

AN ANALYSIS OF TOURISM PROMOTION STRATEGIES: ENHANCING DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH CREATIVE

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Abstract

This article analyzes tourism promotion strategies by focusing on the role of creative marketing in enhancing destination competitiveness. The rapid development of digital technology has shifted promotional efforts from conventional models to more participatory, story-driven, and community-based approaches. Employing a qualitative-descriptive method with a case study design, this study draws on data collected from key tourism destinations in Indonesia, including Pangandaran, Labuan Bajo, and Nglanggeran Village. Data analysis followed a thematic approach using manual coding to identify patterns in promotional practices and community engagement. Findings reveal that active participation of local communities particularly MSMEs as digital content creators significantly expands promotional reach while strengthening cultural identity and local economic resilience. The integration of the PESO model (Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned) with digital storytelling, user-generated content (UGC), and cross-stakeholder collaboration contributes to building a distinctive and emotionally resonant destination image. This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on tourism marketing by offering an integrative framework that connects digital creative strategies with grassroots promotional dynamics, providing new insights into sustainable and community-embedded tourism branding.

Keywords: tourism promotion, creative marketing, destination competitiveness

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital media has shifted the paradigm of tourism promotion from traditional methods such as brochures and print advertisements to more interactive and creative strategies that leverage social media, audio content, and direct community participation. Recent findings by Estiana et al. (2024) in Pangandaran demonstrate that training local vendors in the creation of digital content not only expands the promotional reach of destinations but also significantly increases their income. In this community engagement initiative, vendors were taught how to utilize platforms like Instagram and TikTok, create short videos showcasing their products and life stories, and apply basic techniques for producing appealing visual content. As a result, formerly inactive accounts were able to reach hundreds, even thousands, of potential audiences, with a noticeable rise in transactions.

Such empowerment models highlight the need for a paradigm shift in tourism promotion strategies, in which local communities particularly MSMEs such as vendors, artisans, and tourism service providers are no longer treated as passive objects, but rather as primary agents in the marketing narrative. They are not merely “faces” or background elements of a destination, but active content creators, curators of meaningful local stories, and drivers of community-based promotional networks. This active participation fosters a reciprocal relationship between destination promotion and community welfare. The positive impact operates on two levels: on a macro scale, the destination gains wider recognition through more personal and emotional promotional campaigns; on a micro level, local communities directly benefit through increased income, expanded business networks, and enhanced local capacities. Ultimately, this strengthens the community’s economic structure and reduces dependency on top-down promotional efforts led by formal institutions. By integrating local wisdom and community creativity into marketing strategies, this approach fosters a more inclusive, sustainable, and competitive tourism ecosystem. This study aims to examine how



creative digital marketing strategies, particularly those driven by community participation and content-based promotion, contribute to building tourism destination competitiveness in Indonesia.

This approach aligns with similar digital empowerment practices in other tourism villages, such as Resun Village in Lingga, where participatory digital content production training successfully enhanced residents' skills in promoting their destinations (Laksami, 2025). In Pangandaran, the community-based research method used by Asmari et al. emphasized a two-way dialogue in which facilitators acted as collaborators rather than content dictators. As a result, the content produced was more authentic, contextual, and locally accountable. The synergy of this digital collaboration is further strengthened when combined with the PESO promotion model (Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned) or Integrated Marketing Communication, blending local content with institutional campaigns and offline events. For example, a tourism village that launched a hashtag campaign on social media, organized local festivals, and provided storytelling training for vendors successfully created an integrated promotional ecosystem both online and offline that enhanced the destination's image.

Another successful model can be seen in TikTok-based digital content training in Banyuwangi, which enhanced local MSMEs' ability to produce quality content, leading to increased visibility and new market opportunities. Similar programs in Jayapura and Sukabumi also demonstrated how digital marketing training for local content creators, supported by government initiatives, strengthened synergy between communities and institutions while enhancing regional tourism capacity through more professional and impactful content. Thus, the development of promotion strategies as implemented in Pangandaran confirms that empowering local communities as active agents of digital promotion is key to enhancing destination competitiveness. Through training, contemporary storytelling, use of visual platforms, and a holistic digital ecosystem, destinations are not only able to reach broader audiences but also establish a sustainable local creative economy. Practical recommendations include regular training sessions, the use of basic analytic tools for vendors, local content competitions, and a culture of evaluation based on digital metrics and real income gains (Rumawak et al., 2025).

