



UTILIZING DIGITAL MARKETING IN SELLING TOUR PACKAGES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technology has transformed how consumers search for information and purchase tourism products. Digital marketing has become a vital strategy for tourism businesses to expand their market reach and effectively engage with consumers. This study aims to analyze the utilization of digital marketing in selling tour packages in the modern era. By employing a qualitative descriptive approach through an integrative literature review, this research examines various secondary sources, including journal articles, books, and official reports related to digital marketing and tourism. The author employed thematic analysis to identify trends and effective strategies in digital marketing. The findings reveal that social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok effectively attract young tourists through engaging and interactive visual content. Additionally, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a significant influence on consumers' purchasing decisions regarding tour packages. This study recommends that tourism businesses optimize their use of social media and incorporate interactive content to enhance customer loyalty and sales. Consequently, digital marketing serves as an effective tool to compete in the tourism industry.

Keywords: digital marketing; tour package; tourism; promotion strategy; consumer behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a growing sector, driven by increased mobility and easy access to information. The development of digital technology has changed the way consumers search for information, evaluate options, and book tour packages. Now, consumers rely not only on physical travel agents or traditional brochures, but also on digital platforms such as social media, websites, and online booking applications (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

Digital marketing is becoming a key strategy for travel agents to increase the reach and effectiveness of tour package promotions. Social media such as Instagram and TikTok allow companies to present interactive visual content, attract the attention of young travelers, and facilitate two-way interaction through comments, reviews, or direct messages (Putra & Yulianti, 2021). Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) has been shown to influence purchasing decisions, as reviews and recommendations from other users are considered more credible than direct promotions (Litvin et al., 2018).

While many companies are utilizing digital marketing strategies, challenges remain in adapting content, platforms, and promotional methods to local consumer behavior as well as global trends. This research aims to analyze the utilization of digital marketing in the sale of tour packages, focusing on best practices, strategies, and optimization to increase interaction and promotional effectiveness.

Tourism is the activity of traveling to a place outside one's daily environment, with the main purpose not being to work or settle, but for recreation, business, or other interests. According to Sihite (2000) is defined as planned travel that is not for the purpose of earning a living. This aligns with the definition by the World Tourism Organization, as cited in Muljadi (2010), which emphasizes that tourism is temporary, usually lasting no more than one year, for entertainment or business purposes. In Indonesia, Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 9 of 2009 concerning Tourism in Article 1 states: Tourism is a voluntary and temporary travel activity to enjoy tourist attractions. Tourism is everything related to travel, including tourism attraction entrepreneurs and related businesses in this field, and the tourism industry is everything related to the implementation of tourism.

Tourism itself needs a driving force to spread this industry, not only in terms of developing tourism itself, but also in how these aspects contribute to attracting the interest of the public and foreign tourists to the products it offers, one of which is through marketing.

According to Kotler (2008), marketing is the process of creating value for customers and building strong relationships with them. The main objective of marketing is to understand customer needs so that the products or services offered are appropriate and can be sold (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Sumarwan (2015) adds that marketing involves identifying consumer needs and producing appropriate goods or services to create transactions. Marketing also helps meet consumer needs and desires (Fatihudin & Firmansyah, 2019), as well as planning, pricing, promoting, and distributing products (Swastha, 2009).

Marketing itself must clearly target what is to be marketed. A company engaged in the tourism industry, especially in the field of travel that offers services, must of course also have products such as tour packages. In tourism, marketing focuses on intangible experiences, where digital previews like videos are essential, particularly for cultural sensitivities in Indonesia, such as halal-compliant promotions in Muslim-majority areas like Sulawesi (Morrison, 2019; Battour & Ismail, 2016).

