

THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING USE ON INCREASING TOURIST VISITS: EVIDENCE FROM A LOCAL ECOTOURISM DESTINATION IN EASTERN INDONESIA

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Abstract: Social media has significantly transformed marketing communication strategies for tourism destinations by enabling information to be delivered quickly, widely, and interactively through visual content and videos. This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 109 respondents selected using probability sampling and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. With descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the social media marketing Variabel was categorized as good, with an average score of 3.85 (on a scale of 1–5), with content quality obtaining the highest mean score of 3.94%, followed by user interaction at 3.90% and promotional content reach at 3.73%. The increase in tourist visits Variabel was also categorized as good, with an average score of 4.02%, with social media as a source of information obtaining the highest mean score of 4.11%, followed by visit intention at 4.10% and travel patterns at 3.85%. The results of the simple linear regression test indicated that social media marketing had a positive and significant effect on increasing tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe, Maros Regency. These findings indicate that attractive, informative, and interactive social media content can improve access to information, generate interest, and encourage tourists to visit. This study concludes that the more effective the use of social media marketing, the greater the increase in tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe, Maros Regency.

Keywords: Social media marketing, tourist visits, tourism promotion, social media

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication science is fundamentally concerned with how messages travel between senders and receivers across channels to achieve particular effects. Over time, this field of inquiry has expanded from interpersonal and mass communication toward digital communication, which now dominates modern life. Social media, as the most visible manifestation of digital communication, has transformed how people interact, access information, and form public opinion. This transformation has also reshaped the global tourism industry, where social media has emerged as a dominant channel for destination promotion, reshaping how destinations attract and engage potential visitors (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The capacity of social media to deliver information quickly, visually, and interactively has made it a strategic tool for both large-scale tourism organizations and small, locally-managed destinations alike.

Indonesia's social media adoption rate is among the highest in the world. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube account for the majority of daily digital interaction (We Are Social, 2025). Available data



indicate that 90.9 percent of Indonesian internet users aged 16–64 use WhatsApp, spending an average of 26 hours 13 minutes per month on the platform; Instagram is used by 85.3 percent of users, averaging 16 hours 10 minutes monthly; while TikTok, although not the most widely used platform, records the highest average engagement time at 38 hours 26 minutes per month. As of mid-2024, TikTok reported more than 157.6 million users in Indonesia, while Instagram's advertising reach stood at approximately 100.9 million. This extensive digital penetration carries significant implications for tourism communication, as it opens new pathways for destination discovery and visitor decision-making.

Despite a growing body of international literature on social media and tourism (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014), empirical studies focusing on small-scale, individually-managed tourism destinations in Eastern Indonesia remain scarce. Most existing research concentrates on large urban destinations or nationally recognized tourism sites, leaving a research gap concerning how grassroots digital marketing strategies operate in peripheral tourism contexts.

Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe, located in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi, and in operation since 28 March 2010, provides an ideal setting for this investigation. Its management began actively using social media on 2 July 2020 through an individually-managed account, @bukit.moncongloe. Although managed independently without professional marketing support, one of its posts went viral on TikTok, producing a marked increase in visitor numbers—from an average of 60 to 150 visitors per month. This constitutes a compelling natural experiment for quantitatively assessing the causal relationship between social media marketing and tourist visit growth. Notably, the destination's official Instagram account has accumulated 1,610 followers, whereas its TikTok account has only 14—a disparity suggesting that promotional reach across platforms remains uneven. Its official YouTube channel was likewise only established in March 2025 as part of an emerging video-content strategy.

The principal challenge facing small, independently-managed destinations of this kind lies in optimizing social media use. Many tourism destinations fail to attract visitors because of a limited understanding of digital marketing strategy—content quality, posting frequency, and audience engagement management. To date, no academic study has quantitatively measured the magnitude of social media's effect on visit growth at such a destination. This study is specifically designed to address that gap by posing three research questions: (1) what is the perceived level of social media marketing use among visitors to Abdi Mulia Park; (2) what is the level of tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park; and (3) does social media marketing use significantly affect the increase in tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park?

