The Role of Influencers in the Digital Era as an Effort to Promote Indonesian Tourism Destinations

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Abstract

In the rapidly evolving digital era, the Indonesian tourism sector faces challenges in reaching and engaging millennial and Gen Z travelers through traditional promotion methods. Despite the widespread use of influencers in tourism marketing, there is limited understanding of how influencer credibility, platform characteristics, and narrative styles specifically impact tourist decision-making in Indonesia. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the role of social media influencers in shaping perceptions and influencing travel choices toward Indonesian destinations. Employing a qualitative approach that includes in-depth interviews, social media content analysis, and observation of digital trends, the research seeks to interpret how participants construct meaning through their engagement with influencer content. The findings offer rich, contextual insights for tourism stakeholders to optimize influencer collaborations and tailor marketing strategies to better resonate with target audiences in the digital landscape.

Keywords: influencer, tourism promotion, social media, credibility, digital platform

A. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, the way people discover and evaluate tourist destinations has changed significantly. One of the key drivers of this transformation is the rise of social media, which has become a central platform for travelers to search for information, share experiences, and make travel decisions (Rahma, 2020). Among the various forms of digital marketing, influencer marketing has gained substantial attention in the tourism sector. Influencer marketing refers to the collaboration between organizations and individuals who have significant influence on social media to promote destinations, services, or experiences (Aulia & Taufik, 2022).

Through visually engaging and personalized content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, influencers are able to construct compelling narratives that emotionally connect with their audiences (Rahayu & Mulyaningsih, 2021). These narratives often shape tourist perceptions, inspire curiosity, and influence destination choices (Nugraha, 2023). In Indonesia, where internet and social media use continues to rise especially among millennials and Gen Z, this trend is particularly relevant (Siryayasa et al., 2024).

Although many studies have acknowledged the potential of influencer marketing in promoting tourism (Susilawati & Solehatun, 2023; Komsiatun, 2023), findings on its effectiveness remain varied. For example, some research highlights the positive impact of influencer authenticity and expertise on tourist trust (Wirapraja et al., 2023), while others point to issues such as oversaturation, lack of credibility, or misalignment with audience preferences as potential drawbacks (Nurhadi, 2025). These contrasting findings indicate a need for deeper investigation into what makes influencer marketing in tourism effective, especially in the Indonesian context.

Moreover, the success of influencer-driven promotion does not solely depend on the influencer's content or personality; it also hinges on the characteristics of the social media platforms used. Different platforms serve different audience segments and require distinct content formats for instance, short-form visual content on TikTok and Instagram vs. long-form storytelling on YouTube (Panca et al., 2022). However, little research has integrated these dimensions, influencer credibility and platform characteristics to assess their combined impact on tourism promotion outcomes.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by examining how influencer credibility and platform characteristics influence the effectiveness of tourism promotion in Indonesia. By focusing on these two key variables, this research aims to provide a clearer understanding of what makes influencer-based marketing strategies successful in the context of Indonesian tourism and offer practical insights for tourism stakeholders in designing more targeted and effective digital campaigns.

B.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of how influencers contribute to tourism promotion in the digital era (Rijali, 2018). Qualitative methods are considered suitable for exploring the subjective experiences, strategies, and audience responses that cannot be captured through quantitative approaches.

Data Collection

To ensure data triangulation, this study employed three main data collection methods is in-depth Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants, participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the research focus. All informants had to meet at least one of the following inclusion criteria including actively following or engaging with travel influencers, having made a travel decision based on influencer content, having experience collaborating in digital tourism campaigns. The criteria and segmentation are as follows:
   a. Influencers: Individuals who actively create tourism-related content and have a significant online presence. Five tourism influencers, chosen based on criteria such as follower count (minimum 50,000 followers), engagement rate (>5%), prior experience in promoting tourist destinations, and alignment with the values of Indonesian tourism
   b. Tourism Managers: Representatives from tourism boards or agencies responsible for promotional activities. Three tourism marketing professionals or destination managers, representing regional tourism boards or agencies that have experience collaborating with influencers.
   c. Tourists: Social media users who rely on influencer content as part of their travel planning process. Demographically, respondents were aged 20–35 years, reflecting the millennial and Gen Z segments, who are the most active users of digital platforms in Indonesia (Siryayasa et al., 2024). Eight domestic tourists (ages 20–35), who actively use social media when planning trips and have previously engaged with influencer content.

