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The Influence of Social Media Content on Domestic Visit Intention at Candi Gedongsongo

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of social media content on the visit intention of domestic tourists to Gedongsongo Temple, with online reviews and social visibility acting as mediators. Based on Self-Congruence Theory, the research explores how the alignment between social media content and tourists' self-image can enhance personal engagement, ultimately driving visit intention. Using a quantitative approach with a survey, the study involves 113 respondents who have either visited or seen content about Gedongsongo Temple on social media, analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS). The findings indicate that appealing and authentic social media content increases online reviews that align with consumers' self-image, consequently boosting visit intention. Moreover, credible and informative online reviews about the destination also enhance social visibility and encourage more tourists to visit. Online reviews serve as a mediator that strengthens the relationship between social media content and visit intention. The social visibility gained through online reviews and interactions on social media amplifies the effect of social media content on tourists' intention to visit Gedongsongo Temple. These findings provide insights for destination managers to leverage authentic content and collaborations with influencers on social media to enhance destination appeal and attract tourists, supporting the sustainability of local tourism economies.

Keywords

Digital Tourism, Online Reviews, Social Media Content, Social Visibility, Visit Intention.

1. Introduction

Tourist destinations offer recreational, educational, or spiritual experiences, with natural beauty, historical significance, and local culture serving as key attractions. The tourism sector contributes significantly to regional economic development through job creation, income generation, and infrastructure growth (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2022). Technological advancements have transformed the industry, especially in destination promotion strategies (Vlasich et al., 2022). Social media now serves as a powerful marketing tool, enabling personalized engagement and rapid dissemination of information, while enhancing competitiveness and tourist experience through tools like online booking and data analytics (Kumar et al., 2024; Bekele & Raj, 2024). Social media also expands brand visibility and strengthens the influence of tourist reviews on destination image (Baber & Baber, 2023; Khairifa & Mardhiyah, 2023; Kuswanto, 2024). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp facilitate the sharing of authentic User-Generated Content (UGC), which is often perceived as more credible than official promotions (Cheung et al., 2021; Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2022; Yamagishi et al., 2023). UGC based on firsthand experiences influences travel decisions more effectively (Nguyen et al., 2024). Furthermore, social media supports sustainable tourism by shaping destination perception, fostering community engagement, and encouraging eco-friendly behavior (Fathy et al., 2024). It also enables data-driven evaluation through public sentiment analysis, improving service quality and tourist satisfaction (Viñan-Ludeña & de Campos, 2022).

Cheung et al. (2021) study highlighted the significant influence of social media content on tourists' intention to visit a destination. Cheung et al. (2024) showed that media richness in immersive digital platforms, such as metaverses, can strengthen customer engagement and further drive visit intention. Similarly, Asyraff et al. (2023) emphasized that the information quality of social media content shapes tourists' cognitive and emotional perceptions of a destination, which ultimately guides their travel decisions. Li and Tu (2023) observed that relevant content—such as short videos tailored to the type of destination—increases tourists' engagement and visit intention, with content credibility and perceived usefulness acting as key mediating factors. They also noted that content featuring elements of surprise and novelty positively shapes destination perceptions. In line with this, Zhou et al. (2023) found that congruence between social media influencers and their audiences plays a significant role in influencing visit intention by increasing the perceived trustworthiness and value of the shared content.

Gedongsongo Temple is a culturally significant tourist destination with outstanding historical and natural attractions, but its promotional efforts are limited and it lacks a dedicated social media presence. Most of its visibility relies on user-generated content (UGC) rather than a structured marketing strategy. While previous studies by Huang and Sun (2019) and Adha et al. (2020) have established the general influence of social media on tourist behavior, few studies have specifically examined how UGC influences domestic visit intention to under-promote a heritage site. Furthermore, the mediating role of online reviews and social visibility remains under-explored in this context. This study addresses this gap by investigating how social media content—especially UGC—influences domestic tourists' visit intention, while analyzing the mediating effects of online reviews and social visibility using the lens of Self-Congruence Theory.

Social media usage in Indonesia continues to grow, with over 260 million active users and around 62% of the population engaging with social platforms daily (Statista, 2024). Common activities include sharing content, seeking information, and social interaction. In an increasingly competitive tourism market, social media plays a key role in shaping destination image and influencing travel decisions.