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the body of communication science literature concerning social media use in the promotion of small-scale tourism destinations, while also serving as a reference for further research on digital promotion strategy in the tourism sector. Practically, it offers concrete recommendations for the management of Abdi Mulia Park in optimizing social media use to strengthen the destination's appeal, while also benefiting tourism practitioners and local government in designing digital-based tourism development programs. Socially and economically, effective digital promotion is expected to open business opportunities for surrounding communities, particularly in transportation, culinary, and accommodation services.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Concept and Characteristics of Social Media

Social media represents a continuation of the evolution of communication technology, particularly since the growth of the internet and Web 2.0-based technologies. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The shift from a static Web 1.0 toward a participatory Web 2.0 empowered users to become information producers, triggering a fundamental change in the structure of public communication in which every individual can become a source of information and opinion.

Building on Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) framework, which distinguishes social media by degree of social presence and self-presentation, social media can be grouped into several broad categories: social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn; media-sharing sites such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which emphasize visual content; microblogging platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) for short, real-time messages; and blogs and discussion forums. Beyond these formal classifications, instant-messaging applications such as WhatsApp have also evolved into mass-information distribution channels through group and broadcast features.

Social media is distinguished from traditional media by four fundamental characteristics: (1) interactivity, whereby users act as both content producers and consumers; (2) participation, reflecting active user involvement in

creating and responding to information; (3) network formation based on personal connections and shared interests; and (4) content personalization through algorithmic systems that surface the most relevant content for each individual. In the tourism context, the four platforms most relevant to this study—Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube—each play distinct functional roles: Instagram excels at aesthetic visualization through its feed, story, and reels features; TikTok is effective in reaching younger audiences through short, easily shareable videos; WhatsApp functions as a direct customer-service and information channel; and YouTube serves as a vehicle for in-depth, long-form visual storytelling.

2.2 Social Media and Digital Marketing in the Tourism Sector

Social media marketing refers to the strategic use of digital platforms to promote products, services, or destinations through content creation, audience interaction, and viral dissemination (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In the tourism sector, social media enables destinations to communicate directly with prospective visitors, build destination image, and stimulate visit intention (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) demonstrated that social media has become a primary source of information in travel planning, with more than 60% of travelers consulting user-generated content before making a visit decision. Hays, Page, and Buhalis (2013) similarly found that destinations actively leveraging social media reported visit increases of 20–30%.

Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides (2012) identify three interrelated stages in digital travelers' use of social media. During the pre-travel stage, tourists seek inspiration and initial information through reviews, photographs, and destination videos. During the during-travel stage, tourists actively share their experiences in real time, indirectly promoting the destination. Finally, during the post-travel stage, tourists provide reviews and recommendations that influence prospective visitors' subsequent decisions. These three stages reflect the cyclical nature of social media use within modern tourism, grounded in participation and lived experience.

Digital marketing has likewise revolutionized how tourism organizations build brands and reach consumers. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), digital marketing enables a deeper relationship between brand and consumer through approaches tailored to individual behavior and preference, thereby reinforcing loyalty and influencing visit decisions. One of digital marketing's principal strengths lies in its capacity to build engagement through consumer participation—likes, comments, and user-generated content—a principle believed to enhance credibility and emotional involvement (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Chaffey and Smith (2017) add that the image projected through digital marketing shapes the perceived value of a tourism product, which in turn increases visit intention. Strauss and Frost (2014) further emphasize that data-driven marketing enables more accurate targeting and retargeting of audiences, making promotion more efficient and measurable than through conventional media.