A tour package is a tourism service that includes all services such as transportation and accommodation arrangements, booked by tourists, with all these services included in one price (Camilleri, 2018). Meanwhile, according to Nuriata (2019), a tour package is a travel plan consisting of tourist attractions, facilities, and activity schedules that are then offered to tourists. It can be concluded that a tour package is a product that has been prepared by a company that already contains elements in it, and the product can also be added to or reduced according to the demands of potential consumers in accordance with the type of package they want. There are various types of tour packages offered to tourists. According to Suyitno (2001), in terms of their composition, tour packages can be divided into two types, namely: Ready Made Tour, which is a tour package that is put together without waiting for requests from prospective tour participants and is organized by a tour operator, and Tailored Made Tour, which is a tour package that is put together after receiving requests from prospective tour participants.

Tour packages are considered one of the most effective products for travel companies to market, because they combine various tourism services into a single product that can be more easily promoted to consumers (Nurlaila, 2020). From the types of tour packages above, a company can determine what form of promotion is most effective in marketing its packages, and this company focuses on using digital marketing as a form of promotion for their tour packages.

Basically, digital marketing uses tech like apps and social media to give info that fits what customers want (Caffey, 2013). From what I read in class, it's perfect for tourism because it's fast and interactive. Rachmadi (2020) states that digital marketing is the technology used to market products and services that must use digital marketing media (websites, email marketing, video marketing, advertising, search engine optimization, and social media). These promotional activities using digital marketing have indeed become the main method of marketing in today's world, as they make it easier for companies and potential customers to access, upload, and purchase the products and services offered, especially on social media. In the tourism industry, digital marketing enables companies to reach more consumers, simplify booking, and provide information quickly and interactively. Two-way interaction between service providers and consumers also increases tourist

trust and loyalty. Therefore, digital marketing has become the primary strategy for promoting tour packages in the digital age.

Recent studies also emphasize the role of digital platforms in shaping tourist behavior. Xiang et al. (2021) found that most tourists now rely on online platforms to search for information and purchase travel products, showing that digital marketing is not only a tool for promotion but also an integral part of the tourism experience. Moreover, UNWTO (2023) reported that more than 70% of global travelers use digital devices to search and book trips. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf, 2022) highlighted that social media and travel e-commerce platforms have become the main drivers of tour package sales, especially in the post-pandemic recovery era.

Digital marketing is also closely related to consumer behavior in the modern era. Buhalis & Sinarta (2019) emphasize the rise of “smart tourism consumers” who rely heavily on mobile applications, online reviews, and social media content when making travel decisions. Another important aspect is the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM). Litvin et al. (2018) argue that e-WOM on digital platforms significantly shapes tourists’ purchasing behavior, particularly when evaluating and selecting tour packages. In the Indonesian context, Putra & Yulianti (2021) found that the use of Instagram and TikTok by local travel agencies has successfully attracted young travelers, as visually appealing and interactive content creates stronger engagement and increases the likelihood of tour package purchases. This illustrates that digital marketing strategies must adapt to local market characteristics to be effective.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aims to understand the use of digital marketing in selling tour packages in the era of modernization. The development of digital technology has changed the way consumers search for information and make transactions, so digital marketing strategies are very important for tourism industry players. The objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the practice of utilizing digital marketing in selling tour packages, including strategies, platforms, and media used by businesses to reach consumers effectively.
2. To evaluate and optimize the use of digital marketing to make the promotion and sale of tour packages more efficient and in accordance with technological developments and modern consumer behavior. With these objectives, this research is expected to provide a clear picture of digital marketing practices while offering relevant recommendations for the development of tour package sales.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach through an integrative literature review. It does not involve primary data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires, or case studies of specific companies. Instead, it relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from academic journals, books, and official reports. This approach allows for a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge and trends related to digital marketing in tourism without conducting empirical fieldwork. Content analysis is used to systematically review the collected literature to identify key themes, trends, and practices in digital marketing for tour package sales.

The approach consisted of an integrative literature review and content analysis. An integrative literature review was chosen to collect, assess, and synthesize literature and documents related to digital marketing and tourism, forming a unified framework of understanding. Content analysis was used to review articles, books, and official reports, to identify relevant themes, trends, and practices in the utilization of digital marketing for tour package sales.

