



Analysis of the Influence of the Use of Instagram Social Media in the Promotion

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of Instagram-based tourism promotion on destination awareness and visitation intention toward Lake Toba in the post-pandemic tourism context. A quantitative survey approach was employed involving 49 respondents who actively use Instagram as a source of tourism information. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The findings reveal that Instagram serves as a primary tourism information source for most respondents and significantly contributes to destination awareness, travel interest, and destination consideration. More than 80% of respondents reported increased interest in visiting Lake Toba after exposure to promotional content, while positive perceptions of content credibility and relevance strengthened destination image and recommendation intentions. The study also demonstrates the role of Instagram in encouraging electronic word-of-mouth behavior, thereby extending destination visibility beyond direct promotional efforts. These findings highlight the importance of visual social media as a strategic tool for destination branding and tourism marketing. The study provides theoretical and practical insights for tourism stakeholders seeking to enhance destination competitiveness through digital promotion strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid digitalization of tourism has fundamentally transformed how destinations communicate with potential visitors and build competitive advantages in increasingly crowded tourism markets. Social media platforms have become critical instruments for destination marketing organizations because they facilitate real-time communication, user-generated content creation, and interactive engagement between destinations and tourists (Skinner, 2022; Guerreiro et al., 2024; Kumar & Barua, 2024). In particular, visual-based social networking platforms have emerged as influential channels in shaping destination image, travel inspiration, and tourist decision-making processes. Recent studies indicate that digital tourism promotion has shifted from traditional one-way communication toward participatory and co-created experiences, where tourists actively contribute to destination branding

through content sharing, reviews, and recommendations (Buhalis et al., 2023; Shuvo & Islam, 2024; Sigala, 2023; Wang et al., 2022).

Among various social media platforms, Instagram occupies a strategic position due to its emphasis on visual storytelling, short-form video content, and algorithm-driven engagement mechanisms. The platform enables tourism destinations to present attractive visual narratives capable of stimulating emotional responses and travel intentions among potential visitors (Joseph et al., 2024; Cheung et al., 2022; Huimin & Albattat, 2024). Research has consistently demonstrated that Instagram-generated content influences destination awareness, perceived attractiveness, destination image formation, and behavioral intentions toward travel (Kilipiri et al., 2023; Tešin et al., 2022; Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020). The increasing popularity of Instagram Reels, Stories, and influencer-generated content has further strengthened the platform's role in shaping tourism consumption patterns, particularly among younger generations who rely heavily on social media for travel information acquisition (Yuan et al., 2022; Hauerholt & Lehmann, 2023).

The growing significance of social media in tourism marketing has become even more apparent in the post-pandemic environment. The COVID-19 crisis disrupted global tourism activities and forced destination managers to adopt digital communication strategies to maintain visibility and engagement with potential tourists during periods of restricted mobility (Giannoukou & Kougia, 2024). Consequently, social media platforms evolved from supplementary marketing tools into essential instruments for tourism recovery and destination resilience (Akhtar et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Fyall et al., 2022). Digital tourism promotion enabled destinations to sustain relationships with audiences, communicate safety information, and rebuild travel confidence after prolonged disruptions. As a result, understanding the effectiveness of social media promotion has become increasingly important for destinations seeking sustainable tourism recovery (Hysa et al., 2022; Seyedabolghasemi et al., 2022; Kilipiri et al., 2023).

Within the Indonesian tourism context, Lake Toba represents one of the country's most strategic super-priority tourism destinations. Beyond its extraordinary natural landscape as the world's largest volcanic lake, Lake Toba possesses distinctive cultural assets associated with Batak heritage, local traditions, and community-based tourism experiences. The Indonesian government has invested substantially in infrastructure development and destination revitalization programs to enhance Lake Toba's international competitiveness (Widianingsih et al., 2023; Sinulingga et al., 2024; Eriza et al., 2024). Despite these efforts, the destination continues to face challenges in maximizing digital marketing opportunities and strengthening its visibility among domestic and international tourists. The increasing competition among tourism destinations in Southeast Asia requires Lake Toba to leverage innovative promotional strategies capable of generating destination awareness and stimulating visitation intentions through digital channels (Ray, 2022; Leong et al., 2024).