Beyond its promotional function, social media also opens new strategic opportunities, including the use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies that allow prospective visitors to experience a destination immersively before physically visiting it; the use of big data analytics to design more precisely targeted promotional strategies based on audience behavior and preference; and collaboration with local communities to produce more authentic narratives. Social media further facilitates two-way interaction between destination managers and prospective visitors through comments, direct messages, and live-streaming features, enhancing engagement and building emotional relationships that contribute to loyalty and repeat visitation (Sheldon & Kim, 2019). Studies of local destinations also show that tourism sites whose content goes viral on social media can experience visit surges of several hundred percent within a few months, underscoring that social media has become an integral—rather than merely supplementary—component of destination marketing strategy.

Based on this review, three dimensions of social media marketing are operationalized in this study following Kaplan and Haenlein (2010): (1) content quality, referring to the visual and informational appeal of posted content; (2) user interaction, capturing audience engagement through likes, comments, and shares; and (3) promotional content reach, measuring the breadth of content diffusion to target audiences.

2.3 Tourist Visits and Visit Intention

Tourist visits are conceptualized in this study through three dimensions adapted from Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2017): (1) visit patterns, capturing behavioral regularity; (2) social media as an information source, measuring reliance on digital content in pre-visit planning; and (3) visit intention, assessing willingness to visit or recommend the destination to others. The relationship between media exposure and visit behavior is well established in the tourism literature. Leung et al. (2013) confirmed that visually-oriented platforms such as Instagram are more

effective than text-based platforms in stimulating visit motivation, while Lin, Kim, and Song (2021) showed that short-form video content on TikTok increases visit intention by providing an immersive visual experience.

2.4 Prior Research

To map the development of relevant research and identify the gap this study addresses, prior studies examining the role of social media in tourism are reviewed and compared in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison with Prior Research

Author(s) (Year)	Title	Similarities	Differences from This Study
Xiang & Gretzel (2010)	<i>Role of Social Media in Online Travel Information Search</i>	Examines social media's effect on tourist behavior; focuses on the early travel-planning stage; positions social media as an information source	Focuses on review-sharing platforms such as TripAdvisor; emphasizes user reviews in information search rather than a single local destination
Hays, Page, & Buhalis (2013)	<i>Social Media as a Destination Marketing Tool</i>	Social media used as a promotional tool and image-building instrument; drives increases in tourist visits	Focuses on the marketing strategies of large-scale national tourism organizations (NTOs), not a small, individually-managed ecotourism destination
Leung et al. (2013)	<i>Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality: A Literature Review</i>	Concludes that social media influences tourist decision-making and effectively stimulates visit interest	Conducts a comparative cross-platform literature review rather than an empirical quantitative test at one specific destination

Across the three studies compared, social media consistently proves influential in shaping tourist interest—whether as an information source, promotional tool, or image-builder. However, all three focus on large-scale destinations, cross-destination review platforms, or general literature synthesis. This study fills that gap by providing empirical, quantitative evidence from a small-scale, individually-managed ecotourism destination in Eastern Indonesia—a context substantially different from the large destinations and national tourism organizations that were the focus of prior studies.

2.5 Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in three complementary theories that jointly reinforce the explanation of the phenomenon under investigation.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT).

Developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), UGT holds that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages but active individuals who select and use media to satisfy psychological and social needs. The theory emerged as a response to deterministic media-effects approaches (such as the hypodermic needle model), asserting instead that individuals have varying motivations for media use and actively seek out media that fits those needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Blumler and Katz (1974) identified five categories of need that drive media use: cognitive needs (information seeking), affective needs (entertainment and aesthetic satisfaction), social integration needs (interaction with others), personal identity needs (self-image formation), and escapist needs (relief from stress or boredom). Ruggiero (2000) subsequently updated UGT for the digital era by adding three characteristics—interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity—explaining why modern social media users not only passively receive information but also actively select, process, and create content. In this study, UGT explains how prospective tourists actively seek social media content about a destination to satisfy informational and experiential needs, which ultimately shapes their visit decisions.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC).