The interviews were carried out online via Zoom and lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Questions focused on participants' experiences with influencer content, perception of credibility, decision-making processes, and campaign evaluation.

The researcher also analyzed 30 social media posts from selected influencers across platforms (i.e. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, focusing on four aspects whisch are visual presentation and narrative style; engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares); use of tourism hashtags and call-to-action; and comments from followers indicating influence on travel decisions. Content from the last 12 months was prioritized to ensure relevance with current digital trends. Furthermore, the researchers conducted online observations of digital campaigns run by tourism boards and influencers. Included in the observations are the frequency and timing of posts; types of destinations promoted (e.g., ecotourism, cultural tourism); and platform usage patterns and influencer-audience interaction styles. This method helped contextualize data from interviews and content analysis by capturing real-time dynamics in influencer-driven tourism promotion.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved: transcribing interview recordings; coding key themes such as credibility, authenticity, content effectiveness, and decision-making influence; identifying patterns across data sources (interviews, content, and observation); and comparing empirical findings with insights from the literature review. The thematic approach was chosen to allow flexibility in uncovering emerging patterns while remaining grounded in the research objectives (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Strategic Role of Influencers in Digital Tourism Communication

In the ever-evolving digital era, the tourism sector is undergoing a significant transformation in terms of how to communicate and promote destinations. If in the past tourism promotion relied on conventional media such as television, radio, and brochure advertisements, now a personal, interactive, and visual digital approach is key to attracting audience attention. In this context, influencers play an increasingly strategic role in conveying destination narratives in a more authentic, interesting, and relevant way for the public, especially the younger generation.

One of the main strengths of influencers is their ability to do strong visual storytelling. Tito Ahmad Elfarizi, an Indonesian tourism influencer, emphasizes the importance of presenting content that not only displays the beauty of tourist attractions but also builds a narrative experience that makes the audience feel as if they are taking part in the journey. This cinematic narrative approach creates a deeper emotional connection with the audience. This is in line with the statement of Apriyanti, Head of the Digital Media Team of the Ministry of Tourism, who stated that personal narratives conveyed by influencers have a greater influence than one-way promotions carried out through conventional media. Original and honest content is believed to shape people's positive perceptions of a destination, while increasing their engagement.

This finding is not only narrative but also supported by a number of scientific studies. Recent research by Omeish et al. (2024) shows that exposure to content shared by influencers has a significant impact on tourists' destination perception and visitation intention. The credibility and quality of the content have been shown to increase audience awareness, trust, and engagement with the promoted place. Furthermore, a study by Uniyal (2025) underlines that the main attributes of influencers, namely credibility, authenticity, and consistency, play an important role in shaping the destination image. These effects are mediated by psychological mechanisms such as emotional engagement, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon, and social proof, which is the tendency for people to follow the behavior of others who are considered relevant or credible.

Based on psychological analysis, it can be concluded that modern tourists tend to trust real and personal experiences shared by individuals more than promotional messages that seem fabricated by official institutions. Therefore, digital-based tourism campaign strategies must consider the following practical approaches: first by using authentic storytelling, honest content that displays the influencer's personal experiences has been proven to be easier to trigger empathy and engagement. The use of an emotional narrative style, such as stories of struggle or touching moments during a trip, can increase the resonance of content with the audience. Second strategic use of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), highlighting elements of exclusivity, such as hidden gems, seasonal events, or unique experiences, can create a sense of urgency. This strategy encourages the audience to immediately plan a visit so as not to feel "left behind" from trending experiences. Third, utilization of social proof, including follower testimonials, showing the number of visits, or collaborating with several influencers at once in one campaign can strengthen the social validation of the destination being promoted. Forth, consistency and transparency, influencers who consistently share quality content and are open about their experiences, including the challenges or shortcomings of a destination, tend to be more trusted and considered a reliable source of information.

