

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Navigating tourism governance in the digital age: The role of social media in promoting integrity and transparency

Zulaffendi Jamalludin^{1*}, Noreen Noor Abd Aziz², Mohamed Faiz Ramli³, Nurul Aien Abd Aziz⁴, and Nurliana Nasution ST MKom⁵

¹ Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Pasir Gudang, Jalan Purnama, Bandar Seri Alam, 81750 Masai, Johor, Malaysia

² Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Segamat, Jalan Universiti Off, KM12, Jalan Muar, Kemajuan Tanah Jementah Batu Sebelas, 85000 Segamat, Johor, Malaysia

³ Faculty Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Jalan Iman, 81310 Skudai, Johor, Malaysia

⁴ Faculty Industrial and Management, Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Al-Sultan Abdullah, 26600 Pekan, Pahang, Malaysia

⁵ Faculty of Computer Science, Lancang Kuning University, Jl. Yos Sudarso No. KM8, Umban Sari, Kec. Rumbai, Kota Pekanbaru, Riau 28266, Indonesia

ABSTRACT - The digital era has brought profound changes to tourism governance, reshaping how destinations are managed, promoted, and perceived. Traditional governance structures, once reliant on top-down communication and bureaucratic controls, are increasingly complemented or disrupted by dynamic digital technologies, particularly social media. These platforms not only serve as real-time communication tools but also function as participatory spaces for public discourse, enabling transparency, stakeholder engagement, and institutional accountability. Given the limited scholarly focus on the intersection of social media and governance integrity, this study aims to explore how digital platforms can be harnessed to promote ethical tourism practices, enhance transparency, and strengthen public trust in governance mechanisms. To achieve this, a systematic scoping review was conducted using a structured search strategy within the Scopus database. The initial screening identified 209 articles, of which 22 peer-reviewed journal publications from 2020 to 2025 were selected based on strict inclusion criteria. The selected literature was analysed using an integrative thematic approach to identify dominant trends and theoretical insights related to digital governance, stakeholder engagement, destination branding, and technological innovation. The findings reveal that social media enhances policy implementation, supports crisis communication, and fosters inclusive branding through co-created content. While offering new governance opportunities, challenges such as data ethics, algorithmic bias, and digital inequality remain critical concerns. The study concludes that aligning technological innovation with ethical governance and participatory models is essential for fostering integrity, transparency, and resilience in tourism governance systems of the digital age.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 04-11-2024

Revised : 04-06-2025

Accepted : 17-10-2025

Published : 01-12-2025

KEYWORDS

Tourism

Social media

Governance

1. INTRODUCTION

In this era of digital transformation, the tourism industry is experiencing unprecedented shifts in how destinations are managed, promoted, and perceived. Governance structures, traditionally reliant on hierarchical institutions and static communication methods, are now being challenged and redefined using dynamic digital tools, particularly social media (Ologunbe and Taiwo, 2025; Wong and Chu, 2020). As tourists increasingly turn to digital platforms for travel decisions, feedback, and engagement, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for public discourse and information exchange. This evolution demands a re-examination of tourism governance frameworks to ensure that they not only remain relevant but also uphold the principles of integrity and transparency in an interconnected world (Farmaki, 2020; Zhang et al., 2024).

Tourism governance refers to the collective processes through which public, private, and civil society actors coordinate and implement policies that shape tourism development (Bichler and Lösch, 2019; Taufik et al., 2023). Historically, challenges such as corruption, mismanagement, and limited stakeholder engagement have hindered the effectiveness of governance, particularly in emerging and developing economies. However, the integration of digital technologies, most notably social media, offers new opportunities to bridge these gaps in governance. Social media platforms function as both watchdogs and communication bridges, enabling citizens to hold institutions accountable while fostering participatory decision-making (Shafer, 2025; Vasylychshyn et al., 2024). This participatory model enhances trust and legitimacy, which are critical to sustainable tourism development and long-term policy success.

Despite the growing recognition of its influence, the role of social media in tourism governance has received limited scholarly attention, particularly in relation to promoting transparency, combating corruption, and strengthening institutional accountability (Caputo et al., 2025). This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the transformative potential

of social media as a governance tool. It critically examined how digital platforms reshape stakeholder relationships, encourage ethical practices, and facilitate real-time monitoring of public and private actors in the tourism sector. By integrating interdisciplinary perspectives from tourism studies, public administration, and digital governance, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how social media can be harnessed to promote integrity and build resilient and trustworthy tourism systems in the digital age.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of social media into tourism governance has catalyzed a shift in how institutions, stakeholders, and the public engage with one another, particularly in areas such as transparency, accountability, and participation management. Multiple studies illustrated the increasing significance of digital platforms in shaping governance frameworks, with a particular emphasis on Twitter and Facebook. McNutt and Zarzeczny (2017) investigated Twitter's potential for public information campaigns and highlighted its ability to disseminate evidence-based knowledge, albeit with limited user engagement. Similarly, Souza et al. (2023) analyzed over 400,000 tweets concerning Brazilian protected areas, uncovering public interest patterns, and suggested that social media monitoring can serve as an early warning mechanism for emerging conflicts. These findings aligned with those of Zabudská and Pompurová (2024), who identified varying engagement structures in tourism-oriented Facebook communities, noting that content relevance and community purpose outweigh size in influencing interactions. Collectively, these studies affirmed that social media can facilitate transparency and offer low-cost mechanisms for feedback and monitoring. However, limitations persist, such as uneven engagement, lack of sustained participation, and varying administrative oversight, signaling the need for more nuanced approaches in leveraging digital tools within governance structures.