Previous studies have extensively examined the role of social media in tourism promotion. Existing research has explored the influence of social media marketing on destination image (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Aljumah et al., 2022), travel planning behavior (Yuan et al., 2022), tourist engagement (Cuomo et al., 2021), electronic word-of-mouth effectiveness (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023), influencer marketing (Kilipiri et al., 2023), and digital destination branding (Lacarcel & Huete, 2023). Other studies have investigated Instagram's role in consumer purchase intentions and brand awareness development within broader digital marketing contexts (Hien & Nhu, 2022; Park et al., 2022). These studies collectively suggest that social media contributes significantly to tourism promotion outcomes.

However, several limitations remain evident in the current literature. First, most tourism social media studies focus primarily on destination image formation or travel planning behavior, while relatively limited attention has been given to the integrated relationship between Instagram exposure, destination brand awareness, and visitation intentions within post-pandemic tourism recovery contexts. Second, empirical investigations specifically addressing Indonesia's super-priority tourism destinations remain scarce, despite the strategic importance of these destinations for national tourism development. Third, previous studies frequently emphasize influencer marketing and user-generated content separately, while insufficiently examining how regular promotional content distributed through Instagram contributes simultaneously to brand awareness development and tourist behavioral intentions. Consequently, there remains a need for empirical evidence that explains how Instagram functions as a comprehensive promotional ecosystem influencing multiple stages of tourist decision-making.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining the influence of Instagram-based tourism promotion on Lake Toba tourism in the post-pandemic period. Drawing upon destination branding theory, electronic word-of-mouth theory, and digital tourism marketing perspectives, the study investigates how exposure to Instagram promotional content contributes to destination awareness, destination perception, travel interest, and visitation intentions among potential tourists (Çelik & Aslan, 2025; Aziz & Alam, 2024). Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on destination image or social media engagement metrics, this research simultaneously analyzes the interconnected effects of Instagram exposure on brand awareness formation and travel decision-making processes within one of Indonesia's most important tourism destinations.

The novelty of this study lies in three key aspects. First, it integrates destination branding and electronic word-of-mouth perspectives to explain how Instagram promotion influences both cognitive and behavioral tourism outcomes. Second, it provides empirical evidence from Lake Toba as a super-priority tourism destination undergoing post-pandemic tourism recovery. Third, it evaluates Instagram not merely as a communication platform but as a strategic promotional mechanism capable of transforming destination awareness into travel intentions and advocacy behavior. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of Instagram social media promotion on enhancing Lake Toba's brand awareness and stimulating tourist visitation intentions. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to digital tourism marketing literature and practically to the development of more effective social media promotion strategies for sustainable destination management.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the influence of Instagram-based tourism promotion on destination brand awareness and tourist visitation intentions toward Lake Toba. Quantitative methods are particularly appropriate for investigating relationships between promotional exposure and behavioral responses because they enable the systematic measurement of attitudes, perceptions, and intentions across a defined population (Maru & Sai Vijay, 2024). The study was designed to assess how exposure to promotional content on Instagram affects tourists' awareness, perceptions, and intentions to visit Lake Toba in the post-pandemic tourism environment.

Research Context

The research was conducted within the context of Lake Toba, one of Indonesia's super-priority tourism destinations. Lake Toba represents a strategic tourism area

characterized by unique natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and increasing government investment in destination development. The post-pandemic recovery period provides a relevant context for examining digital tourism promotion because social media has become a primary channel through which potential tourists obtain travel information and interact with destination-related content. The study specifically focused on Instagram because of its visual-oriented communication features and its growing role in tourism marketing and destination branding.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of individuals who actively use Instagram and have either visited Lake Toba or expressed an interest in visiting the destination. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique suitable for studies requiring participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. To ensure the relevance of the collected data, participants were required to meet three criteria: (1) active Instagram users, (2) individuals who had accessed tourism-related information through Instagram, and (3) individuals who had visited or intended to visit Lake Toba within the previous twelve months.

A total of 49 respondents participated in the survey. The sample was dominated by individuals aged between 20 and 35 years, reflecting the demographic group most actively engaged with social media platforms and digital tourism content. This age profile is consistent with previous tourism marketing studies that identify younger consumers as intensive users of social networking applications for travel planning and destination information searches.

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using digital survey platforms, including Google Forms. Online data collection was selected due to its efficiency in reaching geographically dispersed respondents and its compatibility with the digital behavior of the target population. The survey link was disseminated through Instagram networks, travel-related online communities, and personal social media channels associated with tourism activities.