This concept was comprehensively introduced by Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993), who emphasized the importance of an integrated communication plan that combines multiple communication disciplines—

advertising, sales promotion, public relations, social media, and direct marketing—to achieve clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact. In practice, IMC requires that all messages delivered across channels remain consistent and mutually reinforcing, forming a single coherent perception in the audience's mind. One of IMC's core strengths lies in its capacity to integrate audience feedback—social media enables two-way interaction, whereby comments, testimonials, and user-generated content can be repurposed as more authentic and trustworthy promotional material. In the case of an independently-managed destination such as Abdi Mulia Park, the application of IMC—albeit informal, without support from a professional marketing team—still exhibits strategic effects through the consistent, repeated narrative of the site's uniqueness, natural scenery, and visitor experience across multiple platforms.

Destination Image Theory.

Crompton (1979) explains that destination image is an individual's perception of a place formed through cognitive and affective processes—tourists consider not only factual information such as location and facilities, but also the subjective impression formed about the destination. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) extended this concept into three components: cognitive image (what tourists know about the destination), affective image (how tourists feel about it), and an overall image that becomes the basis for final visit-decision evaluation. Stepchenkova and Mills (2010) argue that content shared by social media users—photos, videos, and testimonials—significantly shapes destination image in the minds of prospective tourists, while Tasci and Gartner (2007) show that a positive destination image increases visit intention and tourist loyalty.

Synthesizing these three theoretical frameworks, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₀: Social media marketing use has no positive and significant effect on increasing tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe, Maros Regency.

H₁: Social media marketing use has a positive and significant effect on increasing tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe, Maros Regency.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework positions social media use (Variable X) as the independent variable, measured through four indicators following Kaplan and Haenlein (2010): shared content, posting frequency, user interaction, and reach and engagement. Tourist visit increase (Variable Y) is positioned as the dependent variable, measured through three indicators following Kotler et al. (2017): destination awareness, visit interest, and visit decision. This framework illustrates that the more optimally a destination manager uses social media, the greater the potential increase in tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive-associative design. A survey method was used to collect cross-sectional data from visitors of Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe, Maros Regency.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Data Collection

The population comprised an estimated 150 visitors per month. Using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, a sample of 109 respondents was determined. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria requiring: (1) at least one prior visit to the destination; (2) awareness of the destination through social media; and (3) willingness to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. Data collection was conducted from March to May 2025 through questionnaires and field observation.

3.3 Measurement Instrument

A structured Likert-scale questionnaire (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was administered, consisting of 12 items: 6 items measuring Social Media Use (Variable X), covering content quality, user interaction, and promotional reach; and 6 items measuring Tourist Visit Increase (Variable Y), covering visit patterns, social media as an information source, and visit intention.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity was tested using Pearson correlation, with an r-table value of 0.254 ($df = n-2 = 107$; $\alpha = 0.05$). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with 0.60 as the accepted threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data normality was verified using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test as a prerequisite for regression analysis. Simple linear regression was then employed to test the relationship between social media marketing use and tourist visit increase, supplemented by Pearson correlation analysis, a partial (t) test, and the coefficient of determination (R^2). All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Respondent Profile

Of the 109 respondents, the majority were male (78.0%) compared to female (22.0%). The dominant age group was 15–25 years (63.3%), reflecting the destination's appeal to younger visitors, followed by the 26–30 age group (28.4%) and the 31–40 age group (8.3%). By occupation, students/undergraduates formed the largest group (41.3%), followed by private-sector employees (24.8%), self-employed individuals (16.5%), civil servants (8.3%), and other occupations (9.2%). Instagram was the most commonly used information source (45.0%), followed by TikTok (24.8%), WhatsApp (18.3%), and Facebook (11.9%). Most respondents used social media for 1–3 hours daily (33.0%).