Another research stream emphasizes the broader socio-technological transformations induced by digital platforms, underscoring the emerging complexities of algorithmic governance and digital infrastructure. Sinanan and Ritter (2024) discussed the embedded nature of algorithmic processes within tourism, highlighting how automated data governance reshapes destination management and visitor experience. Their study aligns with Ma et al. (2024), who explored the intersection of disruptive technologies and heritage tourism in Thailand, noting both opportunities and risks in the implementation of AR/VR and mobile platforms. Baalbaki (2024) offered a contextual perspective, analyzing Egypt's crisis communication and proposing adaptive strategies for branding in long-term crises. All three studies converge on the notion that governance in the digital age must balance technological adoption, ethical management, and cultural sensitivity. While these studies bring forward valuable models and frameworks, they also revealed research gaps in comparative cross-regional studies and the absence of robust policy evaluations concerning digital integrity. Thus, further empirical research is essential to assess how transparency and accountability mechanisms perform in diverse sociopolitical and digital environments.

In recent research, the integration of social media into tourism governance has demonstrated significant potential for enhancing transparency, integrity, and participatory planning. Wang et al. (2025) highlighted the transformative role of social platforms in spatial planning and governance within China's coastal fishing villages, where social media expanded stakeholder participation beyond traditional clan-based structures, leading to a more inclusive decision-making process. Similarly, Özgenç et al. (2024) utilized geotagged images from Flickr to assess cultural ecosystem services in Edirne, Turkey, emphasizing the value of social media as a tool for gathering spatial and thematic data relevant to cultural tourism governance. Nguyen Phuc et al. (2024) further supported this finding by evidencing that residents' value perceptions and their support for tourism initiatives were significantly shaped by social media-facilitated communication, surpassing the effectiveness of conventional government messaging. These studies converged on the idea that social media serves as both a medium for democratic engagement and a repository of user-generated content that is valuable for governance. However, challenges remain in terms of ensuring representativeness and mitigating misinformation, particularly when digital platforms are not uniformly accessible or moderated. The evidence points to a clear need to establish governance frameworks that institutionalize social media use in tourism planning, alongside capacity-building initiatives to ensure equitable digital participation.

The use of social media to promote integrity and transparency intersects with broader urban and regional branding strategies, technological integration, and public sentiment monitoring. Kang et al. (2023) demonstrated how digital tools, including artificial intelligence (AI) and the metaverse, are being considered for revitalizing tourism on Jebudo Island, underlining the importance of multiplatform governance and generational engagement in aligning tourism policies with evolving digital trends. Meanwhile, Soltani et al. (2018) explored city branding in Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. They showed that the synergy between local mascots, social media, and emotional appeal can generate significant economic and image benefits. Li et al. (2022) contributed a distinct angle by examining how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influences tourists' perceptions of well-being and social stability, indicating that social media sentiment can be a predictor of governance effectiveness and public trust. Despite the breadth of insights, the current literature remains fragmented in terms of empirical validation across diverse geographical contexts. It lacks a unified theoretical model to guide digital governance practices in tourism. Future investigations should aim to synthesize these thematic strands into integrative policy frameworks that standardize the ethical use of social media, balance community voices with institutional oversight, and adapt to rapid technological changes in the tourism sector.

In the contemporary digital era, tourism governance has experienced a paradigm shift, with social media increasingly recognized as a vital instrument for enhancing integrity and transparency in policy implementation and public engagement. Sidor et al. (2019) revealed that location-based social media platforms and digital reservation services have the potential to yield more accurate and timely data about local tourism operations than official governmental records, particularly in tracking occupancy and visitor engagement patterns. Similarly, Wan and Li (2024) identified the dynamic role of social media in city branding and digital transformation, emphasizing how interactive content, such as live streaming and short videos, can influence public perception and participatory governance. This aligns with the analysis of Buršić et al. (2023), who investigated digital initiatives at Croatian public museums during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their results underscored how museums with robust online engagement strategies maintained communication and transparency during closures, highlighting social media's role in sustaining governance continuity during crises. However, while these studies demonstrated the transformative potential of digital tools, they often lack in-depth assessments of long-term impacts and standardized metrics for evaluating governance effectiveness through social platforms. Additionally, empirical approaches predominantly rely on case-specific or regional analyses, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings across varied governance and tourism contexts.

