

Exploring the Role of Social Media Marketing in Shaping Indonesian Tourists' Interest and Perceptions of Turkey as a Travel Destination

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of social media marketing in shaping Indonesian tourists' interest in visiting Turkey. A qualitative approach was used, with data collected through in-depth interviews from 16 participants, including active social media users, Indonesian tourists who have visited or plan to visit Turkey, and travel agents in Indonesia. The results indicate that social media significantly influences travel decisions by providing engaging visual content, trustworthy user-generated reviews, and interactive promotions. Participants highlighted the emotional appeal of Turkey's iconic landmarks and the influence of influencers in building trust. The study also found that while social media is more personalized and effective than traditional marketing methods, both should be used in combination for greater impact. The recommendations include optimizing visual content, collaborating with influencers, utilizing local language in campaigns, and strengthening engagement through interactive features to enhance social media marketing strategies.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Indonesian Tourists; Turkey; Travel Decision

Eksplorasi Peran Pemasaran Media Sosial dalam Mempengaruhi Minat dan Persepsi Wisatawan Indonesia terhadap Turki sebagai Tujuan Wisata

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana pemasaran melalui media sosial dapat membentuk minat wisatawan Indonesia untuk berkunjung ke Turki. Penelitian dilakukan dengan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam kepada 16 partisipan, yang terdiri dari pengguna aktif media sosial, wisatawan Indonesia yang sudah atau berencana ke Turki, serta agen perjalanan di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial sangat berpengaruh dalam pengambilan keputusan wisata. Hal ini karena media sosial menyajikan konten visual yang menarik, ulasan dari pengguna lain yang dipercaya, serta promosi yang interaktif. Para partisipan juga menyoroti daya tarik emosional dari tempat-tempat ikonik di Turki dan peran influencer dalam membangun rasa percaya. Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa meskipun media sosial lebih personal dan efektif dibandingkan metode pemasaran tradisional, kombinasi keduanya tetap diperlukan agar hasilnya lebih maksimal. Beberapa rekomendasi dari penelitian ini antara lain: mengoptimalkan konten visual, bekerja sama dengan influencer, menggunakan bahasa lokal dalam kampanye, serta meningkatkan interaksi dengan audiens melalui fitur-fitur media sosial.

Kata kunci: Keputusan Wisata; Pemasaran Media Sosial; Turki; Wisatawan Indonesia;

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information technologies has led to significant changes in how people communicate and access information, profoundly impacting various sectors, including tourism. One of the key developments in this transformation is the widespread adoption of social media, which has increasingly become a platform not only for communication but also for marketing purposes. Social media has proven to be a highly effective tool for promoting tourist destinations, allowing destinations, travel agencies, and tourism service providers to engage with potential travelers through visual and interactive content. Platforms such as Instagram,

Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube have facilitated the promotion of tourist destinations by offering an accessible and engaging way for both marketers and travelers to connect (Kuncoro, 2022).

Indonesia, one of the countries with the largest number of social media users globally, exemplifies the growing reliance on social media for information gathering, including travel inspiration. According to a report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, the number of social media users in Indonesia is expected to reach 191 million by 2023, with an average usage time of 3 hours and 18 minutes per day (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2023). This widespread engagement with social media has made it a central tool for Indonesian travelers when it comes to gathering information about destinations, finding travel inspiration, and selecting where to visit (Setyawan, 2021).

Turkey, known for its rich history, culture, and natural beauty, has become one of the world's most sought-after tourist destinations. In recent years, Turkey has increasingly leveraged social media platforms to promote iconic tourist sites such as the Hagia Sophia, Cappadocia, Pamukkale, and the Grand Bazaar. By using digital marketing strategies through social media, Turkey has been able to not only expand the reach of its promotional efforts but also interact directly with potential tourists, including Indonesians. This direct engagement has proven to be instrumental in attracting Indonesian travelers to Turkey, helping to build a stronger connection between the destination and its target audience (Mariani, & Buhalis, 2021).

As a result of these promotional efforts, Turkey has become one of the most popular destinations for Indonesian tourists. Various factors have contributed to this trend, including Turkey's historical landmarks, unique culture, natural attractions, and its image as a Muslim-friendly country. According to data from the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, the number of Indonesian tourists visiting Turkey has grown significantly, from 56,000 in 2019 to 89,000 in 2023 (Turkish Ministry of Tourism, 2023). This increase highlights the growing appeal of Turkey among Indonesian travelers and the role that social media marketing has played in this growth (Turkish Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

Indonesia's large population and high social media penetration rate make it a key market for the global tourism industry, including Turkey. The increasing interest of Indonesian travelers in visiting Turkey is driven by easy access to information, attractive promotions, and content created by influencers and travel agencies. Social media platforms have become essential tools for showcasing Turkey's offerings, with content such as travel videos from Cappadocia, hot air balloon photos, and shared experiences in Istanbul often going viral (Oktay & Korkmaz, 2022). This dynamic interaction between social media marketing and tourism has demonstrated that social media does not merely raise awareness but also plays a pivotal role in influencing the ultimate decision of Indonesian tourists in selecting Turkey as their travel destination (Meeprom, S., & Fakfare, 2024).