The implementation of this approach has proven successful in various contexts. One international example is the "Influencer Academy" program launched by the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism in collaboration with the Beautiful Destinations content agency. This program aims to train influencers to be able to market Dubai's lifestyle and destinations through digital platforms with a focus on storytelling, cinematography, and visual marketing techniques (The Times, 2025). As a result, Dubai has managed to maintain its position as one of the most Instagrammable destinations and is visited by young tourists from various parts of the world.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, a similar strategy is implemented through the "Wonderful Indonesia Co-Branding" program initiated by the Ministry of Tourism. In this program, the government collaborates with various local influencers and content creators to promote leading destinations such as Labuan Bajo, Mandalika, and Likupang. The approach used emphasizes the importance of authentic content and personal narratives to build emotional bonds between the audience and the destination.

In addition, there is also a digital campaign titled #BaliTripVlog initiated by the Bali Provincial Tourism Office in collaboration with a number of domestic influencers. This campaign was launched post-

pandemic with the aim of increasing exposure of Bali tourism through platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. The impact is quite significant, as seen in the increasing interest of domestic tourists to return to Bali. This campaign is also real evidence that strategic collaboration between the government and influencers can strengthen the image of a destination broadly and sustainably.

Credibility and Emotional Connection as Keys to Influencer Influence in Digital Tourism Communication

In the increasingly complex and competitive digital communication landscape, the presence of influencers is becoming increasingly crucial, especially in the tourism sector. Influencers not only act as intermediaries for information but also as shapers of consumer opinions and behavior. Two important elements that are the foundation of the effectiveness of influencer communication are credibility and emotional connection with the audience. Without trust and emotional closeness, promotional messages tend to be flat and lose their persuasive power.

Credibility is an absolute requirement for an influencer to be able to influence the opinions and decisions of the audience. This credibility is formed through a combination of expertise, honesty (trustworthiness), and personality (attractiveness) that are consistently reflected in the content they present. In the context of tourism, credibility is very important in determining whether the audience will trust the recommendations for destinations, itineraries, and even the holiday style displayed.

Tito Ahmad Elfarizi, an Indonesian tourism influencer, highlighted the importance of actively building trust, not only through attractive visual content but also through direct interactions such as replying to comments, answering questions, and opening discussions. This activity shows that influencers care and are really present in the digital lives of their followers, which ultimately increases their trust.

Support for this view also comes from Indri Wahyu Susanti, Head of the Communication Bureau of the Ministry of Tourism, who emphasized that the influence of influencers on tourist decisions is very large. Therefore, the influencer selection process is carried out selectively, considering the level of engagement rate and suitability with the values and image of the destination being promoted. Credibility is not only determined by the number of followers, but by the quality of the relationships and influence they have.

However, credibility alone is not enough. A study by Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo (2021) found that emotional attachment between influencers and audiences has a stronger influence than rationally perceived credibility. This means that the emotional closeness, sense of connection, and empathy felt by the audience towards the influencer form deeper and more lasting trust. Research by Reinikainen et al. (2020) also revealed that relational relationships—built through consistent interactions and friendly communication styles—contribute greatly to perceived credibility. This reinforces the understanding that communication strategies that emphasize the emotional side are more effective in building influence. Content that touches, encourages, or inspires the audience will be more easily remembered and influence their behavior.