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	85	78.0%
	Female	24	22.0%
Age	15–25 years	69	63.3%
	26–30 years	31	28.4%
	31–40 years	9	8.3%
Occupation	Student/Undergraduate	45	41.3%
	Private Employee	27	24.8%
	Self-Employed	18	16.5%
	Civil Servant	9	8.3%
	Other	10	9.2%
Daily Social Media Use	< 1 hour	9	8.3%
	1–3 hours	36	33.0%
	3–5 hours	33	30.3%
	> 5 hours	31	28.4%
Information Source	Instagram	49	45.0%
	TikTok	27	24.8%

	WhatsApp	20	18.3%
	Facebook	13	11.9%
Total respondents		109	100%

Source: Primary data, 2026

4.2 Social Media Marketing Use

Descriptive analysis revealed that overall social media marketing use was perceived as good (mean = 3.85). Content quality obtained the highest dimensional mean (3.94), followed by user interaction (3.90) and promotional content reach (3.73). No responses indicated “disagree” or “strongly disagree” for the content quality and user interaction dimensions, suggesting broad satisfaction. However, item X5 (broad audience reach of promotional content) recorded the lowest score (mean = 3.53), with 11.9% of respondents indicating disagreement—signaling suboptimal content distribution.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics — Social Media Marketing Use

Dimension	Mean	Category
Content Quality	3.94	Good
User Interaction	3.90	Good
Promotional Content Reach	3.73	Good
Overall	3.85	Good

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics v.27 output, 2026

Cumulatively, based on score-range categorization, 84 respondents (76.6%) fell into the high social media use category, 23 respondents (21.4%) into the moderate category, and only 2 respondents (2.0%) into the low category—confirming that the majority of respondents rated Abdi Mulia Park’s social media use positively.

4.3 Tourist Visit Increase

The tourist visit increase variable was likewise rated good overall (mean = 4.02). Social media as an information source scored highest (4.11), followed by visit intention (4.10) and visit patterns (3.85). Item Y3 (social media as the primary source of destination information) recorded the highest item score (4.17), while Y2 (visit frequency within the past year) recorded the lowest (3.80)—suggesting that while visit motivation is high, repeat visitation remains a challenge.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics — Tourist Visit Increase

Dimension	Mean	Category
Social Media as Information Source	4.11	Good
Visit Intention	4.10	Good
Visit Patterns	3.85	Good
Overall	4.02	Good

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics v.27 output, 2026

Cumulatively, 94 respondents (86.2%) fell into the high visit-increase category and 15 respondents (13.8%) into the moderate category, with no respondents in the low category.

Cross-tabulation analysis reinforces this picture. By information source, of the 49 Instagram users, 16 respondents were classified in the high visit-increase category and 33 in the moderate category—the largest

contribution among the platforms. By contrast, all 13 Facebook users fell into the moderate category, with none in the high category, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of Information Source and Visit-Increase Category

Information Source	Moderate Category	High Category	Total
Instagram	33	16	49
TikTok	22	5	27
WhatsApp	19	1	20
Facebook	13	0	13
Total	87	22	109

Source: Researcher's data processing, 2026

4.4 Prerequisite Tests

Validity Test. All 12 items were confirmed valid, with corrected item-total correlation values ranging from 0.255 to 0.664—all exceeding the r-table value of 0.254 ($n = 109$; $\alpha = 0.05$), as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Instrument Validity Test Results

Variable	Item	r Computed	r Table ($n=109$; $\alpha=0.05$)	Result
Social Media Use (X)	X1	0.612	0.254	Valid
	X2	0.586	0.254	Valid
	X3	0.517	0.254	Valid
	X4	0.612	0.254	Valid
	X5	0.396	0.254	Valid
	X6	0.553	0.254	Valid
Tourist Visit Increase (Y)	Y1	0.664	0.254	Valid
	Y2	0.604	0.254	Valid
	Y3	0.455	0.254	Valid
	Y4	0.272	0.254	Valid
	Y5	0.255	0.254	Valid
	Y6	0.397	0.254	Valid

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics v.27 output, 2026

Reliability Test. Cronbach's Alpha for both variables exceeded the 0.60 threshold (Table 7), confirming that the research instrument is reliable.

