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THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING-BASED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN ATTRACTING MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z TO PEKANBARU AGRO TOURISM

Susi Artuti Erda Dewi[1], Hefri Yodiansyah[2], Harry Jummaulana[3]
Universitas Persada Bunda Indonesia, Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia
susiartuti@gmail.com[1] , hefriyodiansyahth@gmail.com[2],
jummaulanahari@gmail.com[3]

Abstract

The development of digital technology has changed the way tourist destinations interact with their audiences, particularly millennials and Gen Z, who dominate internet users in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the role of digital marketing communications in increasing the interest of young people to visit Pekanbaru Agro Tourism. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a purposive sampling technique with five informants, consisting of owners, employees, and visitors. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of social media content, then analyzed using reduction, presentation, and conclusion techniques. The results show that the use of Instagram and TikTok plays a dominant role in attracting the attention of the younger generation through visual, educational, and interactive content. Millennials are more responsive to Instagram, while Gen Z shows a significant increase in TikTok. Digital marketing strategies have been proven to increase engagement, strengthen the destination's image, and encourage visitor loyalty through two-way interactions. The study's conclusions emphasize that digital marketing communications function not only as a promotional tool but also as a medium for interaction and the formation of a positive destination image. The practical implications of this study provide recommendations for tourism managers to optimize creative content-based digital marketing strategies according to the characteristics of young audiences.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, Digital Marketing, Millennials, Gen Z, Agrotourism

Abstract

The development of digital technology has transformed how tourist destinations interact with their audiences, particularly millennials and Gen Z, who dominate internet users in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the role of digital marketing-based communication in increasing youth visits to Agro Wisata Pekanbaru. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed with purposive sampling involving five informants, including the owner, staff, and visitors. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of social media content, then analyzed through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that Instagram and TikTok play a dominant role in attracting young audiences through visual, educational, and interactive content. Millennials are more responsive to

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Instagram, while Gen Z shows a significant increase in engagement on TikTok. Digital marketing strategies effectively enhance engagement, strengthen destination image, and foster visitor loyalty through two-way interaction. The study concludes that digital marketing communication functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a medium for interaction and positive image building. Practical implications suggest that tourism managers should optimize creative digital content strategies tailored to the characteristics of young audiences.
Keywords: Marketing Communication, Digital Marketing, Millennials, Gen Z, Agro-tourism

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental process that allows individuals and groups to exchange information, ideas, and emotions. In everyday life, communication plays a crucial role in building social relationships and fostering understanding among people. This process involves various elements, including the sender, channel, receiver, and feedback. The effectiveness of communication depends heavily on the individual's ability to convey and understand the message effectively, as well as on the context in which the interaction occurs.

Indonesia has various regions with high potential for agrotourism. Several well-known locations, such as Bali, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and East Java, have successfully developed agrotourism. For example, Malang Regency in East Java is known for its horticultural gardens that attract many visitors. Furthermore, areas like Ciwidey in Bandung also offer fruit-picking experiences. Agrotourism not only serves as a tourist attraction but also has a positive impact on the local economy. This sector has the potential to create jobs, increase farmers' incomes, and reduce poverty in areas surrounding tourist destinations. Indonesian tourism currently faces the challenge of adapting to developments in digital technology and changes in consumer behavior. According to Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data (2023), the tourism sector's contribution to national GDP reached 4.1%, with a projected increase following the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery. However, Indonesia's tourism competitiveness still faces obstacles, such as low promotional innovation, limited technology utilization, and suboptimal digital communication strategies (Kemenparekraf, 2024).

Parents also benefit from agrotourism to educate and educate their children about the world of agriculture. This activity is certainly positive, as it combines entertainment and education, enhancing knowledge. The development of agrotourism in Pekanbaru has a positive impact on the local economy. This sector creates new jobs and increases farmers' incomes through direct sales of agricultural products to visitors. Furthermore, agrotourism also contributes to introducing local products to the wider community, thus supporting the sustainability of the regional economy. One such agrotourism destination in Pekanbaru is the Tenayan Raya Pekanbaru Agrotourism. Agrotourism in Pekanbaru, such as the Tenayan Raya Agrotourism, has implemented promotional efforts using social media.(Mpila et al., 2020)However, visitation data shows a decline after 2023. This indicates that the communication strategy employed has not fully addressed the needs of the younger generation. Therefore, a more specific approach based on digital marketing is needed to increase engagement and strengthen the image of agrotourism in the eyes of millennials and Gen Z.(Pratisti et al., 2024)Agrotourism as a form of educational

tourism is highly relevant to the preferences of this generation, especially when packaged with creative communication strategies through TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts.(Florentina et al., 2024)

Digital marketing communications play a crucial role. Digital marketing strategies not only convey information but also foster two-way interaction between tourism managers and tourists.(Yodiansyah & Yuzalmi, 2018)Through social media, tourist destinations can display engaging visual content, engage in storytelling, and create virtual experiences that encourage visitors.(Permatasari & Nugroho Saputro, 2024).