An emergent theme in digital tourism governance literature involves the strategic deployment of social media as a trust-building mechanism and discourse management tool. Ahmad et al. (2024) explored the influence of vlogs on public trust in transportation infrastructure, demonstrating that user-generated content can directly shape behavioral intentions and perceptions of safety, thereby supporting transparent communication in governance. Khalilzadeh et al. (2025) contributed to this discourse by mapping corporate social responsibility narratives across social platforms, identifying long-term thematic evolution and network structures that reflect stakeholder sentiment in tourism and entrepreneurship. Concurrently, Murti et al. (2023) emphasized how social media narratives contribute to nation branding by embedding cultural and historical values into visual storytelling, thereby reinforcing national identity and legitimacy. Collectively, these studies illustrated that, beyond mere promotion, social media platforms are instrumental in disseminating information, facilitating public dialogue, and establishing accountability frameworks. However, the existing body of research frequently omits systematic evaluation of risks such as misinformation, data manipulation, and algorithmic bias, which could undermine transparency efforts. Therefore, there remains a pressing need for future research to develop standardized indicators for measuring integrity in digital communication and establish cross-platform comparative studies to better understand governance outcomes in diverse sociopolitical environments.

3. SCOPE OF STUDY

In the digital age, tourism governance is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by technological advancements and the widespread use of social media. Digital platforms have not only reshaped how destinations communicate with tourists but have also introduced new mechanisms for enhancing transparency, accountability, and public participation. As governments and tourism authorities explore innovative ways to foster trust and collaboration with various stakeholders, the integration of digital technologies and social media into governance practices has become increasingly relevant.

The competitive landscape of global tourism has heightened the importance of destination branding and image management. Cities and nations are increasingly leveraging digital media to shape tourists' perceptions, build reputations, and differentiate themselves in saturated markets. Understanding how social media influences destination branding provides critical insights into the formation of public opinion and tourism behavior. Moreover, emerging digital innovations such as AI, big data analytics, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) have revolutionized service delivery and tourist experiences. These technological trends present both opportunities and challenges for tourism development and require deeper exploration of their practical impact across various tourism domains.

To address these interrelated dynamics, this study adopted the Population, Interest, and Context (PICO) mnemonic framework to frame its inquiry. This study aimed to achieve the following three objectives:

- RO1: To examine how digital technologies and social media platforms influence transparency and stakeholder engagement in tourism governance structures.
- RO2: To explore the role of social media in shaping city and nation branding strategies and their impact on tourists' perceptions of destination image in the digital era.
- RO3: To analyse the influence of emerging digital innovations on service delivery, experience personalization, and tourism development in digitally integrated environments.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Identification

A structured search string strategy was adopted as part of the scoping review process to identify a substantial body of relevant literature. In the preliminary stage, core keywords and synonymous terms were systematically extracted from the Scopus database and supplemented with established literature. Upon formulating and refining the search queries, only

terms deemed contextually relevant were retained to ensure conceptual alignment with the study objectives. This initial phase of the systematic review yielded 209 publications, forming the foundational corpus for further analytical synthesis.

Table 1. The search string

Index	Keywords
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("tourism" AND "social media" AND "governance") AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar"))

4.2 Screening

The screening phase was conducted to ensure alignment between the selected literature and core research objectives by implementing clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. From the initial pool, 187 publications were excluded based on relevance, resulting in a final selection of 22 articles for an in-depth analysis. Although duplicate entries were checked, none were removed due to redundancy. To uphold methodological rigor and consistency, only publications written in English and published between 2020 and 2025 were retained, thereby capturing the most recent developments at the intersection of tourism, digital governance, and social media. The inclusion criteria were further narrowed to peer-reviewed journal articles at the final publication stage to ensure academic reliability and scholarly integrity. Additionally, the subject scope was confined to Business, Management, and Accounting disciplines, emphasizing the technological dimensions of tourism governance from managerial and operational standpoints. This meticulous screening protocol enhances the credibility of the review by incorporating only current, high-quality, and contextually relevant research.

Table 2 The Selection Criterion for Searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2020-2025	<2019
Literature Type	Journal (article)	Conference, Book
Publication Stage	Final	In Press

4.3 Data Abstraction and Analysis

This research employed an integrative analytical approach, emphasizing quantitative techniques to systematically explore and synthesize literature concerning technological applications in the tourism sector. A total of 22 peer-reviewed articles were examined to extract critical data, evaluate methodological rigor, and identify significant empirical outcomes. Theme formulation was conducted through a structured, collaborative approach, wherein all thematic categorizations were cross verified by the research team to ensure analytical coherence and methodological transparency. Emphasis was placed on evaluating influential studies addressing the use of social media in tourism governance, with particular attention paid to the design, scope, and findings of each work. Subsequently, thematic domains were inductively identified through consensus among the contributing authors based on the weight of evidence across the selected literature.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Digital Technologies and Social Media in Tourism Governance and Public Management

The integration of digital technologies and social media into tourism governance has significantly redefined public engagement mechanisms, thereby offering new pathways for stakeholder participation, information dissemination, and destination management. A comprehensive analysis of multiple studies underscores the dual role of social media as both a data source and a communication channel. Souza et al. (2023) and Šormaz and Ruoss (2023) emphasized the usefulness of social media platforms in tracking user engagement, tourist perceptions, and movement patterns across protected and heritage areas. These platforms, especially when combined with tools such as geospatial data and reservation services, offer powerful analytical insights into tourist behavior and reveal governance gaps in official datasets. These triangulated data can be instrumental in predicting tourism trends and ensuring more responsive and inclusive public management strategies.