The questionnaire consisted of structured items measuring respondents' exposure to Lake Toba promotional content on Instagram, perceptions of content relevance and credibility, destination awareness, travel interest, and visitation intentions. Responses were measured using categorical and descriptive indicators that reflected the frequency of exposure, perceived usefulness of information, and behavioral intentions toward the destination. The questionnaire administration took place over a four-week period to ensure adequate participation and response diversity.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

To ensure measurement quality, the research instrument underwent validity and reliability assessment before the main data collection process. Content validity was established through expert review, whereby tourism marketing and research methodology specialists evaluated the questionnaire items for clarity, relevance, and construct representation. This procedure ensured that the instrument adequately reflected the concepts of Instagram promotion, destination awareness, and tourist behavioral intentions.

Reliability assessment was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which is widely applied to evaluate the internal consistency of survey instruments (Hair et al., 2022). A coefficient value exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability and demonstrates that the questionnaire items consistently

measure the intended constructs. The validation and reliability procedures enhanced the credibility and accuracy of the collected data.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Descriptive analysis was employed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics, social media usage patterns, exposure to Lake Toba promotional content, perceptions of Instagram-based tourism marketing, and travel intentions. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to identify dominant response patterns and evaluate the extent to which Instagram contributes to destination awareness and visitation interest.

The analytical process followed three stages. First, survey responses were screened and coded for completeness and consistency. Second, descriptive statistics were generated to summarize key indicators of Instagram usage and promotional exposure. Third, the findings were interpreted within the framework of destination branding theory and electronic word-of-mouth literature to explain how social media promotion influences tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions. The results were presented through tables and narrative explanations to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of Instagram's role in promoting Lake Toba tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings regarding the influence of Instagram-based tourism promotion on Lake Toba. The results are organized into four interrelated dimensions: respondents' characteristics and social media usage, exposure to Lake Toba promotional content on Instagram, the influence of Instagram on destination awareness and visitation intention, and the role of Instagram in strengthening destination image and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). The analysis is based on survey responses from 49 active Instagram users who have utilized social media as a source of tourism information. By examining these dimensions, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram contributes to destination promotion and tourist behavioral intentions in the post-pandemic tourism environment.

Respondent Characteristics and Social Media Usage

The survey involved 49 respondents, all of whom were active social media users. The respondents were predominantly individuals aged between 20 and 35 years, representing a demographic segment that is highly engaged with digital platforms and social networking applications. This age group is particularly relevant because it constitutes one of the largest audiences consuming tourism-related information through online channels.

The findings indicate that social media has become an integral component of tourism information-seeking behavior. All respondents reported active use of social media platforms, confirming the extensive penetration of digital communication technologies within the target population. More importantly, 85% of respondents identified Instagram as their primary source of tourism-related information. This finding demonstrates that Instagram has evolved beyond a social networking platform and functions as a significant source of travel inspiration, destination discovery, and tourism planning.

The high reliance on Instagram suggests that visual content, user interactions, and platform accessibility have contributed to its effectiveness as a tourism communication channel. Consequently, tourism destinations such as Lake Toba increasingly depend on Instagram to reach prospective visitors and maintain engagement with tourism audiences.

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

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Active social media users	49	100
Use Instagram as a tourism information source	42	85
Frequently exposed to Lake Toba promotional content	28	57

Source: Survey data processed by the authors, 2025

As shown in Table 1, Instagram occupies a dominant position in respondents' tourism information search behavior. The findings further reveal that 57% of respondents frequently encountered promotional content related to Lake Toba on Instagram. This indicates that Lake Toba maintains a relatively visible digital presence on the platform. However, 43% of respondents reported less frequent exposure, suggesting opportunities for improving promotional reach and content distribution strategies.

Exposure to Lake Toba Tourism Content on Instagram

The second aspect of the analysis focused on the extent to which respondents were exposed to tourism-related content concerning Lake Toba. Exposure is a critical component of destination marketing because awareness and interest can only be developed when potential tourists encounter promotional messages.

The results indicate that a majority of respondents regularly viewed Lake Toba-related content on Instagram. Promotional materials commonly included photographs of natural scenery, cultural attractions, tourism facilities, and visitor experiences. Through repeated exposure, respondents became increasingly familiar with the destination and its tourism offerings. The frequency of exposure demonstrates that Instagram has successfully facilitated the dissemination of tourism information to a broad audience. The platform's visual orientation allows destination managers to communicate the attractiveness of Lake Toba effectively through images, short videos, and interactive content formats.