In addition to emotional and credibility factors, educational and sustainability values are also increasingly becoming benchmarks for trust in influencers. Ivona, an active follower of tourism influencers, said that her decision to trust a recommendation was greatly influenced by content that provided social and environmental added value. Influencers who promote tourist destinations while educating about local culture, supporting local businesses, or encouraging nature conservation have a stronger influence than those who simply display visual aesthetics without context. They are not only promoters, but also social change agents who direct public attention to important issues in sustainable tourism. In this case, influencers play a dual role: as information providers and as value providers. The integration of compelling visuals with educational messages makes the content more meaningful and increases audience loyalty.

Based on the dynamics of digital tourism communication, there are several strategic implications that are important to consider in designing an influencer-based communication strategy. Active interaction is the main foundation in building relationships between influencers and audiences. Replies to comments, recognition of followers, and open discussions can strengthen personal bonds and make audiences feel appreciated. Emotional and personal narrative content, such as personal travel stories, touching experiences, or reflective moments, can create deeper emotional connections with audiences. Influencer credibility is built through consistency and honesty.

A consistent communication style and transparency in conveying information, including the negative side of a destination, are essential for building long-term trust. Furthermore, social media can also be used to strengthen educational values and tourism ethics, such as environmental conservation, local culture, and promotion of responsible tourism behavior, thereby expanding the positive impact of the content shared. Finally, the selection of influencers must be adjusted to the destination's image. For example, ecotourism destinations will be more effective if promoted by influencers who have a sustainable lifestyle and values that are in line, so that the communication conveyed feels more authentic and on target.

Social Media Platforms as the Main Channel for Destination Promotion

In the increasingly developing digital era, social media has evolved into a primary channel for promoting tourist destinations. This transformation has not only occurred globally, but is also very pronounced in Indonesia, a country with a high level of internet penetration and social media usage. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube now function not only as a means of personal communication but also as a strategic medium in effective tourism marketing. In this context, visual narratives, speed of information delivery, and depth of story are key to reaching and influencing target audiences, especially the millennial and Gen Z generations who dominate the digital tourism market today. The informants involved in this study agreed that the success of destination promotion is largely determined by the selection of the right platform and content strategy that suits the characteristics of each social media user.

One of the main actors in utilizing social media for destination promotion is Tito Ahmad Elfarizi, a tourism influencer who has developed a differential approach to various platforms. Tito's approach reflects a deep understanding of social media user behavior, as well as how content needs to be adjusted to remain relevant and interesting in the context of algorithms and audience expectations. On Instagram, for example, Tito uses this platform to build strong visual branding. It utilizes aesthetic photos, curated carousels, and story features to present a cohesive visual narrative. Consistent use of filters, selection of color tones that match the identity of the destination, and narrative captions play an important role in creating the atmosphere and image of the desired destination. However, the big challenge on Instagram is how to overcome the limitations of organic reach due to increasingly stringent algorithms, which often require paid promotion so that content can reach a wider audience.

Meanwhile, TikTok is optimized as a medium for conveying stories quickly, lightly, and entertainingly. Short videos that follow certain audio trends or challenges are considered effective in attracting users' attention. Spontaneous content such as "behind the scenes", life hacks about travel, and short one-minute itineraries are types of content that are very popular. TikTok's advantage lies in its ability to create virality in a short time, allowing relatively unknown destinations to gain wide exposure in a matter of days. However, the very high level of competition and the fast-changing nature of the algorithm require creators to continue to innovate and be able to read trends quickly. Ignorance or delay in following trends can cause content to lose relevance, which ultimately reduces the effectiveness of the campaign.

On the other hand, Tito uses YouTube to present deeper narratives through cinematic vlog formats, short documentaries, and detailed travel reviews. This platform is suitable for audiences who have a more serious interest in a destination and are willing to spend more time watching long content. Best practices on this platform include strong storytelling, attractive visual packaging, and high production quality, both in terms of video and audio. The ideal duration to maintain audience engagement is usually between eight and twelve minutes. However, YouTube content production requires greater resources, both in terms of time, effort, and cost. In addition, YouTube audiences tend to be more selective and critical, so in-depth research and authenticity of the narrative are needed to build trust and credibility.