Several studies have demonstrated the potential of social media to improve local governance and support sustainable tourism development through informed decision-making and targeted communication. For instance, Wang et al. (2025) and Obregón et al. (2020) illustrated how digital channels enhance transparency and broaden stakeholder inclusivity in tourism-related governance. Wang et al. observed how social media expanded the governance scope of fishing villages by facilitating spatial planning through participatory communication. They showed how targeted campaigns on Twitter can be strategically designed for public education, although their effectiveness depends on network dynamics and intermediary actors. Obregón et al. highlighted the fragmentation in information flow within stakeholder networks, further underscoring the need for cohesive communication strategies across sectors to ensure stakeholder alignment and trust.

Digital communities and citizen interactions are also critical components of public engagement in tourism governance. The structural analysis by Zabudská and Pompurová (2024) on tourism-based Facebook communities demonstrated that

engagement does not correlate solely with community size, but rather hinges on governance, content relevance, and moderation. This finding aligns with the sentiment analysis conducted by Kumi et al. (2024), who used machine learning and Reddit data to reveal local governance concerns in Saskatoon, Canada. Their study confirmed that online discourse, when systematically analyzed, can provide policymakers with actionable insights into public sentiment. In parallel, Nguyen Phuc et al. (2024) discovered that in Can Tho, Vietnam, social media has a greater influence than traditional media in shaping residents' perceptions and support for tourism, especially when social support and peer networks are present. This is evidence of the shifting preference toward decentralized and participatory forms of governance facilitated by social media.

The effectiveness of digital engagement in enhancing transparency, trust, and public discourse was further illustrated through museum governance, eWOM perception, and CSR discourse systems. Buršić et al. (2023) analyzed the digital shift of Croatian museums during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that institutions with stronger digital footprints were more adaptive and resilient. Meanwhile, Li et al. (2022) emphasized how tourists' perception of eWOM significantly influences their well-being, with individual and environmental factors playing moderating roles. These findings suggest that public opinion on tourism, when managed thoughtfully, contributes not only to institutional trust but also to societal well-being. Moreover, digital transformation within museums reflects broader patterns in governance adaptation strategies, in which real-time online engagement becomes pivotal for institutional continuity during crises.

At the intersection of sustainability and technology, social media's role in shaping perceptions and managing visitor behavior also emerges as a key governance concern. Šormaz and Ruoss (2023) addressed how social media popularity can disrupt sustainable tourism development by creating hotspots of visitor pressure at heritage destinations. Their analysis of Instagram and TripAdvisor reviews underscores the need for proactive governance to distribute visitor flows evenly and minimize socio-environmental degradation. They complemented this by illustrating how continuous online data monitoring can reduce tax evasion and improve occupancy tracking in Slovakia. This underscores the broader application of digital data for enforcing compliance and promoting governance equity. Finally, many studies have pointed out the strategic importance of targeted social media interventions in managing emerging narratives around public issues, indicating that such campaigns, when designed systematically, can influence public discourse in meaningful ways.

In conclusion, the synthesis of these studies affirmed that digital technologies and social media are becoming increasingly central to tourism governance and public engagement. From data collection and public discourse analysis to stakeholder participation and governance innovation, these tools offer scalable, participatory solutions to longstanding governance challenges. Souza et al. (2023), Zabuđská and Pompurová (2024), and Wang et al. (2025) demonstrated that well-managed digital platforms not only enhance transparency but also foster civic inclusivity and resilience. Li et al. (2022), Nguyen Phuc et al. (2024), and Kumi et al. (2024) confirmed that digital sentiment and eWOM perceptions can serve as proxies for governance quality and community satisfaction. Together, these findings underline the growing necessity of institutional adaptation to digital realities in tourism governance.

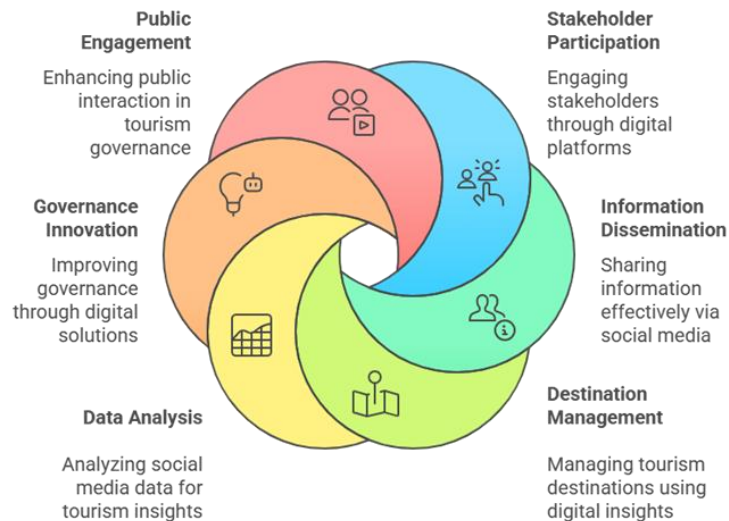


Figure 1. Enhancing tourism governance with digital tools

5.2 City Branding, Nation Branding, and Destination Image in the Digital Era

The integration of digital technologies into tourism governance has significantly reshaped the practices of city and national branding, positioning social media as a powerful tool for identity construction and stakeholder engagement. Ma et al. (2024) emphasized that technologies like AR and VR can enrich visitor experiences at heritage sites while stressing that their application must be culturally sensitive and support sustainability. Similarly, Murti et al. (2023) explored how Indonesia's nation branding relies on the visual narrative of tourism-based social media, in which photos, hashtags, and captions project idyllic landscapes and local identities to craft a collective national image.