Authentic and credible User-Generated Content (UGC) can enhance or harm a destination's reputation, ultimately affecting visit intention (Cheung et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, adopting a more targeted and personalized social media strategy is essential to increase domestic tourist interest in places like Gedongsongo Temple. The growing number of visitors to Gedongsongo has positively impacted the local economy by boosting sales of local food, handicrafts, and souvenirs, thereby supporting community welfare and regional economic development. Based on this context, the present study investigates how social media content—particularly UGC—influences the visit intention of domestic tourists. Applying Self-Congruence Theory, the research also examines the mediating roles of online reviews and social visibility, and aims to offer strategic recommendations for improving digital destination promotion.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

2.1. Social Media Content and Online Reviews

Online reviews shared via social media have evolved into one of the most influential tools in the tourism industry, as they provide rich information that is easily accessible to travelers (Lalicic et al., 2021). These reviews offer insights into travelers' experiences and perceptions, contributing to destination image and management (Luo et al., 2021). Additionally, credible and engaging information in online reviews can influence tourists' decisions, despite challenges such as information overload, which can lead to confusion and a decline in decision quality. Longer online reviews tend to provide more in-depth information, but if excessive, this can reduce their effectiveness, especially for high-involvement products like tourism (Wei et al., 2022; Liao et al. 2024). Social media has also become a vital marketing platform by integrating visual and textual content that enhances tourist understanding (Yang et al., 2024), and by offering User-Generated Content (UGC) that is both flexible and accessible. While companies utilize these platforms to shape consumer impressions, users engage through comparisons and shared experiences. However, an overemphasis on popular destinations and the influence of social norms may restrict exploration and reduce the authenticity of travel experiences (Zheng et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2024). Based on existing theories and research, it can be concluded that social media content, such as appealing visual photos, can influence tourists' intention to visit a destination (Zhu et al., 2023). Especially for more experienced travelers, the strong visual appeal in online reviews can be a more significant factor influencing their decision-making. Therefore, effective social media content management can strengthen destination image and attract more tourists.

H1: Social media content has a significant influence on online reviews.

2.2. Online Reviews and Social Visibility

Social visibility on social media originates from the recognition of individual competence within society, which has now expanded to include perceptions of social reach and users' ability to influence new audiences (Anderson, 1949; Carpio Pacheco et al., 2023). In the tourism context, familiarity with a destination formed through online reviews plays a crucial role in shaping prospective tourists' perceptions. Information conveyed through eWOM, particularly from reviews and both direct and indirect experiences, enables travelers to enrich their understanding of a destination and enhances its appeal (Bigne et al., 2024). High emotional involvement in content, especially that which is surprising or enjoyable, has proven more effective in building connections and increasing positive perceptions of the destination (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2020; Molina et al., 2020). Self-Congruence Theory (SCT) further strengthens this link by emphasizing that alignment between travelers' self-image and destination image—through actual, ideal, social, and ideal social

dimensions—can foster deeper emotional bonds and engagement (Le et al., 2024). When social media content resonates with users' identities, it enhances processing ease and increases interaction (Yang et al., 2021; Yang & Jiang, 2021), encouraging individuals to share and support content that aligns with their self-perception (Meeprom & Fakfare, 2021; Satar et al., 2024).

Additionally, social media facilitates visual expression, such as photos that reflect the characteristics of a destination and serve as an intuitive representation (Wang et al., 2024). Platforms like Instagram and TikTok provide channels for travelers and digital nomads to share authentic experiences, adding to the social visibility of a destination (Lacarcel et al., 2024). The popularity of posts, along with social support in the form of likes and shares, further enhances the destination's appeal and motivation to visit (Carpio Pacheco et al., 2023; Grosso et al., 2024).

H2: Online reviews have a significant impact on social visibility.

2.3. Online Reviews, Visit Intention, and Social Visibility

Visit intention is the tendency of tourists to choose and visit a destination (Ozel & Coban, 2022). Online reviews greatly assist tourists in deciding to visit a destination by boosting their confidence and reducing travel-related concerns (Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2022). Reviews, especially from credible sources or those similar to the reader, increase tourists' engagement and interest. Detailed reviews, as found by Zhu et al. (2024), provide factual information along with emotional elements that can make potential tourists feel more connected and motivated to visit. The combination of factual and emotional information in these reviews helps strengthen tourists' intention to visit the destination. Social media serves as an important tool in attracting tourists' interest through user or influencer-shared content (Yamagishi et al., 2023). Captivating photos and videos uploaded by influencers often inspire audiences to consider the promoted destination. Additionally, positive reviews and high ratings on social media further enhance the destination's appeal, making tourists more likely to choose it (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021). Users who actively engage with destination content, such as by watching or sharing short videos, tend to have a stronger intention to visit (Li & Tu, 2023). Thus, online reviews and social interactions strengthen destination visibility and increase tourists' visit intentions.