Furthermore, digital marketing communications also provide opportunities to build community engagement.(Permatasari & Nugroho Saputro, 2024)Research shows that visitor interaction with social media content at a tourist destination can significantly increase the desire to visit. Furthermore, the presence of local influencers can strengthen marketing messages because they are perceived as more authentic and trusted by the younger generation.

Millennials and Gen Z dominate over 60% of internet users in Indonesia (APJII, 2023). They have unique travel consumption patterns: they tend to choose destinations that offer new experiences, are easily accessible digitally, and offer added educational and social value.(Sari & Utami, 2021)Gen Z plays the role of information disseminator in social media. They have the ability to spread news, trends, or messages across various platforms.(Komara & Widjaya, 2024)However, this also carries significant responsibility, given the ease with which information spreads in this digital age. Sometimes, without malicious intent, Gen Z can unintentionally spread inaccurate information or disinformation. Therefore, it is important to understand how Gen Z can positively contribute to the spread of authentic information, as well as how they can play a critical role in assessing and filtering the content circulating in their social media environment.

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RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. This research design was chosen because it was appropriate for in-depth descriptions of the role of digital marketing-based marketing communications in attracting millennials and Gen Z to Pekanbaru Agrotourism.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher herself, who served as data collector (human instrument). To support data collection, a semi-structured interview guide, observation sheets, and documentation in the form of photos, archives, and social media content from Agro Wisata Pekanbaru were used.

Research Participants/Samples

1. Participants in this study included:
2. Owner or manager of Pekanbaru Agro Tourism.
3. Employees involved in digital services and promotions.
4. Visitors from the millennial and Gen Z generations.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering their understanding of the digital communication strategies used and their experience

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visiting the site. A total of 17 informants were recruited, consisting of 2 employees and 15 visitors.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through several stages:

1. Direct observation of digital promotional activities on social media and visitor interactions in the field.
2. Semi-structured interviews with owners, employees, and visitors to gain insights into the effectiveness of digital marketing.
3. Documentation, in the form of activity photos, visitor reports, and promotional content from Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques. The analysis process was carried out in the following stages:

1. Data reduction, namely sorting data from interviews, observations and documentation.
2. Presentation of data, in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, and graphs to facilitate interpretation.
3. Drawing conclusions, by connecting field findings to digital marketing communication theory and previous literature.

RESEARCH RESULT

The results of this study were obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation of the owners, employees, and visitors of Agro Wisata Pekanbaru, as well as analysis of social media content used in digital-based marketing strategies. The research focused on the role of digital marketing in attracting millennials and Gen Z, the primary target audience.

1. Digital Media Used

Agro Wisata Pekanbaru utilizes various social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Instagram is the primary platform because it emphasizes visual photos and short videos that resonate with the younger generation. TikTok is also used to reach Gen Z through creative and interactive content.

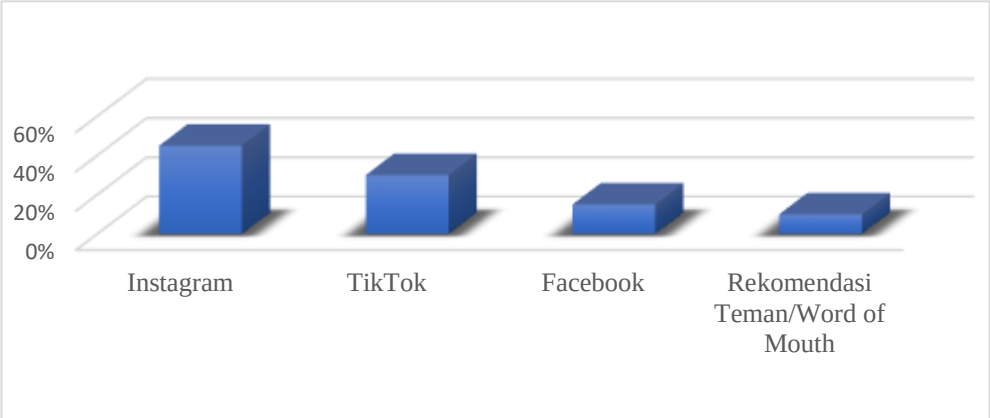
Table 1. Digital Platforms Used by Pekanbaru Agro Tourism

No	Digital Platform	Main Content Types	Dominant Target Audience
1.	Instagram	Photos, reels, stories	Millennials & Gen Z
2.	TikTok	Creative & educational videos	Gen Z
3.	Facebook	General information & events	Millennials
4.	WhatsApp Group	Community/school information	Parents & teachers

2. Millennial and Gen Z Responses

Based on interviews, the majority of millennial and Gen Z visitors learned about Agrowisata Pekanbaru through social media. Visual, educational, and interactive content were key factors in attracting them.