Baalbaki (2024) addressed the challenges of branding during crises and examined Egypt's efforts to maintain a resilient destination image throughout political unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. By applying sentiment analysis to thousands of social media posts, the study revealed that consistent communication and adaptive messaging were key to restoring a destination's image. This perspective complements Kang et al. (2023), who studied Jebudo Island's revitalization strategies during the digital transformation era, revealing that aging tourism destinations require digital engagement and place-based content strategies to remain relevant. Wan and Li (2024) contributed a broader theoretical framework by highlighting the dynamic role of stakeholders in shaping city brands through interactive digital content such as short videos and live streaming. These insights suggest that, in the face of a crisis or transformation, effective branding relies on digital adaptability, strategic communication, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to reinforce image resilience.

Digital transformation has further complicated the representation of tourism destinations by creating conflicting imaginaries that reflect broader societal tension. Tzanelli (2020) critiqued the divergent tourism narratives that emerged post-COVID-19, in which social media shaped both optimistic and morbid perceptions of travel destinations. These antagonistic imaginaries challenge the ethical foundations of tourism and reflect deeper biopolitical tensions. Murti et al. (2023) similarly noted that Indonesia's nation branding is a product of dynamic negotiations between the tourism authority and cultural identity, often reflecting historical and political struggles.

Social media has also democratized branding processes, allowing broader participation in shaping city images and narratives. Wan and Li (2024) emphasized that the shift from static to dynamic digital interactions, especially short videos and live content, has transformed city branding from a top-down practice to a co-creative process involving tourists, businesses, and residents. Kang et al. (2023) advocated multiplatform governance strategies and educational initiatives, such as island business schools and stakeholder forums, to foster participatory branding in remote locations. Ma et al. (2024) similarly recommended collaborative governance models in Thailand's heritage tourism sector to ensure that technological interventions support rather than commodify cultural heritage. These findings collectively suggest that successful branding in the digital era depends on inclusive communication ecosystems, where value is co-created through continuous dialogue between city managers and digital audiences.

In conclusion, the reviewed studies provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital tools, particularly social media, reconfigure city and national branding strategies. From Thailand's heritage sites (Ma et al., 2024) and Jebudo Island's transformation (Kang et al., 2023), to Indonesia's visual nationhood (Murti et al., 2023) and Egypt's resilient crisis messaging (Baalbaki, 2024), each case underscores the significance of integrating technology, culture, and governance. Wan and Li (2024) further highlighted the role of emotional connections, stakeholder participation, and dynamic content in shaping effective and adaptable branding strategies. Finally, Tzanelli's (2020) critical discourse cautions against the ethical consequences of unmediated digital imaginaries. Collectively, these findings stress that the future of tourism branding in the digital era lies in leveraging technology not only for promotion but also as a tool for inclusive, sustainable, and reflexive destination governance.

Characteristic	City Branding	Nation Branding	Destination Image
 Digital Technologies	Identity construction and stakeholder engagement	Visual narratives on social media	Shapes perceptions and engages stakeholders
 Crisis Management	Consistent communication and adaptive messaging	Maintaining resilient image through political unrest	Requires digital adaptability and strategic communication
 Ethical Considerations	Managing political, ethical, socio-cultural implications	Dynamic negotiations between authority and identity	Conflicting imaginaries reflect societal tensions
 Stakeholder Participation	Co-creative process involving tourists, businesses	Multi-platform governance strategies and educational initiatives	Inclusive communication ecosystems and continuous dialogue
 Key Elements	Emotional connection, stakeholder participation, dynamic content	Integrating technology, culture, and governance	Leveraging technology for inclusive, sustainable governance

Figure 2. Branding in the digital era

5.3 Emerging Digital Innovations and Technological Impacts on Tourism Development

The emergence of digital innovations is fundamentally transforming the tourism sector, particularly through the integration of social media, algorithmic governance, and immersive platforms such as the metaverse. Sinanan and Ritter (2024) highlighted that tourist encounters are increasingly mediated by emerging media technologies, which introduce automated and infrastructural processes into destination experiences. These technological developments are embedded in socio-political contexts and raise concerns about territorialisation and platform-driven inequalities. Similarly, Wei (2024) emphasized the metaverse's potential in reshaping tourism and hospitality through co-creation and experiential consumption. However, this transformative potential necessitates proactive regulation, especially when defining protocols and governance mechanisms. Gozgor et al. (2024) added empirical evidence from 151 countries, demonstrating that excessive digital censorship, such as internet shutdowns and social media monitoring, can negatively affect inbound tourism, highlighting the delicate balance between digital innovation and governance transparency.