Aligned with this, the use of User-Generated Content (UGC) has proven increasingly effective in shaping prospective tourists' perceptions. A study by Gangga et al. (2023) revealed that emotional content generated by tourists through photos, videos, and personal stories can create positive expectations and enrich travel experiences in Bali. The study also found that emotional UGC had a more significant impact on destination image compared to factual UGC. These findings are consistent with global research by Aboalganam et al. (2025), which emphasized that UGC not only enhances destination image but also mediates tourists' intention to visit. However, the effectiveness of UGC depends heavily on the availability of supportive infrastructure and active community involvement. Tarmidzi et al. (2024) emphasized that without collaboration with local communities such as artisans in Lombok UGC's potential as a digital branding tool cannot be fully realized. Similar findings in other destinations suggest that content quality and credibility largely depend on a locally supportive context for consistent UGC production.

In addition to UGC, digital storytelling through podcasts, videos, and visual narratives introduces new dimensions to tourism promotion. Digital campaigns like "The Heart Beat of Toba" and "Earth Revitalisation" successfully boosted the image of Lake Toba by 53.4% and 22.5% respectively, due to their immersive brand experiences delivered through strong storytelling. A similar approach was adopted in the "Sigale Gale" storynomics campaign, which promoted Toba's cultural identity through narrative structures involving setting, character, conflict, and message bringing the destination to life in a compelling and relatable way.

Innovations in audio storytelling, such as podcast-based promotion, are also emerging in Indonesia. Hutabarat et al. (2023) reported a surge in podcast access during the pandemic and recommended audio storytelling as a powerful tool for enriching destination information and strengthening emotional connections between tourists and the places being promoted (Rahman & Hum, 2024). Equally important is the proven effectiveness of influencer marketing

and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). In Lombok, destination influencers promoting sites like Gunung Tunak successfully increased visitation intention due to the authenticity and relatability of their content. Similar research in Yogyakarta revealed that vlogs and influencer recommendations helped foster organic engagement with natural tourism destinations.

Theoretically, academic trends also show a sharp rise in tourism-related UGC research growing by 30% over the past decade highlighting the importance of this topic in contemporary tourism promotion literature. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that visual content is not only processed more rapidly by the brain but also generates a stronger emotional connection (Fauziah et al., 2024). This approach enables real-time market mapping, personalized pre-travel experiences, and virtual interactions before physical visits. Accordingly, this study aims not only to enrich academic discourse but also to offer practical strategic recommendations, including enhanced digital literacy through training and mentoring, advocacy for efficient stakeholder collaboration, development of culturally-based creative content design, and the adoption of digital technology to strengthen Jambi's destination competitiveness on both national and global stages.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach that combines digital marketing theory with creative economy practices at the grassroots level. Unlike previous studies that tend to analyze promotional output or tourist behavior, this research highlights the co-production of promotional identity by local communities through storytelling, UGC, and collaborative platforms. By framing community members particularly MSMEs not just as beneficiaries but as active creators of digital branding, this study contributes to expanding the theoretical scope of tourism marketing in the digital era and offers practical insights into inclusive and sustainable promotional ecosystems.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on a case study design, as this method is effective for exploring in depth how creative promotional strategies are implemented in real world destination contexts. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including representatives from the tourism office, destination managers, local creative economy actors, and tourists. Additionally, the researcher conducted participatory observation to directly observe the implementation of promotional campaigns both online (social media, creative content, influencer collaborations) and offline (pamphlets, thematic events) as well as to document promotional materials and creative activities on site (Afifaturrohman, 2025). A purposive sampling technique was used to select informants who possess substantial knowledge and direct involvement in creative marketing strategies. Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework proposed by Miles and Huberman, involving data reduction, coding, theme construction, and interpretation. Triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documentation was applied to ensure validity and reliability. The findings aim to identify patterns of creative promotional strategies such as digital content innovation, collaborative events, and the integration of local wisdom and how these elements influence destination competitiveness. These insights provide a foundation for practical recommendations to support the development of a more competitive tourism market.