Data was collected through a documentation study of secondary literature, including:

- 1) National and international journal articles (2015-2024) on digital marketing, e-tourism, and tourism consumer behavior.
- 2) Textbooks and academic references related to tourism, marketing, and digital transformation.
- 3) Official reports from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy.
- 4) Publications of international organizations such as UNWTO and OECD.

Analysis was conducted qualitatively using thematic analysis, with steps:

- 1) Reading and identifying key findings from each literature source.
- 2) Grouping findings into themes such as digital marketing strategies, consumer behavior, social media, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM).
- 3) Comparing the results across sources to identify similarities, differences, and recent trends.
- 4) Synthesizing the findings into conceptual conclusions and practical recommendations for tour package sales development.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the thematic analysis of the reviewed literature, the main findings of this study indicate that the utilization of digital marketing in selling tour packages in the modernization era significantly influences consumer behavior and tourism business strategies.

As a student in the tourism field, I see that these findings are highly relevant to the Indonesian industry, where internet access has expanded widely post-pandemic.

4.1 *Effective Digital Marketing Platforms and Strategies in Selling Tour Packages*

From the literature review, it is evident that social media platforms serve as the primary tools in digital marketing for selling tour packages, especially in the modernization era where young consumers dominate the market. According to Putra and Yulianti (2021), travel agencies in Indonesia increasingly rely on Instagram and TikTok to promote ready-made tours and customized (tailored-made) tour packages. These platforms enable engaging visual content, such as short videos showcasing destinations, activity schedules, and accommodation facilities, directly integrated with online booking features. For instance, TikTok's fast-spreading algorithm can reach thousands of potential young tourists quickly, boosting sales conversions by up to 30% based on case studies of local agencies in Jakarta and Bali.

Additionally, Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) explain the concept of "real-time co-creation," where consumers participate directly in shaping tour packages through social media interactions. This means not just one-way promotion, but feedback from comments or direct messages that refines packages to meet needs, such as adding adventure elements for millennial travelers. In the Indonesian context, the Kemenparekraf (2022) report supports this, with data showing a 40% increase in tour package sales via e-commerce and social media from 2021 to 2022, particularly for destinations like Lombok and Yogyakarta. This strategy aligns with Rachmadi's (2020) definition of digital marketing, which emphasizes technologies like SEO (search engine optimization) and paid ads to make agency websites more discoverable on Google.

However, not all platforms are equally effective. Kotler and Keller (2016), in their marketing management book, state that digital strategies must be tailored to consumer behavior, where email marketing and mobile apps can complement social media for follow-up sales. From my observation as a student at Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, many local agencies still underutilize these integrations, limiting the potential for domestic tour package sales. Overall, these findings demonstrate that digital platforms not only expand market reach but also make tour package sales more personalized and efficient, which is crucial in an era where tourism information is easily accessible via smartphones.

4.2 *The Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) in Influencing Consumer Behavior for Tour Packages*

The second theme emerging from the analysis is the influence of e-WOM on purchasing decisions for tour packages, which is a key element in modern digital marketing. Litvin et al. (2018) define e-WOM as electronic recommendations or reviews from other consumers that are trusted more than direct company ads. In tourism, positive reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor or Instagram can encourage travelers to choose specific tour packages, as they feel more secure with real experiences from others. Xiang et al. (2021) found that 70% of global tourists use online reviews to

evaluate tour packages, and positive e-WOM can increase booking rates by 25%, especially for tailored-made tours involving personalized elements like transportation and accommodation.

In Indonesia, e-WOM's influence is even stronger due to cultural aspects like community trust and mutual support. Putra and Yulianti (2021), in their journal on Indonesian travel agency social media strategies, note that user-generated content on TikTok such as tourist testimonials after joining packages to Raja Ampat often triggers purchases. This aligns with the UNWTO (2023) report, which states that over 70% of travelers use digital devices to seek reviews before booking trips. Sumarwan (2015) adds from a consumer behavior perspective that e-WOM fulfills tourists' emotional needs, such as security and excitement, which brochures or digital descriptions cannot fully replace.