Visit intention is also driven by the destination image formed through social media information and the emotional aspects felt by tourists (Baber & Baber, 2023). A positive image, such as enthusiasm for the destination, can enhance tourists' desire to visit (Zhou et al., 2024). Visit intention reflects tourists' readiness based on the visual experiences and emotions they derive from social media (Sengel et al., 2022).

H3: Online reviews have a significant effect on visiting intention

H4: Social visibility has a significant effect on visiting intention

2.4. Online Reviews and Social Visibility as Mediation

A strong and emotionally resonant destination image is a key factor in enhancing tourists' motivation to visit, particularly when shaped by dynamic social media interactions (Baber & Baber, 2023). User-generated content (UGC) such as comments, images, and videos significantly contributes to building an emotional connection with destinations, reinforcing tourists' satisfaction and perception. Platforms like YouTube and TikTok enrich this process by conveying the aesthetic and cultural appeal of destinations through engaging audiovisual narratives (Lee et al., 2023). Social media marketing, through mechanisms like online communities, credibility, and content sharing, has also proven effective in strengthening destination image and encouraging visit intention (Gaffar et al., 2022). Within this ecosystem, online reviews function as a critical mediator by providing detailed,

credible, and experience-based evaluations that help align tourist expectations with the reality of the destination (Simonetti & Bigne, 2022).

In particular, UGC plays a vital role in constructing authentic and trustworthy representations of tourism destinations, often through Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), which allows travelers to share genuine experiences beyond formal marketing narratives (Yamagishi et al., 2023; Wijaya et al., 2024). While firm-generated content (FGC) may offer structured credibility, the integration of UGC and FGC creates a compelling content mix that attracts greater attention and influences intention to visit (Li & Tu, 2023). Furthermore, the visual dimension of content—photos and videos—encourages users to share their own travel experiences, thereby amplifying destination visibility (Cai et al., 2024). Social media visibility not only enhances destination appeal but also allows tourists to assert social identity, including among specific groups like Muslim travelers, for whom travel content can reflect both social status and spiritual values (Bilgin, 2024).

H5. Online reviews as mediating the influence of social media content on visiting intention.

H6. Online review and social visibility mediate the effect of social media content on visit intention.

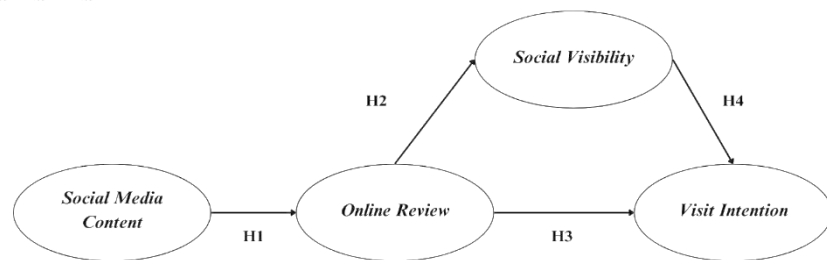


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach using primary data collected through a questionnaire survey. The target population consisted of domestic tourists who had previously visited the Gedongsongo Temple tourism area. To ensure that the data collected reflected relevant and informed perspectives, a purposive sampling technique was applied. This method was chosen to target individuals who had direct experience with the destination, allowing for more accurate and meaningful responses related to their perceptions of the temple and its online representation. The survey was distributed online via Google Forms and disseminated through various social media platforms to effectively reach the intended respondents. A total of 113 valid responses were collected from individuals who had previously viewed social media content related to Gedongsongo Temple and had physically visited the site. The survey instrument was designed to measure four key variables central to the research framework. The first variable, social media content, was evaluated based on the extent to which it presented visually attractive, clear, and authentic information about the temple.