Social media content related to Turkey, such as travel videos from Cappadocia, photos of hot air balloons, and shared experiences in Istanbul, often goes viral on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. These promotional materials play a critical role in shaping the destination's image and appealing to Indonesian tourists. Influencers and travel agencies further enhance this appeal by offering special travel packages and curated experiences, which are promoted through their social media channels. This widespread engagement with social media content has demonstrated that social media marketing does not merely increase interest but also

significantly influences the decisions of Indonesian tourists in selecting Turkey as a destination (Mariani & Buhalis, 2021).

However, despite the growing recognition of social media marketing's importance in tourism, there is limited academic research examining its specific impact on Indonesian tourists' interest in Turkey. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how social media marketing strategies influence Indonesian tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes in choosing Turkey as a travel destination. By understanding the key factors that drive this interest, the research will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital marketing in the tourism sector, particularly in attracting tourists from Indonesia (Musliha, & Adinugraha, 2022).

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the tourism industry. From a theoretical perspective, it will expand the literature on digital marketing in tourism, specifically regarding the role of social media in influencing tourist behavior. Practically, the study will provide recommendations for Turkish tourism service providers and destination marketers on how to effectively use social media to attract Indonesian tourists. The findings are also expected to inform policy recommendations for government agencies involved in tourism promotion, aiding in the development of more effective digital marketing strategies.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the role of social media marketing in shaping Indonesian tourists' interest in Turkey, focusing on in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences, perceptions, and meanings related to this phenomenon. Qualitative research emphasizes the quality and depth of knowledge, using tools such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and narrative analysis to gather data. In this approach, the researcher plays a central role in collecting and interpreting data, providing rich insights into the subject (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). The study aims to explore the experiences of Indonesian tourists who have visited or are considering visiting Turkey, through interviews that will identify the factors influencing their travel decisions and how social media marketing affects their perceptions of Turkey as a destination.

In this study, the informants are selected from Indonesian tourists who have either visited Turkey or have an interest in visiting Turkey. The two groups were selected based on the assumption that tourists who ever visited Turkey are the actual market, meanwhile, the consumers who interested to visit Turkey are potential market. These informants are categorized into three groups: first, those who have direct experience with Turkey as a destination and may have been exposed to social media marketing strategies that influenced their travel decisions; second, individuals who have interacted with social media campaigns related to Turkey's tourist destinations, shaping their interest in visiting; and third, individuals who frequently engage with content related to Turkey, such as promotional posts, advertisements, or informational material shared on social media platforms. Additionally, the study includes Indonesian tourism industry players, such as travel agencies or tourism service providers, who use social media to promote Turkey and its tourism packages. These informants will provide valuable insights into how social media marketing influences potential travelers' interest in Turkey.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the significant influence that social media platforms have in providing travelers with both informational and emotional engagement, which in turn affects their travel decisions. The participants, who included active social media users, Indonesian tourists who had visited Turkey, and potential tourists, all acknowledged the vital role social media plays in their travel planning process. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook were often cited as the primary platforms through which they discovered travel destinations, with visual content such as photos and videos being particularly influential in their decision-making.

For many participants, social media provided a window into the experiences of other travelers, with user-generated content, such as personal travel videos and reviews, resonating more deeply than traditional advertisements. One participant noted:

"Seeing a real traveler's experience in Cappadocia made me feel more connected to the place. It felt more authentic than a commercial ad."

This reflects how social media allows tourists to engage with destinations in an authentic and relatable manner. By engaging with content posted by others, travelers were able to visualize their own experiences, building emotional connections to the locations they viewed.

The emotional appeal of Turkey's iconic landmarks, such as the Hagia Sophia and the hot air balloons in Cappadocia, was a frequent theme in the responses. Many participants mentioned that these images and videos sparked feelings of wonder and curiosity, often prompting them to explore the destination further. Social media, therefore, serves not only as an informational tool but also as an emotional motivator, influencing the decision to visit a destination based on its perceived beauty and cultural significance.

Moreover, the study found that the interactivity offered by social media platforms plays a significant role in the decision-making process. Unlike traditional marketing, which often provides one-way communication, social media allows for a more dynamic exchange of information. Tourists expressed how the ability to interact with tourism companies, other travelers, and influencers on platforms like Instagram and TikTok provided them with a sense of involvement and trust. One interviewee shared,

"When I see influencers responding to comments and sharing their thoughts on Turkey, I feel like I'm part of a community, not just a consumer of travel content."

In terms of content, participants highlighted the effectiveness of travel videos and promotional content that showcased the real-life experiences of other tourists. The use of testimonials and reviews by fellow travelers was often regarded as more credible and relatable than conventional promotional materials. This suggests that user-generated content and peer recommendations play a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions and influencing their travel preferences. Content that conveyed personal experiences, such as the journey of a traveler navigating through Turkey's historic sites, was considered more compelling than generic travel advertisements.

