 2023). This shift has redefined promotional strategies by placing greater emphasis on digital visual communication, emotional engagement, and interactive marketing.

Existing research supports Instagram's role as a key driver of travel decision-making. Studies show that social media, particularly Instagram, affects not only the image formation of tourist destinations but also tourists' behavioural intentions and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Sharma & Arora, 2024). Tourists are increasingly influenced by user-generated content and digital influencers who portray idealised travel experiences, making Instagram a critical touchpoint in the travel planning journey (Egger, 2023). The emotional resonance of Instagram content—enhanced by entertainment, interaction, and trendiness—has been shown to foster self–brand connections and influence engagement behaviour, especially among younger audiences (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2024).

Moreover, the effectiveness of Instagram as a promotional tool is shaped by cultural, psychological, and social factors. As Silva et al. (2023) argue, digital influencers' messaging is embedded in cultural dimensions such as individualism–collectivism and masculinity–femininity, influencing how endorsement content is perceived across different regions. Simultaneously, personality traits such as openness and extraversion impact tourists' engagement with Instagram content and their subsequent travel choices (Egger, 2023). However, the platform's promotional potential is also constrained by challenges such as content saturation and algorithmic changes, which require strategic content planning and differentiation (Wonua et al., 2023).

Given these dynamics, this study aims to investigate how Instagram functions as a promotional tool that influences tourists' decision-making processes. By bridging insights from tourism marketing, social media communication, and consumer psychology, this paper seeks to understand the mechanisms through which Instagram content, especially that created by tourism stakeholders and influencers, affects destination selection. The findings will contribute

to the development of more effective digital strategies for tourism promotion in an increasingly competitive and content-driven environment.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a survey method to investigate the influence of Instagram as a promotional tool on tourists' decision-making. The study was conducted at Kiara Artha Park, a popular recreational destination located in Bandung, Indonesia. This site was selected due to its active use of Instagram for destination promotion and its diverse visitor demographic.

The population for this study consisted of individual tourists visiting Kiara Artha Park. Respondents were selected using convenience sampling, targeting visitors who were present at the park during the data collection period. To ensure the relevance of responses, participants were limited to individuals who use Instagram and were aware of Kiara Artha Park's Instagram content. The final sample size was determined based on the number of valid responses obtained from distributed questionnaires.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two main variable groups: Instagram as a promotional tool (independent variable) and tourist decision-making (dependent variable). Each variable was measured using multiple indicators assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The independent variable, Instagram as a promotional tool, was measured using the following indicators:

1. I often use Instagram to look for information about tourist destinations.
2. I often see posts related to tourism promotion on Instagram.
3. Instagram posts provide sufficient information about Kiara Artha Park.
4. The promotion of Kiara Artha on Instagram attracts my attention.
5. The information conveyed through Instagram about the facilities in Kiara Artha Park is clear.
6. I am satisfied with the quality of the images and videos used in the promotion of Kiara Artha Park on Instagram.
7. The interaction between Kiara Artha Park and its followers on Instagram is very good (e.g., responding to comments or messages).
8. The information provided through Instagram is very helpful for me in planning a visit to Kiara Artha Park.

The dependent variable**,** tourist decision-making, was measured using the following indicators:

1. Instagram posts have a strong influence on my interest in visiting Kiara Artha Park.
2. The promotions I see on Instagram affect my decision to visit Kiara Artha Park.
3. I often visit Kiara Artha Park after seeing its promotion on Instagram.
4. I prefer to visit Kiara Artha Park after seeing Instagram posts compared to getting information from other sources.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. The results of the data analysis show a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.939, indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming that the instrument is reliable.

