



Analysis of the Influence of the Use of Instagram Social Media in the Promotion of Lake Toba Tourism Objects 2024

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of Instagram social media usage in promoting Lake Toba tourism on increasing brand awareness and tourist visits in the post-pandemic period. The survey was conducted with 49 respondents who are productive-age tourists and actively use Instagram as a source of travel information. The results show that the majority of respondents frequently see promotional content about Lake Toba on Instagram and consider the platform a primary source of information when planning trips. More than 80% of respondents expressed interest in visiting Lake Toba after seeing promotional content on Instagram, and 85% of them seek travel information through the platform. Instagram also creates positive associations with Lake Toba's image and encourages word-of-mouth promotion. These findings confirm that Instagram plays a significant role in building brand awareness and increasing tourists' interest and decisions to visit Lake Toba.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia Lake Toba is one of the main tourist attractions in the country; it does not only offer stunning natural view but also boasts of beautiful Batak culture. It is agreeable that the lake has great potential in terms of its tourism attraction capacity but successful implementation of the potential depends on proper promotion and marketing. The emergence of digital platforms in recent years especially the social media has transformed the way tourism destinations interact with their potential visitors (Massari et al., 2024; Cuomo et al., 2021; Akhtar et al., 2021; Buhalis et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2022; Afren, 2024). One of these platforms is the Instagram which has become a potent power through its visual-focused nature that corresponds to the modern tourist expectations of convenient and entertaining content. Although the Lake Toba is endowed with great resources, the region still struggles to utilize digital technology to its best potential, thus inhibiting its capacity to appeal to a broader audience and maintain the interest of both local and foreign tourists (Prideaux, 2005; Reisinger & Dimanche, 2010).

Before the COVID-19, there was evidence that Instagram was massively used to promote tourist visits to Lake Toba. Users who posted photos and travel life stories generated organic visibility of the destination which was essentially peer to peer promotion (Kilipiri et al., 2023). Tourism managers started considering Instagram as

a strategic asset rather than just as a communication tool that could be used as an additional one but as a marketing tool that is vital and can contribute to the increase in brand recognition (Agustian et al., 2023; Park et al., 2022; Rauschnabel et al., 2022; Hien & Nhu, 2022; Malesev & Cherry, 2021). The pandemic, in turn, derailed the movement in the sphere of traditional tourism, significantly decreasing the amount of physical visitors (Li et al., 2022; Mahmoodi et al., 2022). However, Instagram remained relevant as a tool to maintain the presence of destinations, disseminate vital information regarding health guidelines and travel conditions, and virtual experiences to ensure continuing interaction with prospective tourists despite the decrease in mobility. Such continuity stresses the usefulness of the platform in both attracting new visitors and sustaining long-term relationships with audiences in the times of crisis (Fyall et al., 2022; Lacarcel & Huete, 2023).

The digital transformation of tourism is not only about adopting platforms, but also about completely changing tourist behavior with regards to destination information seeking and consumption (Shuvo & Islam, 2024; Xiang et al., 2015; Maslova et al., 2020). Social media is becoming one of the most important sources of immediate content delivered in a visual form by modern travelers, instead of the traditional sources of information, such as guidebooks or brochures. The mix of images, short videos, and interactivity through Instagram allows a tourist to see a destination in advance, thereby affecting the decision-making process and perception of the destination. This change requires destination managers to take the initiative: content should be well-edited to showcase distinct selling points, e.g. the natural landscapes of Lake Toba, cultural events, and local experiences, and at the same time provide a consistent and authentic brand story. The inability to adjust to such trends of behavior may threaten to sideline a destination in an already competitive tourism market (Dwyer et al., 2009; Schmallegger et al., 2011).

Considering this, the present research attempts to understand how the Lake Toba tourism managers use Instagram strategically to promote brand awareness and encourage tourists to visit the area in the post-pandemic period. The study is based on learning about the processes used in creation and distribution of content, and the efficiency of the strategies to shape tourism perception and behavior. Particularly, the study will be focused on the problem formulation: How do Lake Toba tourist attraction managers rely on the Instagram social media as a promotional tool to raise brand awareness and the number of tourists visiting the destination following the COVID-19 pandemic? The research will help uncover the overlap between digital marketing practices and destination management by answering this question, which will provide information regarding the optimization of social media as a sustainable tourism development tool.