Table 2. Exposure and Perceptions of Lake Toba Tourism Content

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Frequently exposed to Lake Toba tourism content	57
Search tourism information through Instagram	85
Positive perception of tourism content	High/Positive
Perceived content relevance	High/Positive
Perceived content credibility	High/Positive

Source: Survey data processed by the authors, 2025

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that respondents generally perceived the tourism content positively. Promotional materials were considered relevant to their travel interests and sufficiently informative to support destination evaluation. Respondents also regarded the content as credible, suggesting that Instagram serves not only as a promotional medium but also as a trusted information source. The positive evaluation of content quality is important because relevance and credibility influence how audiences process promotional messages. Content perceived as trustworthy is more likely to shape favorable destination perceptions and encourage behavioral responses.

Instagram and Destination Awareness Development

The analysis further examined the contribution of Instagram promotion to destination awareness. Destination awareness represents a fundamental stage in the

tourist decision-making process because potential visitors must first recognize and remember a destination before considering it as a travel option.

The survey findings demonstrate that Instagram significantly contributes to increasing awareness of Lake Toba. Respondents reported becoming more familiar with the destination after viewing promotional content. The combination of visual storytelling, destination imagery, and user engagement mechanisms enabled Instagram to strengthen respondents' recognition of Lake Toba as an attractive tourism destination.

The findings also suggest that promotional content successfully communicated the unique characteristics of Lake Toba. Respondents associated the destination with natural beauty, distinctive cultural experiences, and recreational opportunities. These associations indicate that Instagram promotion contributes to the formation of favorable destination perceptions. The observed increase in awareness reflects the effectiveness of digital destination marketing strategies. By consistently exposing users to destination-related content, Instagram enables tourism managers to maintain destination visibility within competitive tourism markets.

Influence of Instagram Promotion on Visit Intention

One of the central objectives of this study was to examine whether Instagram promotion influences tourists' intentions to visit Lake Toba. The findings reveal a strong relationship between exposure to Instagram content and visitation interest.

More than 80% of respondents reported being interested in visiting Lake Toba after viewing tourism-related content on Instagram. Similarly, more than 80% indicated that Lake Toba had become one of their preferred travel destinations. These findings suggest that promotional content effectively stimulates travel motivation and encourages destination consideration.

Table 3. Influence of Instagram Promotion on Travel Intention

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Interested in visiting Lake Toba after viewing Instagram content	>80
Included Lake Toba in travel destination plans	>80
Perceived content as relevant	High/Positive
Perceived content as trustworthy	High/Positive
Reported increased destination awareness	High/Positive

Source: Survey data processed by the authors, 2025

The results indicate that Instagram promotion influences multiple stages of the travel decision-making process. Exposure to destination content not only increases awareness but also encourages active consideration of Lake Toba as a future travel destination. Respondents who perceived the content as relevant and trustworthy demonstrated stronger intentions to visit.

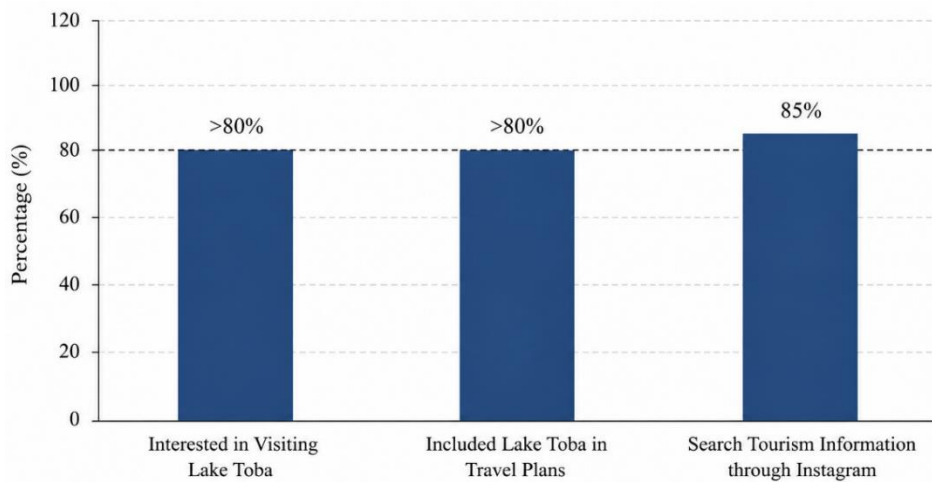


Figure 2. Influence of Instagram Promotion on Travel Interest and Destination Consideration

Source: Survey data processed by the authors, 2025

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between Instagram exposure and tourism-related behavioral outcomes. The results show that more than 80% of respondents expressed interest in visiting Lake Toba after being exposed to Instagram promotional content. A similar proportion included Lake Toba among their preferred travel destinations. In addition, 85% of respondents reported relying on Instagram as a tourism information source. The relatively high percentages across all indicators indicate that Instagram contributes not only to information acquisition but also to the development of destination preference and travel intention.