The data collected were analysed using simple linear regression analysis to determine the influence of Instagram as a promotional tool on tourists' decision-making. The analysis was conducted using statistical software, and the significance of the regression model was tested to evaluate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

3. RESULTS

A total of 122 valid responses were collected in this study. The majority of respondents were aged 17–24 years (75.4%), followed by those aged 25–34 years (20.5%). Only a small percentage were aged 35–44 years (2.5%) and above 45 years (1.6%). In terms of gender, the majority were female (75.6%), while male respondents accounted for 25.4%. Regarding educational background, most respondents held an undergraduate degree (46.7%) or had completed secondary school (41.8%), with smaller proportions having a diploma (9%) or a master's degree (2.5%). As for occupation, the largest group was students (56.6%), followed by employees (19.7%), entrepreneurs (9%), and those categorised as others (14.7%). The illustration of the demographic profiles is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 122)

Category	Indicators	Percentage (%)
Age	17–24 years old	75.4%
	25–34 years old	20.5%
	35–44 years old	2.5%
	> 45 years old	1.6%
Gender	Male	25.4%
	Female	75.6%
Educational Background	Secondary School	41.8%

	Diploma	9.0%
	Undergraduate	46.7%
	Master	2.5%
Occupation	Students	56.6%
	Working/Employee	19.7%
	Entrepreneurs	9.0%
	Others	14.7%

Instagram as a Promotional Tool

This variable consists of 8 indicators measuring respondents' perceptions of how Instagram is used to promote Kiara Artha Park, the results are illustrated in the following table.

Table 2. The perception of Instagram as a promotional tool

Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation
I often use Instagram to look for information about tourist destinations.	**4.41**	0.75
I often see posts related to tourism promotion on Instagram.	4.37	0.79
Instagram posts provide sufficient information about Kiara Artha Park.	4.28	0.75
The promotion of Kiara Artha on Instagram attracts my attention.	4.11	0.76
The information conveyed through Instagram about the facilities in Kiara Artha Park is clear.	4.19	0.76
I am satisfied with the quality of the images and videos used in the promotion of Kiara Artha Park.	4.15	0.85
The interaction between Kiara Artha Park and its followers on Instagram is very good.	4.11	0.90
The information provided through Instagram is very helpful for me in planning a visit to Kiara Artha Park.	4.13	0.85

The result shows that the highest mean indicates that Instagram is widely used as an information source for tourism. Responses are consistently high with low variation. The overall mean scores for these indicators are consistently above 4.0, indicating **st**rong positive perceptions of Instagram as an effective promotional tool for Kiara Artha Park. The low standard deviations (between 0.75 and 0.90) suggest low variability, meaning most respondents share similar views.

Tourist Decision-Making

This variable includes 4 indicators that explore how Instagram influences the actual decision to visit the park. The result are illustrated in the following table.

Table 3. The perception of tourist decision making to Kiara Artha Park

Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation
Instagram posts have a strong influence on my interest in visiting Kiara Artha Park.	4.16	0.80
The promotions I see on Instagram affect my decision to visit Kiara Artha Park.	4.15	0.92
I often visit Kiara Artha Park after seeing its promotion on Instagram.	**3.64**	**1.19**
I prefer to visit Kiara Artha Park after seeing Instagram posts compared to getting information from other sources.	3.85	1.12

While the first two indicators indicate that Instagram significantly influences interest and decision-making, the latter two reflect more variability in actual visiting behavior and preference compared to other information sources. These responses may suggest that while Instagram generates interest, it may not always directly translate into action.

The Influence of Instagram on Decision Making

This study aimed to examine the influence of Instagram as a promotional tool on tourists' decision-making. Based on responses from 122 valid participants, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results indicate a strong and statistically significant relationship between the use of Instagram for promotion and tourists' decision-making.

The model summary shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.817, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Table 4 shows that the R Square value of 0.667 suggests that 66.7% of the variance in tourist decision-making can be explained by Instagram promotional activities. This demonstrates that Instagram plays a substantial role in influencing visitors' decisions.

Table 4. The summary of the regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change in Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.817[a]	.667	.664	2.04553	.667	240.375	1	120	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), independent variable
b. Dependent Variable: dependent variable

Furthermore, the ANOVA test confirms the model's significance with an F-value of 240.375 and a p-value < .001, indicating that the regression model is statistically reliable. The coefficient for Instagram promotion (B = 0.569) is positive and significant (p < .001), meaning that for every one-unit increase in the effectiveness of Instagram promotion, the decision-making score increases by 0.569 units. In addition, the standardised beta coefficient of 0.817 reinforces the strength of this relationship. Residual statistics show that errors are normally distributed and within acceptable limits, confirming the model's goodness-of-fit.

