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The Mediating Role Of Destination Image In The Relationship Between Instagram Based Digital Content Marketing And Tourists' Visitation Intention At Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango

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Abstract

This study examines the role of destination image in mediating the effect of digital content marketing on Instagram on tourists' visitation intention at Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango. A quantitative approach with a causal correlational design was employed. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from 200 respondents who had accessed the destination's Instagram content within the past twelve months. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that digital content marketing has a significant positive effect on destination image and visitation intention. However, its direct effect on visitation intention is relatively weaker compared to its effect on destination image. Destination image has a strong positive effect on visitation intention and significantly mediates the relationship between digital content marketing and visitation intention. These findings suggest that digital content marketing primarily influences tourists' behavioral intention through the formation of destination image. This study contributes to tourism marketing literature by highlighting the importance of perception based mechanisms in conservation based destinations.

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Keywords: Digital Content Marketing; Destination Image; Visitation Intention; Instagram; National Park Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the tourism industry in recent years has demonstrated a significant transformation, particularly in the way destinations communicate their marketing messages to potential tourists. While destination promotion previously relied heavily on conventional media such as brochures, television, and tourism exhibitions, current marketing strategies have shifted toward the digital domain. Social media, video sharing platforms, and digital content marketing approaches have now become the primary channels for delivering information, enhancing attractiveness, and influencing tourists' travel decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

These advancements in digital technology have also altered tourist behavior in seeking information. Tourists increasingly rely on digital media as their primary source of information prior to making travel decisions, as it is considered more accessible, up to date, and capable of presenting engaging visual experiences (Leung et al., 2019). This is consistent with studies indicating that social media plays a significant role in shaping tourists' preferences and behaviors when selecting destinations (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). In this context, digital content marketing functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a medium for shaping tourists' initial perceptions of a destination.

The utilization of digital media in the tourism sector provides opportunities for destination managers to reach potential tourists more broadly and effectively. Through digital content such as photographs, videos, and experiential narratives, destination managers not only disseminate information but also shape perceptions and the overall destination image in tourists' minds. Previous studies have shown that digital content distributed through social media can influence tourists' perceptions and provide insights into the travel experiences offered (Alsoud et al., 2023). However, exposure to digital content does not always directly lead to visitation decisions. Tourists generally form perceptions or a destination image before making travel choices (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024). This indicates the presence of a psychological mechanism that mediates the relationship between digital content marketing and visitation intention.

This phenomenon is also evident in nature based and conservation tourism destinations, which must be managed in accordance with sustainable tourism principles, namely the balance between environmental, social, and economic aspects (Wiweka, 2019). One example is Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango (TNGGP), located in Cibodas, West Java. As a popular

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conservation area, TNGGP attracts visitors with an interest in nature-based tourism and hiking activities. Visitor data indicate that in the post COVID-19 pandemic period, the number of visitors has fluctuated. In 2022, there were 254,932 visitors (Balai Besar Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango, 2022), followed by a significant decline to 124,938 in 2023 and a further decrease to 111,543 in 2024 (Fienaurisilmi et al., 2024). This decline is presumed to be associated with visitation restrictions and conservation efforts. Subsequently, in 2025, the number of visitors increased again to 202,511, based on publication data shared via the official Instagram account of Balai Besar Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango, indicating a recovery trend in tourist visits.