Table 7. Instrument Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Standard	Result
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Social Media Use (X)	0.705	0.60	Reliable
Tourist Visit Increase (Y)	0.641	0.60	Reliable

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics v.27 output, 2026

Normality Test. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on the regression residuals produced a significance value of 0.063 (> 0.05), indicating a normal distribution and satisfying the prerequisite for linear regression analysis.

4.5 Regression, Correlation, and Hypothesis Testing

Simple linear regression yielded the equation: $\hat{Y} = 13.334 + 0.465X$. The constant of 13.334 represents the baseline level of tourist visits absent any social media influence, while the regression coefficient of 0.465 indicates that each one-unit increase in social media use is predicted to raise tourist visits by 0.465 units.

Table 8. Simple Linear Regression Results

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	13.334	1.653	—	8.065	0.000
Social Media Marketing	0.465	0.071	0.534	6.530	0.000

Dependent variable: Tourist Visit Increase. Source: IBM SPSS Statistics v.27 output, 2026

The t-value (6.530) exceeded the t-table value (2.001) at $\alpha = 0.05$, with a significance level ($p = 0.000$) below 0.05. Accordingly, H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted: social media marketing use has a positive and significant effect on increasing tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park.

Pearson correlation analysis produced a correlation coefficient of 0.534 with a significance of 0.000 (Table 9), indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables.

Table 9. Pearson Correlation Test Results

	Social Media Marketing	Tourist Visit Increase
Social Media Marketing	1	0.534**
Tourist Visit Increase	0.534**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); $n = 109$. Source: IBM SPSS Statistics v.27 output, 2026

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.285$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.278$) indicates that 28.5% of the variance in tourist visit increase is explained by social media marketing use, while the remaining 71.5% is attributable to other factors outside the model, such as ticket pricing, physical accessibility, service quality, facilities, and conventional word-of-mouth.

Table 10. Coefficient of Determination

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.534	0.285	0.278	1.428

Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Marketing. Source: IBM SPSS Statistics v.27 output, 2026

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Social Media Marketing Use at Abdi Mulia Park

The finding that content quality and user interaction scored above 3.90 is consistent with the propositions of Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), which holds that audiences actively seek media content that fulfills cognitive and affective needs. High-quality visual content depicting scenic hillside panoramas satisfies both needs simultaneously—the informational need for destination knowledge and the affective need for aesthetic satisfaction. In line with this, Ruggiero (2000) asserts that in the digital era, social media users actively seek content

matching their aesthetic preferences and informational needs. The good score on the user interaction dimension likewise reflects that Integrated Marketing Communication principles (Schultz et al., 1993) have been partially implemented, as consistent two-way communication reinforces credibility and emotional engagement.

The comparatively lower score for promotional content reach (3.73), with item X5 at only 3.53, aligns with Xiang and Gretzel's (2010) finding that the effectiveness of social media marketing depends heavily on algorithmic distribution and audience-engagement strategy. The self-managed nature of Abdi Mulia Park's accounts, with limited use of paid promotion or influencer collaboration, constrains reach and represents a key area for strategic improvement. From the perspective of Destination Image Theory (Crompton, 1979; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), limited reach can hinder the formation of cognitive and affective image among a wider audience; a practical recommendation is therefore to adopt more assertive digital promotion—for instance, through paid advertising, popular hashtags, or collaboration with local micro-influencers—consistent with Instagram's dominance as the primary information source (45%), which aligns with Leung et al.'s (2013) finding regarding the superiority of visual platforms.

5.2 Tourist Visit Increase

The highest-scoring dimension, social media as an information source (4.11), corroborates Xiang and Gretzel's (2010) landmark finding that social media has become the primary pre-travel information channel. The strong visit intention score (4.10) aligns with Destination Image Theory (Crompton, 1979; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), demonstrating that positive cognitive and affective destination images cultivated through visual social media content successfully stimulate visit motivation. The item concerning willingness to recommend the destination to others likewise scored highly, reflecting that positive experiences showcased on social media not only trigger personal interest but also drive digital word of mouth—a finding consistent with Leung et al. (2013) regarding the superiority of image-based platforms in stimulating visit interest.