The findings further demonstrate that tourism-related content distributed through Instagram successfully reaches audiences who are actively seeking travel information. The consistency between information-search behavior (85%) and destination consideration (>80%) suggests that exposure to destination content may facilitate the transition from awareness to travel planning. These results indicate that Instagram serves as an important channel within the tourist decision-making process, particularly during the information search and destination evaluation stages

Destination Image and Electronic Word-of-Mouth Effects

The final analysis explored the role of Instagram in shaping destination image and encouraging electronic word-of-mouth behavior. Destination image refers to the set of perceptions and associations that individuals hold regarding a tourism destination. The findings reveal that Instagram contributes significantly to the formation of a positive image of Lake Toba. Respondents described the destination as attractive, unique, and worthy of consideration as a travel destination. Positive perceptions emerged through continuous exposure to visually appealing tourism content.

Table 4. Destination Image and Electronic Word-of-Mouth Outcomes

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Frequent exposure to Lake Toba content	57
Use Instagram as tourism information source	85
Positive destination image perception	High/Positive
Willingness to recommend Lake Toba	High/Positive
Positive tourism experience expectations	High/Positive

Source: Survey data processed by the authors, 2025

An important finding concerns respondents' willingness to recommend Lake Toba to others. The majority indicated positive intentions to share information and recommend the destination within their social networks. This outcome demonstrates the emergence of electronic word-of-mouth effects resulting from exposure to Instagram promotion.

The willingness to recommend Lake Toba extends the impact of promotional activities beyond direct audiences. Individuals exposed to tourism content become informal promoters who contribute to destination visibility through interpersonal communication and online sharing activities. Such behavior increases promotional reach and enhances the effectiveness of destination marketing efforts. The findings further suggest that destination image and recommendation behavior are closely related. Respondents who developed favorable perceptions of Lake Toba were more likely to express intentions to recommend the destination. Consequently, Instagram promotion not only increases awareness and travel interest but also encourages advocacy behavior that strengthens destination promotion organically.

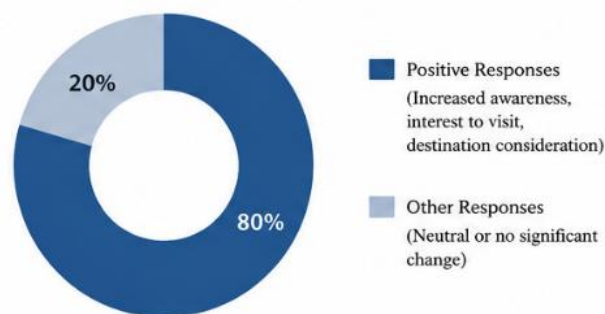


Figure 3. Positive Tourism Responses Following Exposure to Instagram Promotional Content

Source: Survey data processed by the authors, 2025

Figure 3 demonstrates that exposure to Instagram promotional content generated predominantly positive responses among respondents. Approximately 80% reported increased awareness, stronger interest in visiting Lake Toba, and greater destination consideration, while only 20% indicated neutral responses. The predominance of positive responses suggests that Instagram serves as an effective promotional platform capable of strengthening destination image and encouraging favorable behavioral outcomes among potential tourists.

The findings also indicate that positive destination perceptions are associated with respondents' willingness to recommend Lake Toba to others. As positive evaluations increase, respondents become more likely to engage in informal destination promotion through personal recommendations and social media interactions. This pattern highlights the potential of Instagram to amplify tourism promotion beyond direct exposure through the development of electronic word-of-mouth communication.

Instagram as a Strategic Mechanism for Destination Awareness, Travel Intention, and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The findings demonstrate that Instagram functions as more than a communication platform; it operates as a strategic mechanism that influences destination awareness, travel intention, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) behavior among potential tourists. The high proportion of respondents relying on Instagram as a tourism information source confirms the growing importance of visual social media in contemporary travel decision-making processes. This finding is consistent with recent studies suggesting that social media platforms have become primary channels

through which tourists search for information, evaluate destinations, and develop travel preferences (Yuan et al., 2022; Shuvo & Islam, 2024; Lacarcel & Huete, 2023). The results reinforce the argument that digital tourism promotion is increasingly shaped by visually driven content capable of generating both cognitive and emotional engagement.