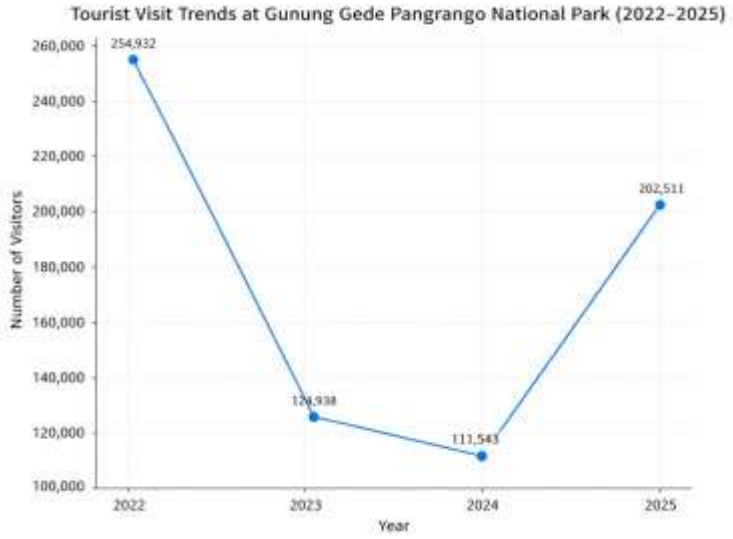


Figure 1. Tourist Visit Trends at TNGGP (2022–2025)

Source: Balai Besar TNGGP (processed)

In an effort to expand its promotional reach, TNGGP has utilized social media, particularly Instagram, as a channel for information dissemination. This platform is used to communicate information regarding natural attractions, hiking trails, environmental conditions, and visitation regulations. The activity of its Instagram account demonstrates a relatively high level of engagement, as indicated by a follower base exceeding 135,000 and fluctuating interactions in the form of likes and comments on each post. This high level of engagement reflects strong audience interest in the content presented.

However, this increase in digital activity is not always accompanied by a consistent rise in visitation numbers. This phenomenon suggests the existence of a gap between digital engagement

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and actual tourist behavior (intention–behavior gap), where interest in content does not necessarily translate into visitation decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Alsoud et al., 2023).

Table: 1 Instagram Engagement Data of TNGGP

Indicator	Value
Followers	135,000 (as of March 7, 2026)
Number of Likes	±100–8,000 per post
Number of Comments	±20–1,800



Figure 2. Instagram Account of BBTN Gunung Gede Pangrango as of March 7, 2026

Although numerous studies have demonstrated that digital content marketing plays a role in influencing visitation intention, existing empirical findings remain inconsistent. Some studies have found that digital content marketing exerts a direct effect on visitation intention (Alsoud et al., 2023). However, other research indicates that this effect is not directly significant but is instead mediated by psychological variables such as destination image (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024).

These differing findings suggest that the relationship between digital content marketing and visitation intention is contextual in nature. Factors such as the type of digital platform, destination characteristics, and accessibility constraints may influence how tourists respond to digital content. In the context of conservation based destinations such as TNGGP, visitation regulations, quota limitations, and physical preparedness requirements distinguish them from

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mass tourism destinations.

In addition, most previous studies have focused on urban destinations or man made attractions and have examined social media in a general sense. Studies that specifically investigate Instagram based digital content marketing as a visual platform in shaping destination image and visitation intention in conservation destinations remain relatively limited (Eman & Refaie, 2023; Omeish et al., 2024).

Based on this discussion, the research gap lies in both the inconsistency of findings regarding the relationship between digital content marketing and visitation intention, and the limited focus on conservation based destinations and visual social media platforms. Furthermore, the discrepancy between high digital engagement and actual visitation behavior indicates an intention behavior gap that remains insufficiently explained. Therefore, this study aims to examine how Instagram based digital content marketing influences tourists' visitation intention, and whether this influence occurs directly or through the mediating role of destination image.

To provide a theoretical foundation for explaining this mechanism, this study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework as the primary theoretical lens. Within this framework, Instagram based digital content marketing is conceptualized as the stimulus (S), destination image represents the organism (O) reflecting tourists' internal cognitive and affective evaluations, and visitation intention is positioned as the response (R).

This study focuses on Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango as a conservation-based destination characterized by visitation restrictions and environmental regulations. Specifically, this study examines: (1) the effect of digital content marketing on destination image; (2) the effect of digital content marketing on visitation intention; (3) the effect of destination image on visitation intention; and (4) the indirect effect of digital content marketing on visitation intention through destination image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Content Marketing

Digital content marketing can be understood as a strategic marketing orientation that prioritizes the intentional development and systematic dissemination of content that is not only relevant and consistent but also capable of delivering meaningful value to a clearly defined target audience, with the ultimate aim of encouraging profitable customer actions (Pulizzi & Piper, 2023). Within this framework, content extends beyond its traditional role as a promotional instrument and instead functions as a relational medium through which organizations cultivate longterm

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engagement by continuously providing useful and insightful information. By emphasizing value creation, this approach gradually shapes how audiences interpret information, influences their attitudes, and ultimately directs their behavioral responses over time.