More importantly, the study acknowledges that being on Instagram does not necessarily mean that a person is interested in tourism and wants to visit a destination (Madinga et al., 2020; Tešin et al., 2022; Hauerholt & Lehmann, 2023). The future of success will be based on knowing the algorithmic processes of the platform, interacting with the audiences in a genuinely authentic manner and incorporating digital campaigning into the overall tourism framework, such as collaboration with local businesses and communities. In addition, adaptive approaches to social and economic tourism revival in the post-pandemic era demand balancing the need to be safe with marketing goals, which make the use of credible, timely, and visually appealing content significant. Finally, the study does not just add to the scholarly discussion of social media marketing in the tourism industry, but also offers practical suggestions on how to make Lake Toba more visible, reputable, and economically sustainable in Indonesia tourism industry.

METHODS

Research Design

In this study, the quantitative approach is used to collect data using a surveying method to understand the usefulness of Instagram as a promotion tool concerning the Lake Toba tourism attractions. The quantitative method of work was chosen in order to objectively and systematically evaluate the correlation between variables pertaining to Instagram promotion and tourist interest, and further decisions about visiting. The strategy permits a strict quantification of the effects and helps to estimate the existence of possible causal relationships, which will form a premise of generalizing the results to a larger group of tourists, relying on social media to obtain information on their tours.

Population and Sampling

The target group includes the tourists who have already visited and intend to visit Lake Toba and actively use Instagram as a means of getting information about the tourist destinations. The study concentrates on users, who are interested in the Instagram content concerning the Lake Toba tourism, as a part of the social media activities of the target audience. To select respondents, a purposive sampling method will be used and the respondents will include tourists who visited or would like to visit Lake Toba within the past 12 months, who are active on Instagram and those who searched information about Lake Toba using Instagram. In order to achieve the objective of having a representative sample, the required sample size will be computed with either the Slovin formula or G+Power depending on the confidence level of 95 and margin of error of 5. In this research, 49 respondents were identified and most of them were aged between 20 and 35 years and were mostly female.

Instrument and Measurement

The structured questionnaire will be used to collect the data to address the scope of the use of Instagram to promote Lake Toba and its effects on the interest and choice of tourists. Before the questionnaire is distributed it will be tested on its validity and reliability. To measure validity, the expert judgment will be used to determine whether the instrument measures the desired constructs whereas reliability will be determined by measuring the Cronbachs Alpha test to verify whether the items measure the same construct internally. The process makes the obtained data accurate and reliable.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection will be through online due to the high efficiency of accessing the target population. The questionnaire will be administered through survey websites like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey. Social media platforms will be used as one of the platforms to spread the survey link, especially Instagram, email, and online travel forums that are related to Lake Toba tourism. To enhance the number of responses and to expand the participation, the researchers will engage social media influencers and travel communities with a substantial number of tourist interested in Lake Toba.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected will be subjected to statistical analysis so as to ascertain how the Instagram promotion impacts tourist interest and visiting choices. The data will be analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics to summarize the demographics of respondents and their patterns of respondents and establish the relationships between the promotion activities on Instagram and the tourist behavior. The findings will give information about the usefulness of social media marketing in influencing the tourism-related decision-making and inform strategies on how to improve the online marketing of Lake Toba.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper explores how Instagram is a promotional medium that can impact Lake Toba tourism within the post-pandemic period. Forty-nine respondents, mostly in the 20-35 years age range and consumers on Instagram, were interviewed to find out the impacts of exposure to promotional materials on their perception, attention, and visit intentions. Instagram has been selected because of its high visual focus and the growth of its contribution to the sources of information on traveling. This section gives the results in the form of major themes with each being preceded by a critical interpretation with reference to literatures on the area of concern.

Use of Instagram

The majority of the sample, which consists of 49 individuals, is the active users of social media, in particular, Instagram. Their primary source of information concerning tourist destinations is Instagram. It is reflected in 85 percent of the participants who are actively searching tourist information on Instagram. Most of the respondents explained that they had encountered promotional materials regarding Lake Toba in Instagram, and 57% of them had frequently encountered such content.