Tito's approach is in line with the results of various studies showing that each social media platform has different characteristics and advantages, which, if utilized strategically, can produce strong synergy in destination promotion campaigns. TikTok, for example, is considered very effective in reaching young audiences with an informal, fast, and visual communication style. Instagram focuses more on aesthetic imaging and is suitable for generating initial interest through destination visualization. Meanwhile, YouTube excels in deepening narratives and strengthening emotional engagement, which can lead to real conversions such as ticket bookings or direct visits. This understanding allows tourism actors to design complementary cross-platform content strategies by adjusting the form and message according to user expectations in each medium.

The study by Martins et al. (2025) provides an important contribution to understanding the power of visuals in tourism promotion. The study highlights that Instagram, with its dominant visual content, has a great ability to arouse desire or the desire to visit. The aesthetically displayed image of the destination is able to create imagination and aspirations in the minds of the audience, which then triggers further actions such as searching for additional information, saving content, or even planning a trip. The psychological effect of this visual exposure makes Instagram a very strategic tool in the early stages of destination marketing, namely when consumers are still in the consideration and inspiration search stage.

However, the use of social media as a destination promotion channel does not necessarily guarantee success if it is not accompanied by a deep understanding of the dynamics of each platform. Each social media platform has different algorithm logic, communication style, and user demographics. Therefore, it is important for tourism industry players to not only focus on content production but also on performance analysis, adaptation to local trends, and the ability to maintain the consistency of the narrative identity of the destination being promoted. Weaknesses in just one element for example, low audience engagement or inconsistency in message delivery can damage the overall perception of a destination that is built digitally.

In addition, other challenges arise, such as content overload, periodic algorithm changes, and ever-evolving audience expectations. In this case, promotional strategies can no longer rely on a one-way approach. Interactivity is key comments, live streaming, polling in stories, and collaboration with local micro-influencers are some of the tactics that can be used to build a digital community that is loyal to a particular destination brand. Building a two-way relationship allows the audience to feel more involved and have an emotional connection, which ultimately increases the likelihood of them becoming real visitors, rather than just passive admirers in cyberspace.

Overall, social media has opened up a new path in promoting tourism destinations that is more inclusive, efficient, and data-driven. By leveraging the strengths of each platform and understanding audience dynamics in depth, tourism campaigns can be designed with a more personal, creative, and adaptive approach to change. In the future, the success of tourism destination promotion will not only be determined by the natural beauty or unique culture it has, but also by the extent to which the story about the place can be retold, shared, and felt emotionally by the audience through social media.

Collaboration between Government and Influencers

Amid the dominance of digital platforms in the world of tourism marketing, collaboration between the government and influencers has emerged as a key strategy to reach a wider audience effectively. The government can no longer rely on conventional media to build the image of a destination; instead, it must align the official narrative with a more flexible and personal communication style. In this context, influencers are present as an important bridge that is able to package the government's strategic messages into more humanistic and relatable content, especially for the younger generation, who are the main drivers of digital tourism.

Collaborative programs such as fam trips, endorsements, and paid promotions are the main vehicles for establishing synergy between these two parties that are different in structure and orientation. However, as expressed by Astri Puspita from the Ministry of Tourism, maintaining a balance between content creativity and the government's official message is not easy. The government certainly has communication standards, visual identities, and branding agendas that must be maintained, while influencers rely on a freer and more authentic personal narrative approach. Tensions arise when the results of content production are not in line with government expectations, both in terms of substance, tone, and aesthetic value. This challenge is compounded by cases such as additional requests from influencers that exceed the budget or minimal commitment in carrying out post-campaign obligations.