In the context of tourism, digital content marketing plays a crucial role in delivering information, enhancing attractiveness, and shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination. Through visual content such as photographs, videos, and experiential narratives, destination managers can provide insights into the travel experiences offered to potential tourists. The use of social media, particularly Instagram, enables the delivery of more interactive and visually engaging content, thereby increasing audience engagement and encouraging the formation of visitation intention (Eman & Refaie, 2023; Fitri et al., 2023). In digital tourism, social media also contributes to shaping tourists' experiences and preferences toward destinations (Sutrisno et al., 2024). Moreover, from a consumer behavior perspective, information obtained through digital media influences tourists' decision-making processes in selecting destinations (Wibowo, 2015).

The effectiveness of content marketing is determined by the ability of content to deliver value to audiences, maintain relevance to the needs of the target audience, ensure consistency in content delivery, and foster audience engagement and experience through the content presented (Pulizzi & Piper, 2023). Therefore, digital content marketing does not solely focus on information dissemination but also on how content can create engaging and meaningful experiences for audiences.

However, several studies indicate that the influence of digital content marketing on tourist behavior is not always direct, but rather mediated by psychological factors such as perceptions and attitudes toward the destination (Wang & Yan, 2022; Helal et al., 2023). This suggests that the effectiveness of digital content marketing is determined not only by content quality but also by its ability to shape tourists' interpretations and evaluations of a destination. Thus, digital content marketing serves not only as a source of information but also as a stimulus that shapes tourists' perceptions of a destination.

Based on this concept, in this study digital content marketing is operationalized into several dimensions, namely content value, content relevance, content consistency, audience engagement, and content experience. Content value refers to the extent to which content provides benefits and value to the audience. Content relevance reflects the alignment of content with tourists' needs and interests. Content consistency indicates the regularity and continuity of content publication. Audience engagement describes the level of audience involvement with the presented content. Meanwhile, content experience relates to the ability of content to convey

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experiential aspects and to build the audience's emotional interest in the destination.

Destination Image

Stylidis et al. (2020) define destination image as a mental representation formed from tourists' perceptions, beliefs, and evaluations of a destination. Destination image not only reflects the physical attributes of a place but also encompasses psychological aspects that influence how tourists assess and experience a destination. In the context of modern tourism, destination image has become a crucial factor influencing tourists' decisions when selecting travel destinations. Destinations with a positive image are more likely to attract tourists' interest compared to those with a less favorable image (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024).

With the advancement of digital technology, the formation of destination image is increasingly influenced by information obtained through digital media and social media platforms. Tourists can access a wide range of content, experiences, and user-generated reviews that contribute to shaping their perceptions of a destination (Sutrisno et al., 2024; Ramdan et al., 2025). Therefore, destination image is no longer formed solely through direct experience but also through exposure to digital information prior to the visit.

However, several studies indicate that the influence of destination image on tourist behavior is not always consistent, as it may be affected by the context of the destination as well as the sources of information received by tourists (Li & Jiang, 2024; Wang & Yan, 2022). In the digital context, destination image is shaped not only through direct experience but also through tourists' interpretations of the digital content they consume. This highlights that destination image is a dynamic construct influenced by the interaction between received information and individual perceptions of the destination.

From a conceptual standpoint, destination image is recognized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses two principal components, namely the cognitive image and the affective image (Stylidis et al., 2020). The cognitive dimension reflects tourists' rational assessments of a destination's functional characteristics, including aspects such as accessibility, quality of facilities, safety conditions, and the availability of attractions. In contrast, the affective dimension captures the emotional reactions of tourists, which may manifest in feelings of pleasure, comfort, and overall attraction toward the destination (Chen et al., 2020; Abou-Shouk et al., 2024).