Table 1. Social Media Usage and Respondents' Exposure to Lake Toba Promotion on Instagram

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Information
Respondents active using social media	49	100	All respondents including active; focused Instagram main
Respondents using Instagram as source information tour	42	85	Shows Instagram is becoming the main platform For look for information destination tour
Respondents often see content promotion about Lake Toba on Instagram	28	57	Majority respondents confess often exposed content promotion Lake Toba

Respondents' Activities and Content Exposure (n = 49)

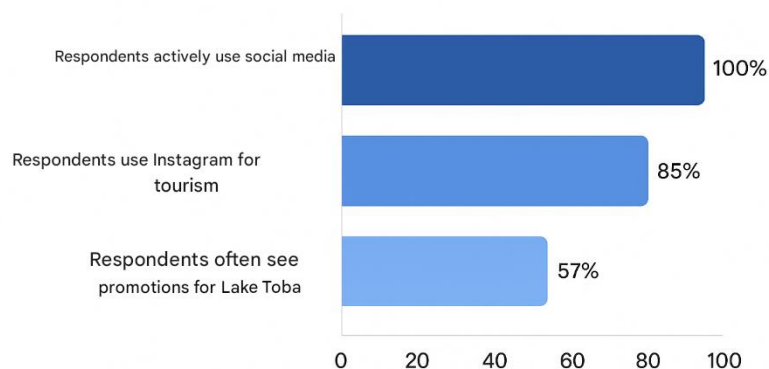


Figure 1. Respondents' Exposure to Lake Toba Promotion on Instagram

Every respondent across all categories such as in category active users of social media, particularly Instagram, which indicates that this platform has gained significance in the daily life of the respondent. The availability of social media among

the regular users provides significant prospects of shaping opinion and drawing them toward the destination tourism. This is evident in the fact that 85 percent of the respondents would be highly interested in knowing details of information regarding destination tour through Instagram, thus validity of the promotional techniques tourism that would tap into the correct target market is through this channel. Moreover, up to 57 percent of the respondents note that they frequently encounter content promotion about Lake Toba in Instagram, which demonstrates that the promotion is effective in terms of reach audience. Despite this, however, still There are respondents 43% who do not really often exposed content promotion, so that there is scope to optimise frequency, quality, and presentation strategy content more to reach promotion in a more maximal way.

Audience Response to Advertising Content on Instagram

Data Wetting (Descriptive Analysis)

Table 2. Respondents' Exposure, Perceptions, and Travel Intentions Related to Lake Toba Instagram Promotion

No	Indicator	Percentage (%)	Description
1	Respondents who often see Lake Toba tourism content on Instagram	57%	Majority of respondents are exposed to Lake Toba promotional content
2	Respondents who search tourism information through Instagram	85%	Instagram is the main source of tourism information for respondents
3	Respondents interested in visiting Lake Toba after seeing Instagram content	>80%	Instagram promotions influence travel interest
4	Respondents who include Lake Toba in their travel destination list	>80%	Lake Toba is considered as a preferred tourism destination
5	Perception of Instagram content (relevant, interesting, trustworthy)	High/Positive	Contributes to increasing brand awareness of Lake Toba

The results prove the opinion that Instagram is the key in forming the knowledge and attraction of tourists to Lake Toba. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (57% of the participants) claimed that they were a regular viewer of Lake Toba tourism material on the platform, which implies that the destination is well perceived in the online environment. Moreover, 85 percent of the respondents actively use Instagram as the main source of information on tourism, which underscores the role of the latter as a social networking platform as well as a reliable information source. Notably, the promotional information seems to be converted to the intention to visit Lake Toba: more than 80% of the respondents mentioned their desire to come to the lake and to add it to their travelling lists after reading Instagram posts. It illustrates an unmistakable relationship between exposure to digital promotions and the development of travel motivation. Relevance, engagement, and trustworthiness of the content on Instagram were the ratings of the respondents, indicating that quality content can increase credibility and popularity. Together, these trends underline the strategic importance of Instagram to create brand awareness and position Lake Toba as a tourism destination of interest.