The lower score for visit patterns (3.85), particularly repeat visitation (item Y2 = 3.80), suggests a post-visit retention gap. As Munar and Jacobsen (2014) argue, tourist loyalty is reinforced through ongoing digital engagement; the absence of a systematic post-visit communication strategy may explain this weakness. From the perspective of Integrated Marketing Communication (Schultz et al., 1993), low repeat visitation may also stem from the lack of retention programs or post-visit follow-up communication.

5.3 Effect of Social Media Marketing on Tourist Visits

The statistically significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.465$, $t = 6.530$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that social media marketing positively drives tourist visits at Abdi Mulia Park. This finding strongly supports Uses and Gratifications Theory—when Abdi Mulia Park's social media content satisfies prospective tourists' cognitive and affective needs, they are motivated to proceed to the visit-decision stage. Integrated Marketing Communication theory is equally relevant, since consistent narrative and cross-platform audience engagement reinforce promotional effectiveness, even when managed without a professional marketing team.

This finding is consistent with prior international studies: Hays et al. (2013) reported 20–30% visit increases for socially active destinations, and Lin et al. (2021) demonstrated that immersive short-form video increases visit intention. The present study extends these findings to a small-scale, individually-managed ecotourism site in a developing regional economy, providing evidence that the persuasive mechanisms of social media marketing operate beyond large-scale destination contexts.

The R^2 value of 0.285 indicates that while social media is a significant contributor, the majority of tourist visit variation is explained by other factors. This is theoretically coherent: physical accessibility, pricing, facilities, and interpersonal (non-digital) word-of-mouth channels remain influential. Future research incorporating these variables would yield a more comprehensive explanatory model.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media marketing use has a positive and significant effect on increasing tourist visits to Abdi Mulia Park Bukit Moncongloe, Maros Regency ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.285$). Specifically: (1) the level of social media marketing use is good, with content quality and user interaction as the principal strengths, while promotional content reach represents the primary area for improvement; (2) the level of tourist visits is likewise good, with social media serving as the dominant information source for prospective visitors and generating strong

visit intention, although repeat-visit patterns remain suboptimal; and (3) social media marketing use has a positive and significant effect on tourist visit increase, although the majority of visit variation (71.5%) is still explained by factors outside this research model.

6.2 Recommendations

For the management of Abdi Mulia Park:

(1) expand promotional reach through paid advertising features on Instagram and TikTok, the use of popular hashtags, and collaboration with local micro-influencers or travel vloggers;

(2) maintain consistent interactive engagement by more actively responding to comments and direct messages and by hosting interactive content such as quizzes or live streams;

(3) encourage repeat visitation through loyalty programs, periodic refreshment of photo spots, and content inviting former visitors to return; and

(4) optimize the YouTube channel through regular documentary content, travel vlogs, and visitor testimonials.

For the Maros Regency local government:

the Tourism Office may position Abdi Mulia Park as a model of a locally-managed destination that has successfully leveraged social media, providing content-management and engagement-strategy training for other small-scale tourism operators, and facilitating cross-destination promotion through official regional tourism social media accounts.

For future research:

given that more than half of the variance in tourist visits is explained by factors outside social media, future studies are encouraged to incorporate additional variables such as service quality, ticket pricing, accessibility, and visitor satisfaction, and to consider qualitative or longitudinal research designs to deepen understanding of the relationship between social media and tourist visits.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital tourism communication by providing empirical evidence from a locally-managed destination in Eastern Indonesia, a context that remains underexplored. Future studies are expected to enrich the explanatory model through additional variables and mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to deepen understanding of the social media–tourism visit nexus.

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