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Visitation Intention

Visitation intention can be interpreted as an individual's inclination or willingness to undertake a future visit to a particular tourism destination, serving as an important antecedent of actual travel behavior. In tourism studies, this construct is widely acknowledged as a key predictor of tourists' real decision-making actions when selecting destinations (Gaffar et al., 2020). It embodies the degree of readiness of an individual to act, which emerges from their evaluation and interpretation of information obtained about a destination.

Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) introduced by Ajzen (2005), intention is positioned as the central determinant of human behavior. It represents the extent to which an individual is prepared to engage in a specific action, shaped by three core factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Within this theoretical perspective, a stronger level of intention corresponds to a higher probability that the behavior will be realized. Applied to the tourism setting, visitation intention reflects tourists' preparedness to carry out a visit, which develops from their assessments of available information as well as their formed perceptions of a destination.

Furthermore, the concept of intention is aligned with consumer behavior theory proposed by Kotler et al. (2017), which states that intention is a crucial component in the consumer decision making process prior to actual behavior. The decision to visit a destination is influenced by various factors, such as perceptions of the destination, prior experiences, and information obtained from multiple sources.

In the contemporary digital era, the development of visitation intention is increasingly shaped by the flow of information accessed through social media and various online platforms. Exposure to digital content, user-generated reviews, and interactive engagements on social networks contributes to the construction of tourists' perceptions regarding a destination, which subsequently influences their intention to visit (Mutamakkinah, 2025). Furthermore, the presence of a favorable destination image has been empirically identified as a crucial factor that strengthens tourists' willingness to undertake a visit (Maarif et al., 2023). From the standpoint of consumer behavior theory, this phenomenon illustrates the process by which individuals receive external stimuli, interpret them, and convert them into decisions or concrete actions, thereby reflecting behavioral outcomes within the decision-making process (Li & Jiang, 2024). However, in the digital context, the formation of visitation intention is not only influenced by internal factors as explained in the Theory of Planned Behavior, but also by external factors in the form of exposure to digital content (Pradana & Prasetio, 2025; Mutamakkinah, 2025).

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In this study, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework is extended by emphasizing the role of attitude as the primary determinant of visitation intention. Destination image is positioned as a representation of tourists' attitudes toward a destination, formed through the evaluation of received information. Meanwhile, digital content marketing serves as an external source of information that influences the formation of tourists' perceptions and attitudes. Thus, exposure to digital content through social media can shape destination image, which subsequently affects tourists' visitation intention. This development indicates that the relationship between digital content marketing and visitation intention occurs through the process of attitude formation, in line with the mechanism proposed in the Theory of Planned Behavior.

In tourism research, visitation intention is commonly measured using several indicators, such as plans to visit a destination, interest in seeking further information, willingness to recommend the destination to others, and preference in choosing a destination (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024). These indicators are used to represent tourists' behavioral tendencies in making travel decisions.

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R)

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model is a theoretical framework that explains how individuals respond to environmental stimuli through internal processes before producing a behavioral outcome. In contemporary research, this model is widely used in digital marketing and consumer behavior studies to explain how external stimuli influence individuals' psychological states and behavioral decisions (Islam et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021). In the tourism context, the S–O–R approach is relevant for understanding how exposure to digital content, particularly through social media, can shape tourists' perceptions and responses toward a destination (Bigne et al., 2020). Visual content and information presented on digital platforms act as stimuli that trigger cognitive and affective evaluation processes within tourists.

In this study, Instagram based digital content marketing is positioned as the stimulus (S), functioning as an external source of information for tourists. The content presented, such as photographs, videos, and experiential narratives, serves as the initial stimulus that influences how tourists perceive and evaluate a destination. This process then occurs at the organism (O) stage, which is represented by destination image. Destination image reflects the outcome of tourists' cognitive and affective processes in evaluating a destination based on the information received (Stylidis et al., 2020; Abou-Shouk et al., 2024). The final stage is the response (R), manifested in

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the form of visitation intention as a behavioral tendency of tourists in planning a visit (Alsoud et al., 2023; Maarif et al., 2023). Thus, the S–O–R model explains that the influence of digital content marketing on visitation intention occurs through an internal process involving the formation of destination image, indicating that the relationship among variables is indirect.