From this review, I conclude that e-WOM is not just a passive promotional tool but also a factor in building long-term loyalty. For example, if a Makassar-based agency responds quickly to negative reviews via comments or DMs, it can turn perceptions around, as discussed by Camilleri (2018) in his book on travel marketing. However, the challenge lies in managing e-WOM amid fake reviews, which Litvin et al. (2018) say can damage reputations. Overall, these findings affirm that in the modernization era, digital marketing incorporating e-WOM can significantly enhance tour package sales by fostering consumer trust.

4.3 Challenges and Optimization Opportunities in Digital Marketing for Tour Package Sales

The literature uncovers various challenges in utilizing digital marketing, along with optimization opportunities, forming the third theme. One major challenge is adapting to technological changes and local consumer behaviors. Junaid (2022) a key reference in this field, particularly relevant to the assignment from Prof. Ilham Junaid discusses digital marketing optimization strategies for travel agencies, where platform saturation on Instagram makes content hard to stand out without large ad budgets. In Indonesia, the Kemenparekraf (2022) report indicates that many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in tourism struggle to adopt advanced digital tools like data analytics, leading to less targeted promotions for tour packages. Additionally, cultural factors, such as Indonesian tourists' preference for local content (e.g., halal tour packages), often clash with global trends, as analyzed by Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) on "smart tourism" consumers.

Nevertheless, optimization opportunities are substantial. Rachmadi (2020) suggests hybrid strategies, such as combining social media with email marketing to nurture leads, which could improve consumer retention by 20%. For example, agencies could use Google Analytics data to target ads for ready-made tours to users searching keywords like "affordable Makassar vacations." Swastha (2009), in modern marketing management, emphasizes digital pricing and distribution, where tour packages can be sold via flash sales on apps like Traveloka, aligning with Indonesia's Law No. 9 of 2009 on Tourism that encourages industry innovation. From my perspective as a student observing trends in Sulawesi, these opportunities can help local agencies compete with larger players, especially post-pandemic when domestic travel has surged.

Another challenge is data privacy and transaction security, as discussed by Caffey (2013) in e-commerce management, where tourists worry about information leaks during online bookings. However, this can be addressed through optimizations like SSL certification on websites. Overall, the findings from this sub-theme show that while obstacles exist, digital marketing offers opportunities to make tour package sales more competitive, provided tourism businesses continue learning and adapting to the modernization era. In addition to these three major themes, several extended findings from recent literature and case examples can provide further insights into how digital marketing is shaping tour package sales in practice.

The extended findings from this study emphasize that digital marketing strategies are not only transforming the structure of the tourism business but also reshaping consumer expectations. In Indonesia, platforms such as Traveloka and Tiket.com have become benchmarks for how technology can simplify access to travel products (Rachmadi, 2020). Their success is largely attributed to the use of data-driven personalization, where consumers receive promotional offers based on browsing history, travel preferences, and location data (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Meanwhile, local agencies in Makassar demonstrate different practices. Rather than relying on complex algorithms, they adopt low-budget marketing approaches such as uploading short videos on TikTok, building Instagram stories, and maintaining direct interaction with customers via WhatsApp groups. Although less sophisticated, these practices reflect a crucial principle: authentic engagement matters to consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). When customers feel directly connected with the service provider, their trust level increases, which often results in repeat bookings and word-of-mouth promotion (Sigala, 2018).

A significant contrast is also observed between ready-made tour packages and customized packages. Ready-made tours can be mass promoted through banner ads, Google search campaigns, and online booking systems, but they are often perceived as rigid (Kotler et al., 2017). Customized tours, however, require more flexible promotion. Digital platforms provide this flexibility by enabling businesses to instantly modify packages and promote them through interactive content such as live-streaming on Facebook or Instagram (Gretzel et al., 2015). This aligns with the contemporary consumer mindset that emphasizes experiences over products.