Social media content, including user-generated materials such as vlogs and geotagged photographs, has gained traction as a pivotal element in shaping travelers' perceptions and behaviors. Ahmad et al. (2024) explored how trust in vlog content could directly influence the intention to use new transport systems such as the Vande Bharat Express in India. Their findings affirmed that social media fosters trust and behavior change when credible and relatable content is provided. In a complementary vein, Özgenç et al. (2024) examined geospatial data from Flickr to evaluate cultural ecosystem services (CES) in Edirne, Turkey. Their findings illustrated how digital imagery contributes to mapping heritage values and guiding sustainable urban governance. Khalilzadeh et al. (2025) analyzed CSR discourses on social media, showing how keyword networks evolve to reflect shifts in tourism and entrepreneurship priorities. Together, these studies underline the growing analytical potential of social media data in understanding both spatial patterns and thematic development in tourism landscapes.

Technological advances also play a key role in public health governance, directly affecting tourism development, particularly in the context of pandemic recovery. Otubanjo (2022) examined Nigeria's struggle with poor public health infrastructure and asserted that improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services are foundational for meaningful tourism growth. His analysis suggested that tourism, including medical tourism, could contribute significantly to economic development if supported by appropriate infrastructural investments and behavioral reforms. This need for transformation is compounded by the lessons of COVID-19, which have exposed systemic vulnerabilities and underscored the importance of a collaborative public-private governance model. This argument is closely linked to the digital aspect discussed by Sinanan and Ritter (2024), who emphasized that digital infrastructure must also align with ethical standards to ensure equitable tourism experiences.

From a governance standpoint, digital transformations are not just about technological deployment, but also about maintaining integrity, inclusiveness, and participatory policy-making. Gozgor et al. (2024) underscored how digital governance capacity, when misapplied through practices such as online censorship, can deter tourism development rather than facilitate it. Wei (2024) also warned that while the metaverse offers expansive opportunities for experiential tourism, its unregulated growth could lead to societal and behavioral disruptions if left unchecked. Moreover, Khalilzadeh et al. (2025) revealed how CSR discussions on platforms like X evolve through long-memory processes, suggesting that the governance of digital spaces must account for historical continuity and emerging priorities. These insights collectively stress that the digital transition in tourism governance must be handled not only as a technological upgrade but also as value-based restructuring.

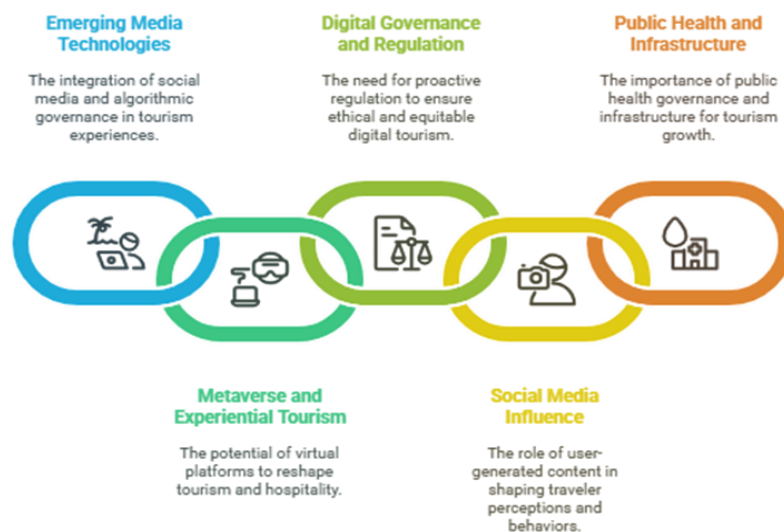


Figure 3. Digital transformation in tourism

In conclusion, digital innovations such as emerging media platforms, the metaverse, and algorithmic governance are revolutionizing tourism development while also introducing new challenges concerning equity, ethics, and regulatory

balance. Sinanan and Ritter (2024), Wei (2024), and Gozgor et al. (2024) collectively indicated that digital governance practices, including transparency and data integrity, are essential for promoting sustainable tourism. Ahmad et al. (2024) and Khalilzadeh et al. (2025) demonstrated the value of user-generated content in shaping destination images and trust. Finally, Otubanjo (2022) argued that digital and infrastructural investments must coincide with improvements in public health and social behavior to realize the full potential of tourism. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of how technological innovation, when thoughtfully implemented and ethically governed, can meaningfully contribute to tourism development in the digital era.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The convergence of digital technologies and social media with tourism governance has introduced transformative changes in policy implementation, public engagement, branding, and tourism development strategies. Digital tools now facilitate more accessible communication between stakeholders, enable the real-time monitoring of tourist activities, and support participatory governance structures. These developments have improved the responsiveness and inclusivity within tourism management systems, particularly in areas such as destination planning, conflict resolution, and stakeholder alignment. The ability of social media platforms to simultaneously act as communication channels and data sources further enhances their utility in capturing public sentiment and informing evidence-based governance decisions. Additionally, user engagement across digital communities underscores the importance of content relevance, moderation, and platform governance over mere audience size in shaping impactful discourse.