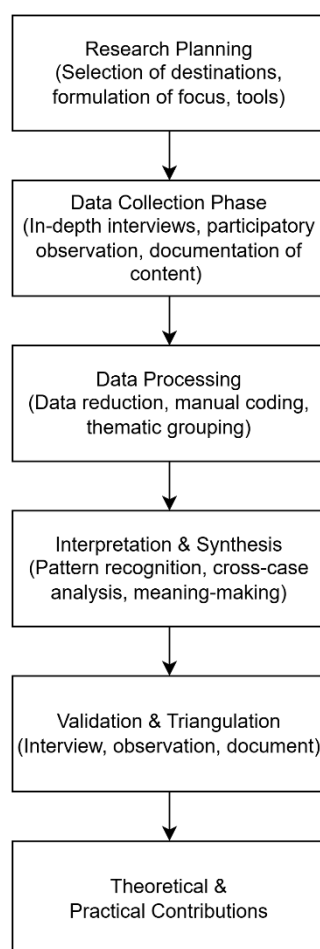


Figure 1. Visual Framework of The Research Process and Thematic Analysis Stages

3. Results and Discussion

The Urgency of Creative Marketing in the Tourism Industry

In the era of rapid globalization and digital transformation, the tourism industry is no longer competing solely based on natural beauty or cultural richness, but also on its ability to market these attractions creatively. Competition among destinations is becoming increasingly intense, with tourists having more options and becoming more selective in choosing their travel destinations. In this context, creative marketing plays a vital role in differentiating one destination from another. Conventional approaches that rely solely on brochures, exhibitions, or one-way promotional messages are now considered less effective in reaching modern, digitally savvy travelers (Koswara et al., 2019).

Creative marketing emphasizes the use of innovative ideas, compelling narratives, and interactive digital and social media to build emotional engagement with potential visitors. This strategy aims not only to sell a place, but also to offer experiences, stories, and local values that resonate personally with tourists. For example, through storytelling techniques that highlight local community life, unique cultures, or inspirational journeys, tourism promotion becomes more authentic and engaging (Loso Judijanto et al., 2024). Furthermore, shifting tourist behavior trends require industry players to adapt. Today's tourists tend to seek personalized, sustainable experiences that can be shared via social media. This makes content-based creative marketing a strategic tool for creating attractions that are not only informative but also emotional and visually appealing (Siregar et al., 2025). Implementing creative marketing also opens opportunities for lesser-known destinations to stand out by adopting unique and contextually relevant promotional approaches. Thus, the urgency of creative marketing in the tourism industry goes beyond serving as a mere promotional tool; it

functions as an essential instrument for shaping destination identity, enhancing competitiveness, and driving local economic growth. When marketing strategies are developed in a creative and contextual manner, tourist destinations can successfully build a strong image, expand market reach, and foster sustainable visitor loyalty.

Tourism Promotion Strategy: Concepts, Objectives, and Approaches

A tourism promotion strategy is a series of systematic efforts designed to introduce, persuade, and influence potential tourists to choose a particular destination for their travel. In the highly competitive tourism industry, promotion plays a vital role not only in increasing visitor numbers but also in shaping the image of the destination, expanding market reach, and fostering tourist loyalty (Chatamallah, 2008). The concept of tourism promotion is closely tied to marketing communication principles, in which messages must be able to attract attention, generate interest, create desire, and stimulate action, as reflected in the AIDA model: Attention, Interest, Desire, Action.