The second variable, online reviews, focused on aspects such as the rating, quality, and quantity of reviews, as well as their influence on visitor interest. The third variable, social visibility, was assessed by examining indicators such as content reach, user engagement, and overall popularity on social platforms, all of which reflect the degree of social exposure a destination receives. Lastly, the variable of visit intention captured respondents' future travel plans, enthusiasm toward the destination, and their tendency to compare it with other locations. These constructs

were chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media dynamics influence tourists' behavioral intentions.

For the data analysis, the study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) supported by the PLS and SPSS 24 software. SEM was selected due to its capacity to examine multiple relationships among variables simultaneously, offering a robust analytical framework for assessing complex interactions. Prior to the main analysis, the dataset was examined to ensure it met necessary assumptions, such as the absence of outliers and appropriate data distribution. Additionally, tests for validity and reliability were conducted to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the measurement instruments. A model fit evaluation followed to assess the suitability of the proposed model with the observed data. These preparatory steps were essential to ensure the findings produced were both valid and reliable, enabling a trustworthy interpretation of the relationships among the variables under investigation.

4. Results

Validity testing aims to determine whether the research questionnaire items can measure the intended variables accurately. Data is said to be valid if the Pearson Correlation value is greater than the r-table value. This validity test uses SPSS 24 and the Pearson Correlation value. With a sample size of 113 respondents and a significance level (α) of 0.05, the r-table value is 0.1541. The results of the study showed that the Pearson Correlation value for each item was greater than the r-table value (> 0.1541). Thus, it can be concluded that all variables from the sample can be analyzed further. Reliability testing is carried out to assess the consistency of the questionnaire items used in the study. An instrument is said to be reliable if it consistently gives the same results when applied to the same conditions. In this analysis, a variable is classified as reliable if its Cronbach's alpha exceeds 0.70. All variables in the study achieved a Cronbach's alpha value above the threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement instrument used was considered reliable. Hypothesis testing in this study was carried out by analyzing T statistics and P values. The hypothesis is accepted if the p value of each hypothesis is smaller than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

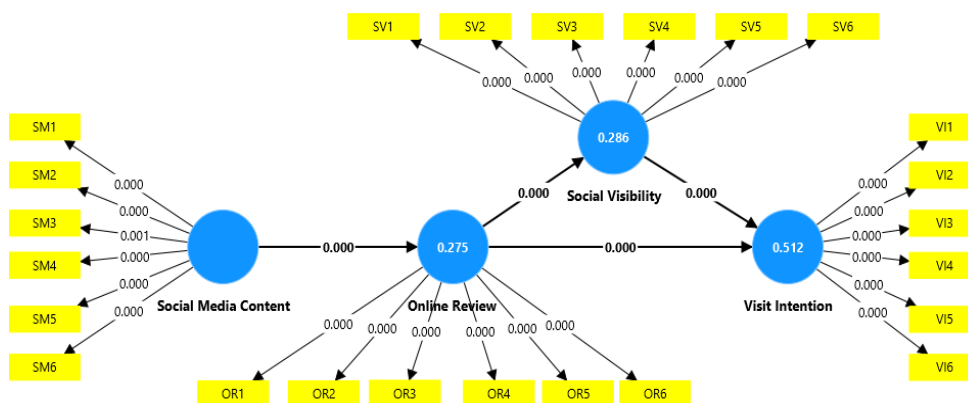


Figure 2. Output SEM of the research model

Figure 2 shows the results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) which illustrates the relationship between latent variables in the study: Social Media Content, Online Review, Social Visibility, and Visit Intention. Each construct is measured through several indicators (indicated by yellow labels such as SM1–SM6, OR1–OR6, SV1–SV6, and VI1–VI6), all of which

have a significance value of $p = 0.000$, indicating that all indicators are valid in representing the latent variables being measured. Structurally, Social Media Content has a direct influence on Online Review with a coefficient of 0.275, and Online Review has a fairly large influence on Visit Intention with a coefficient value of 0.512. In addition, social media content also has an effect on social visibility (0.286), which ultimately affects Visit Intention indirectly. All relationship paths between variables have a value of $p = 0.000$, indicating that these relationships are statistically significant. These results illustrate that social media content not only influences perceptions through online reviews, but also increases social visibility which also drives tourists' visit intentions.