Instagram promotes the development of a strong and positive connection between Lake Toba and the image of a unique and exciting tourist experience. Critically, the fact that the respondents want to suggest the destination after exposure to the promotional texts shows how digital exposure becomes electronic word-of-mouth (e-

WOM), which is a process that is known to have a wide-ranging impact on destination marketing. The given dynamic shows that the presence of Instagram is not limited to creating brand awareness, but, instead, it enables more in-depth interaction, by predisposing tourist choice and impacting peer networks. These findings indicate that the platform influences a more complex decision-making course in which the initial awareness is turned into advocacy and the actual travel intentions. Therefore, Instagram is something that can be viewed as a strategic instrument of visibility as well as the translation of social interaction into quantifiable tourism results.

The findings are aligned with the existing studies that place Instagram as a powerful channel of getting information on tourism. The visual orientation of it, its interaction capabilities, and peer-generated credibility are some of the specific benefits that cannot be achieved through traditional promotional means and, therefore, enhances its ability to need influence over the behavior of the tourists. Such a combination allows not only to improve the image of Lake Toba as a beautiful place to visit but also proves the strategic importance of Instagram in the formation of travel decisions. Nonetheless, this dependence on one platform also poses a question of sustainability especially considering how unstable the algorithms of the social media can be and how quickly people change their affection. This indicates that although Instagram is very effective, the effect needs to be supported with combined digital tactics to make the destination competitive in the long term.

Instagram's Influence on Visit Interest

Over 80 percent of the respondents are willing to go to Lake Toba in the near future and had the destination in their travel list. The majority of respondents believe that the Instagram posts concerning the Lake Toba are pertinent and reliable, and they help them become more aware of the tourist destination.

Table 3. Respondents' Perceptions and Intentions Toward Lake Toba Promotion on Instagram

No	Indicator	Percentage (%)	Description
1	Respondents interested in visiting Lake Toba in the near future	>80%	Majority of respondents expressed a strong interest to visit soon
2	Respondents who included Lake Toba in their travel destination list	>80%	Lake Toba is considered a priority tourism destination
3	Respondents who perceive Instagram content about Lake Toba as relevant	High/Positive	Content is viewed as suitable and aligned with respondents' travel interests
4	Respondents who perceive Instagram content as trustworthy	High/Positive	Content is regarded as reliable and credible
5	Respondents who reported increased awareness of Lake Toba through Instagram	High/Positive	Instagram content effectively raises brand awareness of the destination

The results highlight the important role played by Instagram in the formation of perceptions and behavioral intentions of tourists. Over 80 percent of respondents said that they plan to visit Lake Toba and made it part of the travel behavior after consuming promotional content, implying that engagement with the platform is successfully converted into the real travel motivation. The view of the Instagram content as relevant and trustworthy not only reflects its abidance with the

expectations of the tourists but also the ability to contribute to the credibility of promotional messages. Such credibility is critical in the minimization of information uncertainty which is usually a dilemma in destination marketing. In addition, the mentioned growth in awareness proves that Instagram can be used beyond its purposes as a social networking platform; the tool is a strategic means of communication that can reinforce the image of Lake Toba as an attractive tourist destination. Combined, these results indicate that Instagram is not just powerful in terms of creating awareness, but it is also critical in transforming online interactions into destination consideration and possible visitation.

Brand Association dan Word of Mouth

Table 4. Perception of Tourism Content on Instagram and Its Impact on Lake Toba Promotion

No	Indicator	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
1	Respondents who often see Lake Toba tourism content on Instagram	57%	The visibility of Lake Toba on Instagram is strong, with more than half of respondents frequently exposed to its promotional content. This exposure helps build positive associations with the destination.
2	Respondents who are neutral about seeing Lake Toba tourism content	43%	Although some respondents are less exposed, the overall visibility remains significant, indicating room for expanding promotional reach.
3	Respondents who search for tourism information through Instagram	85%	Instagram functions as the main source of tourism information, reflecting its role not only as a social media platform but also as a trusted travel information hub.
4	Respondents who expressed willingness to recommend Lake Toba to others	High/Positive	The willingness to recommend indicates a strong word-of-mouth effect, showing that Instagram content translates into advocacy, which amplifies promotional impact beyond direct viewers.
5	Respondents' perception of Instagram content (unique, interesting, positive)	High/Positive	Instagram successfully creates a positive image of Lake Toba as an engaging tourism experience, strengthening its branding as a unique destination.