The main objective of tourism promotion strategies is to communicate the unique advantages of a destination to a broad audience in ways that are attractive, relevant, and distinct from competitors. This includes increasing destination awareness, building a positive image, and strengthening the destination's positioning in the minds of consumers. Within this framework, promotional strategies may also target specific market segments, such as special-interest tourists, domestic travelers, international tourists, or younger generations active on social media. Other objectives include encouraging longer stays, increasing tourist spending, and promoting repeat visits (Pratiwi et al., 2018).

The approaches used in tourism promotion have become increasingly varied and dynamic, especially with the advancement of information technology and digital media. Traditional methods such as print media, television, brochures, and participation in tourism expos are still in use, but are now combined with more interactive and personalized modern approaches. One of the most prominent is the storytelling-based approach, in which promotion conveys more than just information; it taps into the emotional side of travelers through meaningful and authentic narratives (Puspawati & Rostanto, 2018).

Moreover, digital content and social media-based strategies have become dominant. The use of promotional videos, hashtag campaigns, influencer tourism, and user-generated content (UGC) allows destination promotions to spread virally and reach wider audiences at relatively low cost. In addition, experience-based marketing has gained prominence, where the focus is not only on images or descriptions, but on inviting tourists to feel the atmosphere, culture, and signature activities of a destination firsthand (Vania & SE, 2025).

In general, an effective promotional strategy must consider three essential aspects: a clearly defined target audience, a relevant and distinctive message, and the use of appropriate and contextual media. In today's fast-paced digital era, adaptability and creativity are key. Promotional strategies that are capable of building emotional connections, offering engaging digital experiences, and aligning with current tourist values and trends are more likely to create destinations that are not only well-known but also loved and widely recommended (Harto et al., 2023).

Integrated Marketing Model: PESO Collaboration and Promotion Digitalization

In an increasingly complex world of tourism marketing, effective promotional strategies can no longer rely on a single type of media or method. An integrated approach is required one that combines multiple communication channels to reach audiences holistically. One widely adopted model is the PESO framework, which stands for Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned Media. When strategically integrated with digital elements, this model can generate multi-layered, measurable, and dynamic promotional strength.

The first component, Paid Media, includes all forms of paid promotion such as digital advertising (Google Ads, Facebook Ads), event sponsorships, and paid influencer campaigns. While requiring a specific budget, paid media is highly effective for reaching a large audience quickly, especially when launching new campaigns or promoting emerging destinations

(Pramesti & Lailiyah, 2025). Earned Media refers to exposure gained organically through mass media coverage, positive reviews from tourists, or third-party publications. This includes travel magazine features, customer testimonials, and blog posts by independent writers. In the context of tourism promotion, earned media is extremely valuable as it reflects the public's authentic perception and lends credibility to the destination.

The Shared Media component focuses on engagement and interaction via social media platforms. It includes shared content, visitor reposts, comments, and hashtag-based campaigns. Shared media enhances promotional strategies by creating emotional connections and enabling potential tourists to feel like part of a destination's story or community (Firdaus, 2024).

According to Firdaus (2024), Owned Media consists of all communication channels directly managed by destination organizers, such as official websites, blogs, e-newsletters, and verified social media accounts. Owned media functions as the central hub for information, enabling complete control over brand messaging, narrative delivery, and the overall digital experience presented to audiences.

In practice, these four PESO elements must be unified through an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach so that messaging is cohesive, reinforcing, and mutually supportive across all platforms. This is where the role of digitalization becomes increasingly significant. Digital transformation allows each PESO component to be interconnected in real time, measurable through data analytics, and aligned with evolving consumer behavior trends. Through digital integration, the effectiveness of the PESO strategy can be significantly enhanced. For instance, a paid advertising campaign can be amplified through influencer engagement (shared media), supported by organic testimonials (earned media), and further reinforced by compelling content on the destination's owned platforms. The use of emerging technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Tours, and AI chatbots also adds value to owned media by delivering interactive and immersive experiences to potential visitors. Thus, an integrated marketing model based on PESO collaboration and digitalization does not only expand market reach, but also builds emotional connections with tourists, strengthens destination credibility, and creates a sustainable, high-impact promotional ecosystem capable of boosting long-term competitiveness.