Chart 1.1. Information Sources for Millennial & Gen Z Visitors



3. Visit Trends

Data shows that the number of visitors from younger generations has increased significantly following digital marketing optimization. Millennials dominated in 2022, while Gen Z showed a sharp upward trend in 2023–2024.

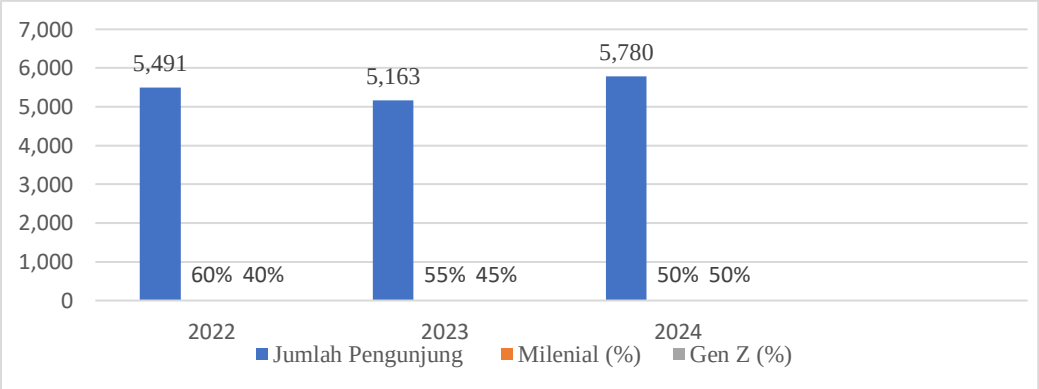


Chart 1.2. Information Sources for Millennial & Gen Z Visitors

4. Research Findings

1. Digital marketing, especially through Instagram and TikTok, plays a dominant role in attracting millennials and Gen Z.
2. Educational and interactive visual content is preferred by the target audience, thus increasing the appeal of Agro Tourism.
3. The number of visitors from Gen Z continues to increase, indicating a shift in the main audience segment.
4. A consistent digital marketing strategy has a positive impact on destination image, visitor loyalty, and digital word-of-mouth promotion.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that digital-based marketing communications through Instagram and TikTok not only serve as promotional tools, but also create closer interactions between tourism managers and millennial and Gen Z visitors. This

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is in line with the views of(Yodiansyah & Yuzalmi, 2018)which emphasizes that digital marketing opens up two-way communication, so messages are no longer one-way but instead allow for emotional engagement. Thus, the effectiveness of digital strategies at Pekanbaru Agro Tourism can be understood as a form of participatory communication that strengthens visitor loyalty.

The younger generation's engagement with visual and interactive content also supports the uses and gratifications theory, which explains that audiences actively choose media based on specific needs and gratifications. Millennials prefer Instagram for its aesthetic visual experience, while Gen Z is more responsive to TikTok due to its dynamic, fast-paced, and trend-driven nature.(Florentina et al., 2024)These differences in preferences indicate that digital audience segmentation is not homogeneous, so marketing strategies must be able to adapt content formats to the media consumption habits of each group.

Furthermore, the findings of this study strengthen the study(Permatasari & Nugroho Saputro, 2024)regarding the importance of engagement in digital marketing communications. Interaction through comments, content sharing, and participation in online activities has been shown to increase visitor interest and strengthen the image of tourist destinations. Agro Wisata Pekanbaru, which consistently builds interactions through social media, is able to create an emotional experience that drives digital word-of-mouth promotion, in line with the concept of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM).

In addition, the results of this study also confirm the shift in visiting trends from millennial dominance towards a significant increase in Gen Z visitors. This shift can be explained by Rogers' theory of innovation diffusion, where Gen Z acts as early adopters and disseminators of information through their social networks.(Komara & Widjaya, 2024)This means that destination managers who are able to capitalize on Gen Z's media consumption patterns will have a competitive advantage in expanding their tourism market reach.

Thus, digital marketing communications in the agrotourism context not only increase exposure but also build a positive image, strengthen emotional connection, and foster community engagement. This position emphasizes the need for digital marketing strategies to continuously innovate with relevant, creative content to ensure sustainable visits from millennials and Gen Z amidst increasingly fierce tourism destination competition.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results regarding the Role of Digital Marketing-Based Marketing Communications in Attracting Millennials and Gen Z to Pekanbaru Agro Tourism, it can be concluded that digital communication strategies have proven to play a significant role in increasing the interest and visits of young tourists. The use of social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, has become the primary means of reaching an audience dominated by millennials and Gen Z. Visual, educational, and interactive content successfully adapts to the characteristics of the digital native generation, thus creating a more engaging, participatory, and memorable tourism experience.

This research also shows that the success of digital marketing communications is determined not only by the information delivered, but also by the ability to build emotional connection with young visitors. Therefore, digital marketing is not just a promotional tool, but also an interactive space that can strengthen a destination's image and foster visitor loyalty.

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