The positive relationship between Instagram exposure and destination awareness supports previous findings that social media content contributes significantly to destination image formation and brand recognition (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Cuomo et al., 2021). Respondents' increased familiarity with Lake Toba following exposure to promotional content indicates that Instagram facilitates destination visibility in highly competitive tourism environments. Unlike traditional promotional channels, Instagram enables continuous interaction through images, videos, stories, and user-generated content, creating repeated exposure that strengthens destination recall (Mohamed, 2025). This finding extends previous destination branding research by demonstrating that awareness development in the post-pandemic tourism context is increasingly dependent on sustained digital engagement rather than conventional marketing communication alone.

The study also reveals that exposure to Instagram content contributes to stronger visitation intentions. This finding aligns with studies reporting that social media influences tourists' behavioral intentions by reducing information uncertainty and increasing destination attractiveness (Tešin et al., 2022; Hauerholt & Lehmann, 2023; Kilipiri et al., 2023). The relevance and credibility attributed to promotional content by respondents suggest that Instagram serves as both an information source and a persuasive medium. This outcome is particularly important because previous research has emphasized that trustworthiness is a critical determinant of tourism decision-making in digital environments (Madinga et al., 2020; Gursoy et al., 2024). The present study contributes to this literature by demonstrating that destination awareness and travel intention emerge simultaneously through Instagram-based promotional exposure.

Another significant finding concerns the emergence of electronic word-of-mouth behavior. Respondents who developed positive perceptions of Lake Toba also expressed a willingness to recommend the destination to others. This observation supports recent evidence indicating that social media users often become destination advocates when promotional content generates favorable emotional and cognitive responses (Kilipiri et al., 2023; Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023; Sigala, 2023). The result extends e-WOM theory by illustrating how destination promotion on Instagram can transform passive audiences into active promoters, thereby amplifying destination visibility beyond direct managerial communication.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the integration of destination branding theory and electronic word-of-mouth theory within the context of digital tourism marketing. While previous studies have often examined destination awareness, travel intention, or e-WOM independently, this research demonstrates their interconnected nature within a single promotional ecosystem. The novelty of the study lies in its examination of Instagram as a mechanism linking destination awareness, travel intention, and advocacy behavior in a post-pandemic tourism recovery context, particularly within a super-priority tourism destination in Indonesia.

Practically, the findings suggest that destination managers should prioritize the development of visually appealing, credible, and interactive Instagram content. The use of short-form videos, influencer collaborations, user-generated content, and authentic storytelling may enhance destination visibility and engagement (Buhalis et al., 2023; Massari et al., 2024; Afren, 2024). Tourism stakeholders should also

diversify digital promotion strategies across complementary platforms while maintaining Instagram as a central communication channel.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to 49 respondents, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the analysis relied primarily on descriptive data, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships between promotional exposure and behavioral outcomes. Third, the study focused exclusively on Instagram and did not compare the effectiveness of other social media platforms.

Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, incorporate inferential statistical techniques, and compare multiple social media platforms to identify differences in promotional effectiveness. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine whether intentions generated through Instagram exposure translate into actual visitation behavior and long-term destination loyalty. Such investigations would provide deeper insights into the role of digital promotion in supporting sustainable tourism development and destination competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of Instagram-based promotion on destination awareness, visitation intention, and electronic word-of-mouth behavior in the context of Lake Toba tourism. The findings demonstrate that Instagram has become a primary source of tourism information and plays a significant role in shaping tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions. Exposure to promotional content contributed to increased destination awareness, stronger interest in visiting Lake Toba, and greater willingness to recommend the destination to others. These findings confirm the strategic role of visual social media in supporting destination branding and tourism promotion in the post-pandemic environment.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the integration of destination branding and electronic word-of-mouth perspectives by demonstrating how Instagram simultaneously influences awareness, intention, and advocacy behavior. Practically, the findings suggest that tourism stakeholders should prioritize visually engaging, credible, and interactive content to strengthen destination competitiveness and audience engagement. Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its relatively small sample size and reliance on descriptive analysis. Future research should employ larger samples, comparative platform analyses, and advanced statistical approaches to examine causal relationships and long-term behavioral outcomes associated with digital tourism promotion.

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