This is where influencer selection becomes crucial. A study by Iswanto et al. (2024) emphasized that successful collaboration must be based on partner selection that considers not only popularity but also value compatibility, credibility, and closeness to the target audience. Because in the end, the effectiveness of digital promotion is not only measured by how often content is viewed, but by how much it is able to influence tourists' decisions and perceptions.

One real portrait from the audience's perspective is the experience of Hillary Medina, a female traveler who actively follows various travel accounts on social media. In an interview, Hillary emphasized that her travel decisions were greatly influenced by two main factors: trust and security. According to her,

influencers who show too much luxury or an unrealistic lifestyle actually create psychological distance. On the other hand, she trusts influencers who are down-to-earth, honest in telling their experiences, and provide practical and relevant information, especially regarding safety, costs, and basic facilities. This is an important insight because it shows that audiences are not just looking for stunning visualizations but also information that can form realistic expectations and confidence in planning a trip.

Hillary's experience proves that the effectiveness of a digital campaign is largely determined by the credibility and communication style of the influencer. In other words, the success of a collaboration does not depend only on the sophistication of the digital strategy or the strength of the social media algorithm, but also on the ability to convey an authentic narrative that resonates emotionally with the audience. This becomes even more important when the campaign's target is a demographic group that has its own information preferences and sensitivities, such as female travelers or solo travelers. In this context, the selection of influencers must consider personal trust factors, not just visual impressions or engagement statistics.

Furthermore, to ensure that collaborations and digital campaigns are truly impactful, the evaluation process must be designed holistically. So far, many parties are still fixated on shallow metrics such as the number of views, likes, comments, or follower growth. In fact, these indicators only describe the surface of the audience's response. A deeper evaluation should include the conversion rate, which is how many audiences then access the destination website, buy a tour package, or express further interest after viewing the content. Behavioral attribution—a digital footprint that shows the path from content exposure to actual action is a particularly relevant method in this context.

Sprout Social's (2025) report reinforces the importance of establishing clear, measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) before a campaign begins. These KPIs should align with the campaign's objectives whether to build awareness, drive traffic, or strengthen the destination's image. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as satisfaction surveys and case studies can reveal how audience perceptions are shaped. Insights from users like Hillary can be used as a reference in developing target traveler personas, which in turn guide the direction of the campaign narrative to be more targeted.

Furthermore, the role of social listening in brand sentiment analysis is very important to capture the nuances of public perception in real time. For example, whether the narrative built by the government through influencers has succeeded in creating positive associations towards a destination, or has it instead reaped controversy because it is considered too exaggerated or not in accordance with reality. This is where the integration of quantitative and qualitative data becomes the key to building an evaluation system that is not only accurate but also meaningful for improving future strategies.

By considering all these elements, the synergy between the government and influencers must be based on the principles of sustainability and mutualism. The government needs to open up enough space for influencer creativity without losing control over the core message of the campaign. On the other hand, influencers need to understand that their involvement is not only about visual style, but also about the integrity of communication and social responsibility as a representation of the destination. Hillary Medina's experience is a reminder that behind every click and like, there is an individual with real hopes, concerns, and needs that must be answered sincerely by every promotional campaign.

Ultimately, the success of digital tourism promotion is not the result of mere momentary virality but rather the ability to build a touching, informative, and credible narrative. When governments and influencers are able to work together in a structured, responsive, and data-driven collaborative framework, the impact is not only visible in social media statistics but also in real visit growth, improved local community welfare, and strengthening Indonesia's image as an inclusive and competitive tourist destination.

Evaluation of Digital Promotion Effectiveness

The digital transformation of Indonesia's tourism landscape demands a new approach to communication strategy, where narrative power, emotional engagement, and authenticity become the main values. Amid the explosion of social media usage, a purely informative promotional approach is no longer enough. The government, through the Ministry of Tourism, has begun to adopt a strategy centered on collaboration with influencers as the main channel in conveying destination narratives. However, so that this strategy does not stop as a momentary trend, a reformulation of communication policies is needed that is more adaptive, selective, and long-term oriented.