Additionally, the study revealed that influencers have a strong impact on the decision-making process of potential tourists. Influencers, particularly those with a personal connection to the destination, were seen as trusted sources of information. Their ability to convey personal,

authentic experiences was cited as a key factor in shaping tourists' desire to visit Turkey. One participant remarked,

"I trust influencers who share their honest experiences, not just the touristy things, but the little details that make a trip memorable."

This demonstrates that influencer marketing can provide a more genuine and relatable connection to potential tourists. Despite the strong influence of social media on travel decisions, traditional marketing methods were still seen as complementary to digital marketing. While social media provided a more personalized and interactive experience, participants noted that traditional advertising such as brochures and television commercials still had a place in their overall decision-making process. However, the study suggests that for maximum effectiveness, the combination of both approaches—digital and traditional—should be employed to reach a wider audience.

The study highlights the pivotal role that social media platforms play in shaping Indonesian tourists' travel preferences, particularly toward Turkey. Social media is not simply a promotional tool—it functions as an immersive experience that merges visual appeal with emotional resonance. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offer tourists a sense of presence through rich visual content, making destinations like Turkey feel familiar and accessible before the actual visit. This finding is consistent with Lee, Y., & Weaver (2014), who emphasized the power of digital imagery in stimulating tourist curiosity and influencing early-stage interest in travel planning.

More importantly, social media's emotional and interactive features significantly differentiate it from traditional marketing. The ability to engage with content in real time, whether through likes, comments, or shares, creates a feedback loop that reinforces a tourist's sense of trust and community (Guden & Safaeimanesh, 2024). This dynamic is particularly effective in tourism marketing, where both rational and emotional factors often influence decision-making. This two-way communication fosters a stronger psychological connection between tourists and the destination, making marketing efforts more persuasive and memorable (Lee et al, 2022).

Another key insight from the study is the credibility granted to user-generated content and influencer marketing. Rather than relying solely on professionally produced advertisements, tourists are increasingly influenced by testimonials and travel stories shared by peers and micro-influencers. Peer-based content drives higher trust and authenticity, mainly when it reflects real-life, relatable experiences (Liao et al, 2023). In this context, influencers act not merely as marketers but as narrative storytellers who humanize the travel experience and make it aspirational yet attainable.

While digital content dominates, traditional marketing methods still have relevance, albeit in a supplementary role. The study indicates that brochures, travel magazines, and television ads continue to contribute to decision-making, particularly for certain demographics. This underscores the importance of integrated marketing strategies that combine the reach of traditional media with the personalization and interactivity of social platforms. Soteriades (2012) also support this blended approach, suggesting that effective tourism marketing today requires synergy across multiple channels to reach a broader and more diverse audience.

Lastly, the findings have broader implications for both Turkish and Indonesian tourism stakeholders. The study reinforces the importance of localized and culturally relevant campaigns for Turkey when targeting international markets like Indonesia. For Indonesia, the success of Turkey's strategy provides a valuable benchmark for developing digital tourism campaigns that leverage social media as both an engagement and conversion tool. Adapting to the digital behaviour of audiences is no longer optional—it is essential for competitive positioning in a global tourism landscape increasingly shaped by digital storytelling, emotional branding, and participatory content (Mathew, V., & Soliman, 2021; Pencarelli, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that social media plays a crucial role in shaping Indonesian tourists' interest in Turkey, offering both informational and emotional engagement that influences their travel decisions. The visual appeal of destinations, the credibility of user-generated content, and the personal connection provided through influencers all contribute to Turkey's growing popularity among Indonesian tourists. The findings suggest that social media marketing, when coupled with authentic content and direct engagement, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotions. As a result, tourism marketers should focus on creating visually captivating, interactive, and relatable content to foster deeper connections with potential travelers.

By doing so, they can leverage social media as a powerful tool to boost interest in Turkey as a prime travel destination for Indonesian tourists. This results give important implications for Indonesia and Turkey. On one hand, Turkey government able to develop tourism strategy in order to attract Indonesian tourists using social media as the promotion tools. On the other hand, Indonesian government able to take lessons from the best practice of tourism marketing in Turkey to be implemented di Indonesia. This knowledge may useful to formulate social media marketing to attract international tourists from all around the world to visit Indonesia.

This study has several limitations. First, the study does not investigate the specific kind of social media used. Therefore, future research should explore which platform is more powerful than others to formulate tourism marketing programs. Besides, this study does not differentiate the response between existing and potential tourists. Therefore, the results give the homogeneous responses of tourists' interests to visit Turkey, whereas the actual and potential tourists, and tourists and travel agents may have different needs and wants regarding the visit intention to many kinds of destinations in Turkey. The coming studies may focus on differences analysis among tourists categories to identify the specific needs of each of them.

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