Instagram creates a favorable image between Lake Toba and a tourism experience that is unique and interesting. Numerous respondents as well indicated that they would praise Lake Toba to others and this demonstrates the influence of social media in promotion by word of mouth. Perception of Tourism Content on Instagram. 57% of the respondents indicated that they tend to see content about Lake Toba on Instagram with the remaining being neutral in their viewpoint A total of 85% respondents indicated that they use Instagram as the main source of information on travelling.

Instagram's Role in Lake Toba Tourism Promotion

The results of the conducted research indicate that Instagram is one of the most significant tools influencing tourists perceptions and behavioral intentions to Lake

Toba. This value of 85 percent as the majority of the responded are considered the main source of tourism information is consistent with previous researchers highlighting the increased prevalence of the use of visual social media as the primary means of tourism information (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; Chung & Koo, 2015). This indicates that Instagram is no longer a nice-to-have communication element but it has become a part and parcel of the destination marketing programs, especially where the destination is a visual marvel that draws people like Lake Toba.

Theoretically, the findings enhance the applicability of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and destination branding theory in online tourism. The willingness of respondents to refer other people to Lake Toba after reading content on the Instagram page exemplifies how e-WOM functions within the social media to broaden the promotion campaign without necessarily requiring managerial action. Furthermore, the relevance, trustworthiness, and uniqueness of Instagram content are associated with a stronger brand image, which is how digital stories are critical in the process of destination identity development (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Concurrently, there are a few constraints of the findings. Whereas 57 percent of the respondents said that they were frequently exposed to Lake Toba content, the other 43 percent said they were less often exposed. This is the gap that demonstrates the algorithmic difficulties of Instagram, where the content is ranked and the time when it is posted matter greatly as well as the engagement of users. Relying on one platform is not risky as well because the alteration in the policies of the platform or the behavior of the users may undermine the visibility of the destination. So, even though Instagram is good, one should not consider it as an independent strategy but as a component of a bigger digital ecosystem.

In practical terms, the findings are of great implications to destination managers and tourism stakeholders in Lake Toba. The level of interest and desire to visit rates created in Instagram also emphasize the need to invest in professional content and collaborate with influencers, as well as use such interactive elements as Reels and Stories to maintain attention levels. Nonetheless, the promotion mix is also important to diversify. The addition of Instagram campaigns to the other ones, including TikTok, YouTube Shorts, or even Facebook, will allow increasing the audience base and minimize the potential risks caused by the dependence on a single platform. Moreover, the partnership with the communities and companies to create authentic content may bolster the credibility and originality of the digital identity of Lake Toba.

Lastly, this paper indicates that Instagram is indeed effective when it comes to marketing Lake Toba, but it also suggests that further studies are needed to address the long-term effects, i.e., whether people actually visit the destination or not, and whether they are satisfied or not with the experiences that they have been given by the social media. The assessment of these dimensions will give a more comprehensive picture of how digital promotions will impact sustainable development as a tourist destination.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study entitled "Analysis of the Influence of the Use of Instagram Social Media in the Promotion of Lake Toba Tourism Objects 2024", it can be concluded that Instagram has a significant influence in promoting Lake Toba tourist destinations. The use of Instagram as a promotional social media has been proven to increase brand awareness and encourage interest and decisions to visit Lake Toba in 2024. Most respondents stated that they were interested in visiting Lake Toba after seeing promotional content on Instagram, which shows the effectiveness of this platform as a digital marketing tool. Instagram also creates positive associations with the image of Lake Toba and facilitates word of mouth

promotion through sharing content and tourism recommendations. Therefore, tourist destination managers are advised to continue to optimize the use of Instagram in promotional strategies in order to increase the number of tourist visits sustainably.

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