One of the reasons why influencers have become so strategic in tourism promotion is their ability to build emotional connections with audiences. This was emphasized by Bayu Aji, Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, who saw that the main strength of influencers is not merely the number of followers, but the ability to create emotional engagement through content that is personal, touching, and visual. Elements such as cinematic narratives, viral background music, and relatable communication styles make influencer campaigns feel more real and human than conventional advertising. In this context, the tourism experience is not only sold as a product, but is framed as a life story that can be experienced emotionally by the audience.

The study by Taype and Pachas-Fuentes (2025) also strengthens this perspective, they found that the younger generation, especially millennials and Gen Z, shows a high level of trust in influencers as a source of travel inspiration. Influencers are considered more credible than official institutions because their delivery methods are more authentic, informal, and reflect personal experiences. This provides a great opportunity for the government to make influencers "digital ambassadors" who educate, inspire, and market destinations with an approach that is not patronizing but still carries strategic values.

However, this kind of collaboration is not without risk. The mismatch between the image built by the government and the influencer's communication style can create message dissonance. Several cases have shown that content that overly emphasizes a luxurious lifestyle or is insensitive to the local cultural context actually risks damaging the destination's image, rather than strengthening it. Therefore, one of the main strategic implications is the need to increase selectivity in choosing influencers. The government must set criteria that do not only refer to social media statistics, but also consider the alignment of values, personal integrity, and the suitability of the narrative style with the identity of the destination being promoted.

In addition to selectivity, drafting a firm and fair cooperation contract is an important step in managing the expectations and commitments of both parties. This contract not only contains technical aspects such as the amount of content and duration of cooperation, but also includes ethical guidelines, strengthening local narratives, and content quality standards. Thus, influencers are not merely passive promotional tools, but communicative actors who understand and comply with the national narrative framework promoted by the government.

To support this alignment, the government also needs to provide special training to influencers regarding the national tourism narrative, local cultural values, and sensitive issues that need to be considered when producing content. This training is not intended to limit creativity, but rather as an effort to equip influencers with an in-depth understanding so that their content is not only interesting, but also educational and contextual. Strengthening this capacity will make influencers strategic partners who are able to internalize the vision of sustainable tourism promotion.

However, an adaptive and collaborative communication strategy also requires a data-based evaluation system to measure the impact of the campaign as a whole. Until now, many digital campaign evaluations are still trapped in surface metrics such as the number of likes or views, which are not always directly proportional to tourist conversions or changes in perception. A more comprehensive evaluation should include indicators such as conversion rate (how many audiences then make a booking), sentiment analysis (how the public perceives the destination before and after the campaign), and behavioral tracking (a digital footprint that shows the flow from content consumption to real action).

One important dimension that is often overlooked is the impact of campaigns on tourists' perceptions of safety, inclusivity, and comfort, especially for segments such as women or solo travelers. Insight from Hillary Medina, a female traveler, shows that influencer narratives greatly influence these perceptions. She trusts influencers who are honest, realistic, and able to provide practical information about transportation, safety, and budget estimates. This shows that down-to-earth and empathetic narratives can create a sense of trust, which is a key element in driving travel decisions. In the framework of national communication, this kind of insight is very valuable as a reference in forming target tourist personas and designing inclusive and responsive communication strategies.

In addition, the use of social media as a promotional channel has changed the logic of communication from one-way (top-down) to dialogic and participatory. The audience is now no longer just a recipient of messages, but also a disseminator, reviewer, and even content producer through the practice of UGC (user-generated content). Therefore, tourism communication strategies cannot rely only on professional influencers, but also need to encourage the involvement of the wider public in building a

positive narrative about the destination. The government can facilitate this space through content competitions, hashtag campaigns, or digital community platforms that accommodate citizens' tourism experiences.