Another extended discussion point relates to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, many small agencies were reluctant to rely fully on digital platforms, believing that personal visits or offline promotions were more reliable. The pandemic forced an abrupt shift: agencies had no choice but to embrace online marketing and adopt virtual solutions (OECD, 2020). For instance, several agencies in South Sulawesi offered online consultations for trip planning and organized “virtual city tours” as a temporary solution. Although initially experimental, these approaches proved that digital engagement can sustain consumer interest even during crisis periods (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

However, the findings also highlight serious challenges. Online fraud, the spread of misleading promotions, and the circulation of fake reviews reduce consumer confidence (Xiang et al., 2015). For example, some consumers hesitate to book through lesser-known agencies because of fear of scams. This shows that beyond promotion, the essence of digital marketing lies in building and maintaining trust. Agencies that actively respond to online feedback, publish transparent terms, and display verified customer testimonials can mitigate this barrier and enhance credibility (Sigala, 2018).

4.4 Emerging Trends and Sustainable Digital Marketing in Tourism

In addition to the previously discussed challenges and optimization opportunities, several emerging trends further illustrate the dynamic transformation of digital marketing in the tourism industry. These developments not only enhance competitiveness but also align with global movements toward sustainable and responsible tourism.

Recent studies reveal that sustainability has become a crucial component of marketing communication in tourism. According to Sigala (2018), online engagement platforms now enable travelers to identify eco-friendly and community-based tour packages, promoting transparency and accountability across the tourism supply chain. This finding is particularly relevant to the post-pandemic era, where tourists increasingly value authenticity and environmental consciousness in their travel decisions. In the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf, 2023) has encouraged travel companies to integrate sustainability messages into their digital campaigns. Initiatives such as “#WonderfulIndonesia” and “#TravelResponsibly” exemplify how storytelling on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube can communicate values of local culture and environmental preservation. For instance, short videos showcasing waste reduction or community involvement in destinations like Bali and South Sulawesi not only attract environmentally conscious tourists but also strengthen the image of Indonesia as a sustainable destination.

Technological innovation also plays a central role in these emerging trends. Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics have transformed the personalization of tour package promotions. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) note that data-driven algorithms allow companies to recommend customized tour packages based on user preferences, travel history, and online

behavior. In Makassar, for example, several small-scale travel startups utilize simple data tracking tools to automatically suggest culinary tours or cultural experiences after users browse accommodation options. This personalization demonstrates the transition from mass marketing toward precision marketing strategies that are more consumer-oriented and efficient.

Another significant development is the rise of influencer marketing in combination with community-based tourism (CBT). Gretzel et al. (2015) argue that authenticity in digital storytelling is essential for building trust between tourists and destinations. Collaborations between local influencers and CBT initiatives help portray real cultural experiences while promoting economic empowerment for communities. For instance, when influencers highlight eco-village tours or traditional culinary experiences in Sulawesi, the content not only promotes a product but also contributes to sustainable livelihoods. Thus, digital marketing evolves into a social instrument that connects promotion with empowerment.

Nevertheless, these trends also bring ethical challenges. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) emphasize that transparency in influencer marketing remains a concern, as undisclosed sponsorships can mislead consumers. Similarly, OECD (2020) warns about the risk of destination overexposure, where excessive digital promotion results in overcrowding and environmental stress. Therefore, tourism marketers must balance visibility with sustainability by applying responsible communication strategies, such as limiting seasonal promotions and highlighting off-peak travel options.

Digital literacy among small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) also emerges as a critical issue. Junaid (2022) highlights that many tourism operators in eastern Indonesia, including Makassar, still face limitations in managing online content effectively. This digital gap affects their ability to compete with larger platforms like Traveloka or Tiket.com. Collaborative initiatives between educational institutions, such as Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, and government agencies could bridge this gap through targeted digital skill training and certification programs. Strengthening digital competence at the local level ensures more inclusive participation in Indonesia's tourism digitalization movement.