Case Studies: Promotional Innovation in Leading Tourism Destinations

Innovative promotion has become a key factor in strengthening the competitiveness of tourism destinations amid growing global competition. Various regions in Indonesia have demonstrated significant progress through the application of creative promotional strategies tailored to their local potential and market dynamics. Case studies from several leading tourism destinations reveal that the success of promotional efforts is not solely dependent on large budgets, but also on the ability to present destination appeal in an authentic, digital, and participatory manner (Bahrudin, 2017).

One notable example is Nglanggeran Tourism Village in Yogyakarta, which has been recognized as one of the world's best tourism villages by UNWTO. The innovation lies not only in its visual presentation but also in a strong narrative that highlights community engagement, environmental preservation, and cultural values. The village's promotional strategy is built on community-based storytelling, where residents take an active role in sharing the destination's stories through social media, official websites, and YouTube channels. Collaboration among village authorities, youth groups, and local MSMEs has resulted in integrated, engaging promotion that resonates emotionally with potential tourists.

Another example can be found in Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, one of Indonesia's five super-priority tourism destinations. Labuan Bajo's promotional strategy leverages a highly digitalized approach, including the launch of an official tourism app, campaigns with international influencers, and a visual campaign under the theme "Beyond Komodo," which expands the public's perception of the area beyond Komodo Island. The region also collaborated with professional filmmakers to produce short eco-tourism films, which are

distributed via social media and streaming platforms further enhancing the destination's global exposure and exclusive image.

Meanwhile, Kampung Lawas Maspati in Surabaya emphasizes a grassroots promotional strategy that involves active local participation and social media engagement. Despite being relatively small in scale, this community has managed to attract attention by integrating elements of history, mural creativity, and cultural activities into cohesive tourism packages. Local residents serve as guides, content creators, and social media managers, which gives the promotion a personalized and relatable touch. This case illustrates that creative tourism promotion does not necessarily require a large budget but must be deeply rooted in emotional, social, and cultural authenticity.

These case studies clearly demonstrate that successful promotion is determined not by how advanced the media is, but by the depth of community involvement, the clarity of the narrative, and the courage to stand out. Innovation in tourism promotion requires cross-sector collaboration from government entities and local communities to creative industry players and digital media platforms. When promotion strategies are executed with the right market alignment and context sensitivity, tourism destinations can not only gain recognition but also become memorable and organically recommended by visitors (Wibowo, 2023). The following table summarizes the promotional strategies implemented in the three key destinations analyzed in this study, highlighting unique elements, stakeholder roles, media used, and overall impact. This comparative overview provides insight into how localized creative approaches contribute to destination competitiveness.

Table 1. Comparative Summary of Creative Tourism Promotion Strategies

Destination	Unique Strategy	Key Actors	Media Used	Measured Impact
Nglangeran Village	Community-based storytelling via social media	Youth groups, MSMEs	Instagram, YouTube, village website	Named UNWTO Best Village; visitor growth
Labuan Bajo	Digital campaigns with international influencers	Tourism Board, creatives	Official app, short films, hashtags	Increased global exposure; brand elevation
Kampung Lawas Maspati	Grassroots promotion rooted in mural and cultural events	Local residents	Facebook, TikTok, offline tours	Boosted engagement; enhanced authenticity

Similar approaches to creative community-based promotion have also been implemented internationally. For instance, in Hallstatt, Austria, destination marketing shifted from traditional brochures to immersive storytelling led by local artisans and supported by AR-based mobile experiences (Kasemsarn & Nickpour 2025). In Kyoto, Japan, local tourism boards collaborated with university students to produce video series exploring local rituals and everyday culture successfully humanizing the destination and increasing domestic tourism (Tanaka, 2023). These international comparisons highlight how authentic narratives, locally produced content, and multi-stakeholder collaboration serve as universal levers for strengthening tourism brand identity and competitiveness in both developing and developed contexts.