Digital media has emerged as a strategic asset in the realm of destination branding, enabling cities and nations to construct, communicate, and sustain their identities. Interactive tools, such as short videos, live streaming, and augmented reality experiences, contribute to immersive branding approaches that extend beyond traditional promotional methods. Branding during crises or post-conflict periods has been shown to benefit from adaptive digital communication strategies, in which consistent and culturally grounded messaging helps restore public trust and reinforces a positive destination image. Furthermore, the shift from top-down brand narratives to co-created digital content allows more inclusive participation by residents, businesses, and tourists. Such collaborative models offer a more sustainable approach to place representation, where branding serves not only economic objectives, but also cultural preservation and social cohesion.

Emerging technological innovations are further reshaping the tourism landscape by redefining traveller behavior, enhancing service delivery, and introducing new forms of interaction. Tools such as geospatial analytics, sentiment analysis, and immersive environments such as the metaverse are increasingly used to map tourist flows, monitor public opinion, and design customized experiences. However, these technologies bring challenges related to governance integrity, ethical use, and data regulation. If misapplied, digital censorship and platform control mechanisms can inhibit tourism growth and distort public narratives. Conversely, well-governed technological adoption can promote transparency, support equitable access and strengthen institutional trust. The integration of public health considerations, particularly in post-pandemic recovery planning, also highlights the interconnectedness among infrastructural readiness, digital governance, and sustainable tourism outcomes.

Overall, the synthesis of research confirms that digital technologies and social media are not only tools for operational efficiency but are increasingly central to redefining tourism governance paradigms. Their role in shaping public dialogue, co-creating destination narratives, and facilitating equitable tourism experiences marks a significant evolution in this sector. Successful implementation depends on aligning digital innovation with participatory governance, ethical standards, and cultural sensitivities. By doing so, tourism stakeholders can foster more resilient, inclusive, and transparent governance structures suited to the demands of the digital era.

This study offers valuable insights into the intersection of digital technology, social media, and tourism governance. However, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The analysis is primarily based on synthesized secondary data, which, although comprehensive, may not reflect the most current developments in digital platforms or governance frameworks. The rapid pace of technological innovation, such as the emergence of the metaverse, geospatial analytics, and immersive virtual environments, poses challenges for maintaining real-time relevance. Moreover, the absence of empirical data from stakeholders, including policymakers, tourism operators, and local communities, restricts deeper insight into how digital governance models are implemented, resisted, and adapted in practice. The diversity of socio-political, infrastructural, and cultural contexts across different regions further limits the generalizability of the findings, while issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and digital surveillance remain underexplored within the current scope.

To address these gaps, future research should incorporate empirical methodologies such as interviews, digital ethnography, and longitudinal analysis to validate the conceptual conclusions presented. Investigations should be extended to examine how governance systems in various regions adapt to digital tools under different legal and cultural constraints. Comparative studies across countries or regions can offer a broader understanding of the best practices and challenges in implementing technology-driven governance. Additionally, research should critically explore the ethical dimensions of digital governance, with a particular focus on safeguarding transparency and inclusivity without compromising personal privacy, data protection, or democratic participation. This approach will help build a grounded, context-sensitive framework for navigating tourism governance in the digital age. The convergence of digital technologies and social media with tourism governance has introduced transformative changes across policy implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express gratitude to all of the persons and organizations that helped complete this research study, whether directly or indirectly. Research collaboration from participants such as UTM, UMPSA, and UniLAK is critical in completing this project since it provides significant assistance and unique insights.

FUNDING STATEMENT

This article was financially supported by Universiti Teknologi MARA and Institute of Postgraduate Studies UiTM.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Zulaffendi Jamalludin (Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Visualisation; Supervision, Writing – original draft)

Noreen Noor Abd Aziz (Conceptualization, Supervision)

Mohamed Faiz Ramli (Methodology; Data curation; Writing - original draft; Resources)

Nurul Aien Abd Aziz (Methodology; Data curation; Writing - original draft; Resources)

Nurliaa Nasution ST MKom (Data curation)

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Not applicable.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, K., Sharma, B. K., Mishra, M., Khatwani, R., & Mitra, P. K. (2024). The impact of vlogs on travellers' intentions to use semi-high speed trains: A study on Vande Bharat Express. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 8(6), 2989.
- Baalbaki, J. (2024). Egyptian crises and destination brand image: the resurrection of the mummy. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 27(6), 887–905.
- Bichler, B. F., & Lösch, M. (2019). Collaborative governance in tourism: Empirical insights into a community-oriented destination. *Sustainability*, 11(23), 6673.
- Buršić, E., Golja, T., & Benassi, H. M. (2023). Analysis of Croatian Public Museums' digital initiatives amid COVID-19 and recommendations for museum management and governance. *Management: Journal of Contemporary Management Issues*, 28(1), 211-226.
- Caputo, F., Ligorio, L., & Venturelli, A. (2025). Framing research on corruption and public administration in management studies: research trends and future directions. *Journal of Global Responsibility*.
- Farmaki, A. (2020). Regional network governance and sustainable tourism. In *Tourism and sustainable development goals* (pp. 192–214). Routledge.
- Gozgor, G., Lau, C. K., Lin, Z., & Zeng, Y. (2024). The impact of digital governance on tourism development. *Journal of Digital Economy*, 3, 1-13.
- Kang, H. C., Baek, W. Y., Choi, J.-Y., & Kim, J. (2023). Revitalizing island tourism in the digital transformation era: Case of Jebudo Island. *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, 12(2), 69-85.
- Keleş Özgenç, E., Dönmez, A. H., & Özgenç, E. (2024). Evaluating cultural ecosystem services through geospatial social media data: A study of Edirne City. *Journal of Geovisualization and Spatial Analysis*, 8(2), 30.
- Khalilzadeh, J., Kromidha, E., & Taheri, B. (2025). Anatomy of a CSR discourse system: Entrepreneurship and tourism domains. *Tourism Management*, 110, 105195
- Kumi, S., Snow, C., Lomotey, R. K., & Deters, R. (2024). Uncovering concerns of citizens through machine learning and social network sentiment analysis. *IEEE Access*, 12, 94885–94913.
- Li, X., Wu, Y., & Jiang, Y. (2022). The value of tourism public opinion management in social governance: A study on the impact of electronic word-of-mouth perception on people's livelihood well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1081960.