HYPOTHESIS

The Effect of Digital Content Marketing on Destination Image

A significant role of digital content marketing lies in its capacity to distribute information while simultaneously influencing how tourists construct their perceptions of a destination through diverse forms of digital content. When the content delivered is perceived as valuable, relevant, and consistently presented, it enables potential tourists to develop a clearer understanding of the attractions, facilities, and overall experiences available at a destination. As emphasized by Pulizzi and Piper (2023), the effectiveness of content marketing is fundamentally determined by its ability to generate value for the audience and to cultivate engagement through the continuous provision of meaningful information.

Within the tourism domain, content disseminated via social media platforms extends beyond merely functioning as an informational resource; it also acts as a mechanism through which tourists form their initial impressions and perceptions of a destination. Content that is designed to be engaging and tailored to audience preferences has the potential to shape how tourists interpret, assess, and evaluate the destination being promoted (Leung et al., 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2023).

Furthermore, prior empirical findings suggest that digital content marketing contributes to the formation of destination image by conveying information and experiential representations in a digital format (Dwivedi et al., 2021). As the level of content value, relevance, and consistency increases, the likelihood of developing a more favorable destination image in the minds of tourists also becomes stronger. Based on this line of reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:
H1: Digital content marketing has a positive effect on destination image.

The Effect of Digital Content Marketing on Visitation Intention

Beyond serving as a channel for information dissemination, digital content marketing also holds the capacity to shape tourists' decision making processes when selecting destinations to visit. Content that is designed to deliver meaningful, relevant, and consistently presented value can stimulate audience engagement and encourage behavioral responses. As highlighted by

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Pulizzi and Piper (2023), the strength of content marketing lies in its ability to create value while simultaneously motivating audiences to take action through sustained and purposeful communication. In the tourism context, digital content distributed through social media platforms contributes to how tourists interpret, assess, and ultimately respond to a destination.

Referring to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2005), intention is positioned as the most immediate predictor of behavior, emerging from individuals' evaluations of the information they receive. In this regard, digital content acts as a key informational input that shapes such evaluations, thereby influencing tourists' intention to visit. Empirical evidence further supports that content which is informative, engaging, and aligned with audience needs can enhance tourists' interest and stimulate the development of visitation intention (Alsoud et al., 2023). Consequently, the effectiveness of digital content marketing is directly associated with stronger visitation intention among tourists. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:
H2: Digital content marketing has a positive effect on visitation intention.

The Effect of Destination Image on Visitation Intention

Tourists' decisions in choosing a destination are strongly shaped by the image they hold of that destination, making destination image a critical determinant in travel selection. When a destination is perceived positively, it tends to strengthen tourists' confidence and increase their interest in visiting. In this regard, destination image represents a set of perceptions constructed through both cognitive assessments and affective responses, as explained by Stylidis et al. (2020).

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior, the formation of intention is closely linked to how individuals evaluate and perceive an object (Ajzen, 2005). In line with this view, empirical findings consistently demonstrate that a favorable destination image contributes significantly to the development of tourists' visitation intention (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2020). This indicates that stronger positive perceptions of a destination are associated with a higher likelihood of tourists intending to visit. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:
H3: Destination image has a positive effect on visitation intention.

The Mediating Role of Destination Image

The influence of digital content marketing extends beyond information delivery, as it also contributes to shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination, which subsequently affect their decision making regarding visitation. In this relationship, destination image occupies a pivotal

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position as an intervening variable that connects digital content marketing with tourists' intention to visit.