Table 1. Validity Test

Variable	Item	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Social Media Content	SM1	0.717	0.000
	SM2	0.685	0.000
	SM3	0.544	0.000
	SM4	0.670	0.000
	SM5	0.782	0.000
	SM6	0.714	0.000
Online Review	OR1	0.665	0.000
	OR2	0.767	0.000
	OR3	0.707	0.000
	OR4	0.594	0.000
	OR5	0.723	0.000
	OR6	0.711	0.000
Social Visibility	SV1	0.798	0.000
	SV2	0.797	0.000
	SV3	0.772	0.000
	SV4	0.532	0.000
	SV5	0.759	0.000
	SV6	0.859	0.000
Visit Intention	VI1	0.823	0.000
	VI2	0.846	0.000
	VI3	0.816	0.000
	VI4	0.779	0.000
	VI5	0.873	0.000
	VI6	0.816	0.000

Table 1 shows the results of the item validity test through Pearson Correlation analysis between each indicator and the total score of its variables. All items in the Social Media Content, Online Review, Social Visibility, and Visit Intention variables show strong correlation values, with a coefficient range of 0.532 to 0.873. All of these correlation values are above the minimum limit of 0.50 which is generally used as an item validity criterion, and all are significant at the 0.000 level ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the relationship between items and their constructs is statistically very strong. With these results, it can be concluded that all question items in the questionnaire are valid and able to measure the intended variable construct accurately. This shows that the instrument used in this study has met the validity requirements and can be continued for further analysis such as reliability testing and structural modeling.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Content	0.773
Online Review	0.778
Social Visibility	0.851
Visit Intention	0.904

Table 2 presents the results of the reliability test for each variable using the Cronbach's Alpha value. The results show that all variables have a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70, which is the minimum threshold commonly used to state that a construct has good reliability. The highest value is found in the Visit Intention variable with a value of 0.904, indicating very high internal consistency between items in measuring visit intention. Meanwhile, the Social Visibility variable also shows very strong reliability with a value of 0.851, followed by Online Review at 0.778 and Social Media Content at 0.773. Thus, all instruments used in this study can be considered reliable, because they show high consistency in measuring their respective constructs. This strengthens the validity of the data obtained for further analysis.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test

Variable	Original Sample	Mean	Std. Dev.	T Statistics	P Values
H1: Social Media Content -> Online Review	0.525	0.544	0.076	6.877	0.000
H2: Online Review -> Social Visibility	0.535	0.547	0.067	8.011	0.000
H3: Social Visibility -> Visit Intention	0.514	0.515	0.070	7.309	0.000
H4: Online Review -> Visit Intention	0.294	0.297	0.077	3.808	0.000
H5: Social Media Content -> Online Review -> Visit Intention	0.155	0.161	0.048	3.216	0.001
H6: Social Media Content -> Online Review -> Social Visibility -> Visit Intention	0.144	0.154	0.041	3.541	0.000

Based on Table 3, it is known that social media content also has a positive and significant influence on online reviews, with a p-value (0.000) smaller than α (0.05), meaning H1 is accepted. Additionally, online reviews have a positive and significant influence on social visibility, with a p-value (0.00) less than α (0.05), meaning H2 is accepted. Furthermore, there is an influence of social visibility and online reviews on visit intention, with each variable's p-value (0.000) smaller than the α value (0.05), indicating H3 and H4 are accepted.

The mediation effect test was conducted to prove that the variables of social visibility and online reviews can act as mediating variables between social media content and visit intention. In this study, the mediation effect test was performed by analyzing the T statistics and p values in the specific indirect effect section. A hypothesis is accepted if the p-value of each hypothesis is smaller than the significance level ($\alpha=0.05$). The results indicate that there is an indirect influence mediated by the online review variable in the relationship between social media content and visit intention. This is shown by the p-value (0.001), which is smaller than α (0.05), meaning H5 is accepted. The results also indicate that there is an indirect influence mediated by the online review and social visibility variables in the relationship between social media content and visit intention, with a p-value (0.000) smaller than the α value (0.05), meaning H6 is accepted.