- Ma, C., Somrak, T., Manajit, S., & Gao, C. (2024). Exploring the potential synergy between disruptive technology and historical/cultural heritage in Thailand's Tourism Industry for achieving sustainable development in the future. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 26(5), e2759.
- McNutt, K., & Zarzeczny, A. (2017). Leveraging social media in the stem cell sector: Exploring Twitter's potential as a vehicle for public information campaigns. *Regenerative Medicine*, 12(7), 753–764.
- Murti, D. C. W., Ratriyana, I. N., & Asmoro, I. D. (2023). "Dream now, travel tomorrow": Communicating the nation branding of Indonesia through tourism-based social media. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 34(3), 293–314.
- Nguyen Phuc, H., Dao Thi Tuyet, L., & Tran Huu, T. (2024). The impact of integrated social communication on resident's perception and support for tourism development. *Quality and Quantity*, 1-26.
- Obregón, C., Admiraal, R., van Putten, I., Hughes, M., Tweedley, J. R., & Loneragan, N. R. (2020). Who you speak to matters: Information sharing and the management of a small-scale fishery. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 7, 578014.
- Ologunibi, J., & Taiwo, E. O. (2025). The impact of digital communication on governance, political dynamics, and leadership; A case study of the Nigerian people and process. *Political Dynamics, and Leadership*.
- Otubanjo, O. A. (2022). Public health, tourism, and the emergence of pandemics. *Nigerian Journal of Parasitology*, 43(1), 168–196.
- Shaher, W. (2025). *The Impact of Digital Communications and Social Media on Government Officials and the Political Sphere: A Case Study of the Arab Spring Revolutions*.
- Sidor, C., Kršák, B., Štrba, L., Cehlár, M., Khouri, S., Stričík, M., Dugas, J., Gajdoš, J., & Bolechová, B. (2019). Can location-based social media and online reservation services tell more about local accommodation industries than open governmental data? *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(21).
- Sinanan, J., & Ritter, C. S. (2024). Emerging media technologies in the tourist encounter. *Tourism Geographies*, 26(4), 587–598.
- Soltani, A., Pieters, J., Young, J., & Sun, Z. (2018). Exploring city branding strategies and their impacts on local tourism success, the case study of Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(2), 158–169.
- Šormaz, A., & Ruoss, E. (2023). Social media as a management tool: Opportunities for sustainable heritage destinations. *Academica Turistica*, 16(1), 121–138.
- Souza, C. N., Almeida, J. A., Correia, R. A., Ladle, R. J., Carvalho, A. R., & Malhado, A. C. (2023). Assessing Brazilian protected areas through social media: Insights from 10 years of public interest and engagement. *Plos one*, 18(10), e0293581.
- Taufik, M., Ibrahim, M. A., Ahmad, B., Suni, M., & Nur, M. (2023). Collaborative government in tourism sector development. *KnE Social Sciences*, 530–547.
- Tzanelli, R. (2020). Post-viral tourism's antagonistic tourist imaginaries. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 7(3), 377-389.
- Vasylchyshyn, O., Storozhenko, L., Babkova, T., Kuchmenko, V., & Kovalchuk, V. (2024). Social media as a factor in the transformation of public administration, justice and legality. *Multidisciplinary Reviews*, 7.
- Wan, F., & Li, J. (2024). RETRACTED ARTICLE: Navigating the Digital Age: City Branding in the Era of Social Media and Digital Transformation. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 15(4), 16666-16699.
- Wang, J., He, M. M., Lee, S. H., & Tsai, S. C. (2025). Meaningful multi-stakeholder participation via social media in coastal fishing village spatial planning and governance. *Water*, 17(11), 1703.
- Wei, W. (2024). A buzzword, a phase or the next chapter for the Internet? The status and possibilities of the metaverse for tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 7(1), 602–625.
- Wong, W., & Chu, M. (2020). Digital governance as institutional adaptation and development. *China Review*, 20(3), 43–70.
- Zabudská, E., & Pompurová, K. (2024). Identifying patterns among tourism-oriented online communities on Facebook. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 5(3), 830–847.
- Zhang, F., Lv, Y., & Sarker, M. N. I. (2024). Resilience and recovery: A systematic review of tourism governance strategies in disaster-affected regions. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 104350.