Furthermore, the national communication strategy needs to consider the diversity of destination characteristics. Not all destinations have explicit visual appeal or are suitable for being packaged in a short format like TikTok. For cultural or historical destinations, for example, in-depth and educational narratives are needed that are more suitable for YouTube or podcasts. Therefore, the communication approach must be multimodal and adaptive to the characteristics of the platform and the type of audience being targeted. The integration of visual power, storytelling, and educational value is a promising formula for building a strong and sustainable destination narrative.

Overall, the implication of an influencer-based digital approach to the national tourism communication strategy is the need for a paradigm shift from merely "destination promotion" to "personal, emotional, and meaningful communication experiences". Influencers are no longer just partners in distributing messages, but cultural actors who shape narratives together with the community. The government, in this case, needs to act as a facilitator and curator, not the sole controller of messages. With a selective, contractual, data-driven, and emotionally engaged strategy, Indonesia can develop a tourism communication ecosystem that is dynamic, inclusive, and relevant to the times.

Risks and Ethical Challenges in Influencer-Based Tourism Promotion

While influencer-driven campaigns have demonstrated significant potential in enhancing destination visibility and emotional resonance, they are not without inherent risks. One major concern is the possibility of misinformation or exaggerated content that creates unrealistic expectations among travelers. Influencers, in pursuit of engagement, may sometimes prioritize aesthetic appeal over factual accuracy or ignore critical safety, accessibility, or environmental considerations. Additionally, the commodification of local culture for digital content often without proper context or consent raises ethical concerns about cultural appropriation and the erosion of authenticity. Cases have emerged where influencers unintentionally disrespected sacred local sites or misrepresented local customs, leading to public backlash and reputational damage to the destination. These incidents highlight the importance of establishing clear ethical guidelines and accountability mechanisms in influencer collaborations, especially in culturally sensitive or ecologically fragile areas.

Gaps and Limitations in Government Communication Strategies

The current government strategy in leveraging influencers for tourism promotion, while progressive, still exhibits several weaknesses that need critical reflection. There is often a lack of comprehensive vetting processes that go beyond follower metrics, which increases the risk of partnering with influencers whose values or content styles do not align with the destination's identity. Moreover, the government's communication efforts sometimes remain rigid and overly bureaucratic, making it difficult for influencers to exercise creative freedom without clashing with formal branding requirements. This tension can result in forced, inauthentic content that fails to resonate with audiences. Furthermore, the absence of robust monitoring and post-campaign evaluation frameworks means that the effectiveness of influencer collaborations is rarely measured beyond surface metrics like views and likes. This limits the ability to learn from past campaigns or to adapt strategies for different target markets. Addressing these gaps requires a more agile, data-driven, and participatory approach to public-private communication initiatives in tourism.

D. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the role of influencers in digital tourism communication and evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration between the government and influencers in promoting tourism destinations. Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that influencers serve as crucial intermediaries who not only provide information but also craft authentic narratives that influence tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes. The collaboration between the government and influencers enhances the reach and emotional impact of tourism campaigns, particularly among younger audiences. However, the success of such collaborations depends on careful influencer selection, alignment of values,

and a balanced approach that respects both creative freedom and official messaging. Furthermore, evaluation methods must go beyond superficial metrics to incorporate deeper insights from tourists. It is essential to examine how they construct meanings around ritual objects or cultural performances. These findings underscore the need for a strategic, adaptive, and data-driven communication framework to optimize digital tourism promotion in Indonesia.

This study has several limitations, including the data coverage is still limited to a qualitative approach and has not included quantitative analysis based on social media performance such as audience conversion or real visit impact. In addition, the focus on professional influencers and government institutions has not fully captured the role of other actors such as micro-influencers or digital tourism communities. For further studies, it is recommended to conduct a broader analysis with a mixed methods approach, as well as expand the participation of sources from various tourist segments and industry players to obtain a more comprehensive and applicable picture of tourism communication strategies in the digital era.

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