For hypothesis H5, it was found that the direct mediation path through Online Review has a significant effect on Visit Intention, with an original sample value of 0.155, a t-statistic value of 3.216, and a p-value of 0.001. Because the p-value is below 0.05, hypothesis H5 is accepted, which means that Online Review significantly mediates the relationship between social media content and visit intention. Meanwhile, hypothesis H6 tests chain mediation through Online Review and Social Visibility. The results show that the indirect effect of Social Media Content on Visit Intention through the two mediation variables is also significant, with an original sample value of 0.144, a t-statistic value of 3.541, and a p-value of 0.000. Because this value is also significant below the threshold of 0.05, hypothesis H6 is accepted.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that social media content has a significant influence on domestic tourists' visit intentions to Gedongsongo Temple, with this influence mediated by online reviews and social visibility. In line with the findings of Hussain et al. (2024), visually appealing, informative, and authentic content on social media can encourage user interaction which then results in online reviews. Credible content, especially from influencers, also strengthens audience trust in tourism messages (Ong et al., 2024). In addition, personal and informative destination images can increase consumer engagement and encourage electronic word-of-mouth (Abbasi et al., 2023). Furthermore, Zheng et al. (2023) argue that online reviews contribute to increasing the social visibility of destinations. Public reviews on social media can create "destination envy" and expand destination exposure among users. Sharma (2023) also said that active promotion from tourists through positive reviews and online interactions is an effective means of increasing visibility, especially for destinations that are experiencing a crisis or are less well-known. Reviews that display positive emotions such as joy gain more engagement and reach Galiano-Coronil et al. (2023), while content that highlights local sustainability also plays a role in expanding social exposure (Chatterjee & Dsilva, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2024).

High social visibility, including reach, engagement, and popularity of content, has been shown to drive tourists' visit intentions. According to Chelliah et al. (2020), a positive destination image can overcome risk perceptions and still attract interest in visiting. Destination visualization helps tourists form expectations through the process of "perception completion" or completing perceptions based on available visual information (Khozaei et al., 2023). Authentic and credible content on platforms such as YouTube can also strengthen users' emotional attachment to the destination, according to Carpio Pacheco et al. (2023), while the right digital communication strategy from destination marketing organizations has been shown to increase visibility (Molina et al., 2020). User-generated content containing positive emotions such as happiness and serenity is becoming more popular and effective in shaping travel intentions (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2020; Li & Tu, 2023).

Online reviews also directly influence tourists' travel intentions. Information sources that are perceived as expert and relevant can increase interest in a destination (Arora & Lata, 2020), while social similarities between reviewers and potential travelers help foster trust (Gonzalez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Emotional narratives that highlight positive experiences can trigger tourists' imaginations about their visit (Zhu et al., 2024). In addition, positive reputations formed on social media support the formation of cognitive and affective destination images (Baber & Baber, 2023), and emotional reviews are very effective in attracting new visitors, especially to less popular destinations (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021). Cai et al. (2024) argue that the role of online reviews has been shown to strengthen the relationship between social media content and tourists' travel intentions. For example, user-generated photo reviews of expensive destinations reinforce the exclusive image and

attract tourists. Trust in user-generated content and emotional aspects in reviews also help shape a positive destination image, as stated by Yamagishi et al. (2023). The preferences and social identities of reviewers, such as Muslim travelers, help expand the appeal of destinations through reviews that emphasize spiritual and privacy aspects (Bilgin, 2024). Wijaya et al. (2024) also argue that, in fact, content from official sources influences certain groups more than content from ordinary users, and the match between destination type and video source can increase the effectiveness of promotion.

6. Conclusion

Social media content significantly influences domestic tourists' intention to visit Gedongsongo Temple by increasing online reviews and social visibility. Authentic, engaging, and informative content encourages users to share positive feedback, increasing destination exposure, and strengthening public perception. Online reviews help build credibility and trust, while social visibility through user interactions and content popularity presents Gedongsongo Temple as a desirable and reliable destination, which ultimately fosters stronger visitation intentions. Practically, these findings provide useful insights for local destination managers. By optimizing digital strategies, especially through authentic and culturally relevant social media content, managers can strengthen emotional connections with potential visitors. Theoretically, this study supports the Self-Congruence Theory in the context of digital tourism, which suggests that congruence between tourists' self-image and destination identity increases emotional engagement and behavior. The role of online reviews and social visibility highlights the importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and User-Generated Content (UGC) in influencing tourists' perceptions, offering valuable perspectives on how digital platforms can serve as tools for local economic empowerment. Limitations of this study include the small sample size that limits the generalizability of the results, and the focus solely on social media users may exclude insights from non-users. Future studies are recommended to include more diverse respondents and consider additional variables such as service quality and destination image.

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Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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