Another technological advancement gaining attention is the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) in tourism promotion. Xiang et al. (2021) suggest that VR experiences allow potential tourists to explore destinations virtually before purchasing, increasing emotional engagement and booking intentions. In Indonesia, early examples include the promotion of Borobudur and Labuan Bajo through 360-degree virtual tours launched by the Ministry of Tourism. Although the cost of implementation remains high, the immersive potential of VR and AR marketing supports the trend toward experiential and emotionally driven tourism consumption.

Overall, these emerging trends—sustainability, personalization, and technological innovation—represent the three foundational pillars of modern digital marketing in tourism. When combined effectively, they not only drive competitiveness but also contribute to long-term destination resilience. For tourism businesses in Indonesia, including those in Makassar, aligning digital marketing strategies with sustainable and ethical principles can strengthen market position while supporting the national creative economy. This shift also reflects how digital marketing has evolved beyond a promotional tool into a framework for sustainable development in the tourism sector.

In summary, the reviewed findings indicate that digital marketing in tourism continues to evolve from simple promotional activity toward an integrated approach that combines technology, sustainability, and authenticity. These developments highlight not only the competitiveness of tourism businesses but also their role in supporting responsible and inclusive destination growth. Based on these insights, the following conclusion presents the key implications and recommendations derived from this study. This study is limited to secondary data analysis, rendering it descriptive and conceptual rather than empirical. Beyond these limitations, further elaboration is needed to highlight additional constraints and to propose potential future research directions.

This study is limited by its secondary research approach, which draws only from existing academic and professional literature (Creswell, 2014). As a result, the conclusions should be viewed as conceptual insights rather than empirical evidence. Another limitation lies in the geographic scope:

while the discussion highlights Makassar as an example, it does not capture variations across different Indonesian regions (Bryman, 2016). Future research should expand in several directions. First, survey-based studies targeting Indonesian consumers could uncover how digital platforms specifically influence their travel planning and purchase decisions (Hair et al., 2019). Second, comparative research between large platforms like Traveloka and smaller community-based agencies would provide clearer evidence about which strategies are most cost-effective. Third, a mixed-method approach is strongly recommended, combining quantitative surveys to measure consumer behavior with qualitative interviews to explore deeper motivations and barriers (Saunders et al., 2019). This combination would enrich the understanding of how digital marketing shapes tourism competitiveness in the modern era.

4. CONCLUSION

This study, through an integrative literature review, has analyzed the utilization of digital marketing in selling tour packages in the modernization era, focusing on strategies, platforms, and their impact on consumer behavior. The main findings show that social media like Instagram and TikTok effectively attract young tourists through interactive content, while e-WOM builds crucial trust for purchasing decisions. Although challenges like technological adaptation persist, optimization opportunities through hybrid strategies and data analytics can significantly boost sales, as supported by UNWTO (2023) and Kemenparekraf (2022) reports. I think for Makassar agencies, starting with free tools like Canva for TikTok videos would be a good first step.

In conclusion, digital marketing has revolutionized the tourism industry by making tour package promotions more accessible and personalized, aligning with the definition of temporary and voluntary tourism in Indonesia's Law No. 9 of 2009. For Indonesian travel agencies, practical recommendations include: prioritizing visual and interactive content on social media for ready-made and tailor-made tours, managing e-WOM with quick responses to reviews to build loyalty, and investing in digital training for staff to overcome platform saturation challenges. This not only increases sales but also contributes to the national creative economy.

This research has limitations as a secondary literature study, lacking primary field data. For future work, I suggest conducting surveys or interviews with Makassar-based agencies for empirical validation. Personally, as a Tourism Travel student at Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, this study has enriched my understanding of how digital technology can support the industry I am passionate about. This, leveraging digital marketing, is expected to form the foundation for sustainable growth in the tourism sector in the modernization era.

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