Based on this result, Instagram serves as a powerful promotional tool that significantly influences tourists' interest and decisions to visit Kiara Artha Park. These findings highlight the importance of strategic social media engagement in enhancing tourism promotion.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate a strong and statistically significant relationship between Instagram as a promotional tool and tourist decision-making to visit Kiara Artha Park. With an R-value of 0.817 and R^2 of 0.667, the analysis confirms that 66.7% of the variation in tourist decision-making can be explained by the effectiveness of Instagram-based promotions. This is a substantial proportion, reflecting Instagram's dominant role in influencing how tourists perceive and decide on visiting a destination.

These findings are consistent with previous research that positions Instagram as a powerful platform for tourism marketing. As noted by Egger (2023), Instagram has become an essential channel through which travellers engage with destination imagery and experiences. The platform's visual features, such as photo-sharing, video reels, and story highlights, enable destination marketers to showcase attractions in engaging and aesthetically compelling ways. In this study, respondents rated the usefulness of Instagram highly, particularly for finding travel information (M = 4.41), viewing tourism promotions (M = 4.37), and receiving helpful content for visit planning (M = 4.13). These results are in line with Wijayanti (2021), who

highlighted Instagram's visual appeal and its potential to influence consumer perceptions and behaviours.

The high beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.817$) further underlines the direct influence Instagram has on tourists' behavioural intentions. This supports the findings of Ibrahim and Aljarah (2024), who asserted that social media marketing activities, particularly those involving customisation, interaction, and visual content, enhance user engagement and self–brand connection. In this context, Instagram not only promotes destinations but also builds emotional resonance with users, thereby affecting their decision-making.

Furthermore, the content strategy of Kiara Artha Park on Instagram appears to align with practices that foster destination image consistency and user trust, as recommended by Syafganti et al. (2023). The clarity of information about park facilities ($M = 4.19$) and satisfaction with promotional images and videos ($M = 4.15$) indicate that visual credibility and communication quality are key components influencing interest in visiting. This echoes research by Silva et al. (2023), who emphasised the role of cultural appeal and symbolic messaging in enhancing Instagram's impact on consumer behaviour.

However, while interest and intention to visit are influenced by Instagram, actual behavior, such as visiting after seeing promotions, had slightly lower mean scores ($M = 3.64$ and $M = 3.85$). This suggests that while Instagram significantly shapes awareness and intention, other factors (e.g., accessibility, time, financial constraints, or competing sources of information) may moderate actual visitation behaviour. This is consistent with the observation by Sharma and Arora (2024) that social media influences do not always translate into immediate action but may build long-term awareness and interest.

Based on these results, Instagram is a highly effective promotional medium in the tourism sector, capable of significantly influencing potential visitors' perceptions, interests, and decision-making processes. Destination marketers, such as those managing Kiara Artha Park, should continue leveraging Instagram with strategic content that not only informs and entertains but also builds emotional and cultural resonance. Integrating interactive engagement, consistent branding, and high-quality visuals will further strengthen Instagram's ability to convert interest into actual visits.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Instagram is a highly effective promotional tool that significantly influences tourist decision-making, particularly in the case of Kiara Artha Park in Bandung. The results from a simple linear regression analysis indicate a strong positive relationship between Instagram-based promotions and tourists' intentions to visit. These findings confirm that Instagram not only serves as a source of inspiration and information but also enhances the visibility and attractiveness of destinations through engaging and visually compelling content.

Despite the promising results, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted at a single location using a convenience sampling method, with the majority of respondents being young and female. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups or tourism contexts. Additionally, the study focused only on one independent variable, the Instagram promotion, without considering other potential factors that may influence decision-making, such as price, accessibility, or peer influence.

Future research should consider expanding the scope by including multiple destinations and a more diverse sample. Incorporating other variables such as influencer credibility, perceived trust, or destination image could provide a more holistic understanding of social media's impact. Longitudinal and mixed-method approaches may also help assess how Instagram influences actual visitation behaviour over time.

Hence, despite Instagram plays a crucial role in modern tourism marketing, the ongoing research is needed to fully explore its dynamic influence on travel behaviour across different contexts and populations.

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