Building Destination Competitiveness: Challenges and Strategic Recommendations

In the face of increasingly competitive global tourism dynamics, building destination competitiveness has become a top priority for tourism stakeholders and local governments. A destination's competitiveness is no longer measured solely by its natural beauty, but also by its ability to create added value, offer unique differentiation, and provide memorable experiences for tourists. However, efforts to build such competitiveness encounter a variety of complex and multidimensional challenges (Nurhidayati & Nuchayati, 2025).

One of the main challenges is the lack of consistency and sustainability in promotional strategies. Many destinations still rely on sporadic promotional efforts without long-term planning or synergy among government, private sector, and local communities. As a result, campaigns often lack direction, produce limited impact, and fail to build a strong destination identity. In addition, the shortage of competent human resources particularly in digital marketing and creative content production poses another barrier, especially in regions with limited tourism-related infrastructure and training (Pamungkas et al., 2024).

Another significant challenge concerns the quality of infrastructure and amenities. Even if a destination is promoted well, tourists are unlikely to return if basic facilities such as transportation, accommodation, cleanliness, and safety are inadequate. The gap between promotional messaging and the actual visitor experience can lead to disappointment, negative online reviews, and ultimately, a weakened destination image (Yacob et al., 2021). Furthermore, intensified competition among destinations, both nationally and internationally, forces regions to continuously innovate. When other destinations begin offering experience-based tourism, digital immersion, or environmentally sustainable tourism, stagnant destinations risk being left behind. In this context, destination competitiveness requires sensitivity to global trends and a rapid ability to adapt to shifting tourist preferences, such as rising interest in wellness tourism, digital experiences, and community-based travel (Nurhidayati et al., 2025).

To address these challenges, several strategic recommendations are proposed. First, the development of long-term, market-researched promotional plans is essential to ensure campaigns are proactive and impactful. Second, capacity-building for tourism human resources should be prioritized, especially in digital skills, creative content creation, and tech-based destination management. Third, reinforcing local identity and unique narratives can be a powerful differentiator in global competition not just selling landscapes, but also offering stories, values, and authentic experiences (Sari et al., 2025). Fourth, it is important to strengthen collaboration among stakeholders from local government and business owners to communities, influencers, and media partners. This collaboration can be supported through communication forums, integrated data systems, and flexible yet targeted policies. Lastly, integrating sustainability principles into tourism promotion is crucial, ensuring that competitiveness is not short-lived but generates long-term benefits for the environment, culture, and local communities.

In conclusion, building destination competitiveness demands a comprehensive, collaborative, and well-planned strategy. Creative promotion alone is not enough destinations must deliver on their promises, provide quality experiences, and continue innovating in line with evolving expectations. In this way, tourism becomes not just an economic sector, but also a powerful reflection of regional identity that seeks recognition on the global stage (Nurjannah et al., 2025).

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

Tourism promotion strategies based on creative marketing have proven to be effective approaches in building strong and competitive destination branding. By involving local communities as active agents in digital promotion, campaigns become not only more authentic and emotionally engaging but also have a direct impact on community well-being. Case studies from various destinations in Indonesia demonstrate that stakeholder collaboration, integration of the PESO model, and the use of digital technologies such as social media, podcasts, and visual storytelling are key factors in the success of destination promotion.

Nevertheless, several significant challenges remain, including limited human resource capacity, the absence of long-term planning, and the disconnect between promotional messaging and on-the-ground realities. Therefore, a promotional strategy must be not only creative but also structured, sustainable, and data-driven. Strategic recommendations include strengthening local digital literacy, developing culturally rooted content, building infrastructure to support user-generated content (UGC), and fostering cross-media promotional collaboration. With such strategies, tourism destinations can achieve broad recognition,

compete globally, and deliver long-term positive impacts for local communities. In the long term, adopting community-driven creative promotion models is not only a marketing imperative but also a policy direction that aligns with inclusive economic development and cultural preservation. As such, this study should serve as a foundation for rethinking tourism governance frameworks that integrate digital creativity, local participation, and sustainable destination management as pillars of national tourism strategy.

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