Referring to the Theory of Planned Behavior, the information received by individuals plays a fundamental role in forming their perceptions, which then influence the development of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 2005). Within the tourism context, digital content acts as an initial source of information that first shapes destination image before ultimately impacting visitation intention. Empirical evidence further supports this mechanism, indicating that destination image can serve as a mediating variable in the relationship between digital marketing and visitation intention (Aboalganam et al., 2025). This suggests that the effect of digital content marketing on visitation intention is not solely direct, but also operates indirectly through the formation of destination image.

Accordingly, the mediating role of destination image becomes a central element in explaining how digital content marketing influences tourists' behavioral intentions. Based on this line of reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Destination image mediates the effect of digital content marketing on visitation intention.

Based on the synthesis of the literature and the relationships among the variables described, this study develops a conceptual model that emphasizes the role of destination image in mediating the effect of digital content marketing on visitation intention.

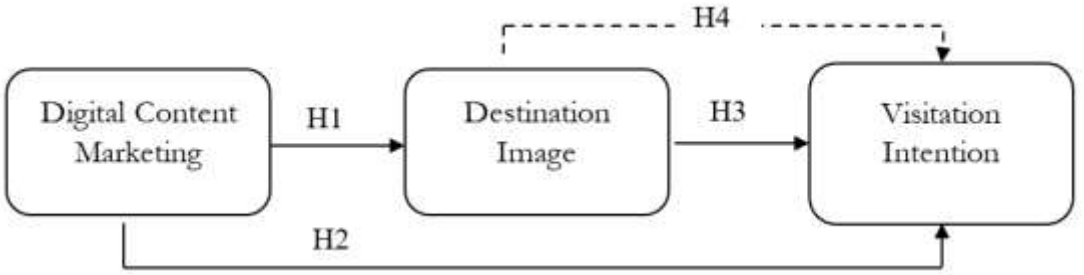


Figure 3. Research Framework

Notes:

H1: Digital Content Marketing has a positive effect on Destination Image.

H2: Digital Content Marketing has a positive effect on Visitation Intention.

H3: Destination Image has a positive effect on Visitation Intention.

H4: Destination Image mediates the effect of Digital Content Marketing on Visitation Intention.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach grounded in a survey method is adopted in this study, utilizing a causal correlational design to examine the relationships among the specified research variables. This design is intended to identify and analyze the causal associations between digital content marketing on Instagram, destination image, and visitation intention in the context of Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango, Cibodas, West Java. The selection of a quantitative framework is based on the objective of the study to empirically test the interrelationships among variables through the analysis of numerical data collected from respondents, thereby enabling a more objective and measurable evaluation of the proposed research model.

1. Participants / Subject / Population and Sample

The participants targeted in this research are individuals who have been exposed to digital information related to Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango via Instagram. The selection of respondents was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, whereby individuals are chosen based on predetermined criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. Specifically, the inclusion criteria require respondents to be at least 17 years of age and to have accessed or viewed the official Instagram account of Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango within the last twelve months.

Referring to the guidelines for multivariate statistical analysis, the determination of sample size adheres to the recommendation of having a minimum of 5–10 observations for each research indicator (Hair et al., 2019). Given that this study incorporates 16 indicators, the suggested sample size falls within the range of 80 to 160 respondents. Accordingly, the study involves 200 respondents, a number that sufficiently satisfies the minimum threshold recommended for robust statistical analysis.

2. Instruments

The data used in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through the distribution of an online questionnaire using Google Forms to respondents who had accessed digital information regarding Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango within the past twelve months, with the data collection conducted in March 2026. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from various sources, such as tourist visitation reports, official documents from destination management authorities, and scientific literature relevant to digital content marketing and destination image (Amorim et al., 2022).

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The research instrument was developed based on the dimensions of each variable derived from the underlying theories and subsequently operationalized into indicators adapted from previous studies. The digital content marketing variable refers to the content marketing concept proposed by Pulizzi and Piper (2023), destination image refers to Stylidis et al. (2020), and visitation intention refers to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2005). All indicators were measured using a five point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3. Data Analysis

The analytical procedure applied in this study utilizes Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. The choice of PLS-SEM is grounded in its suitability for predictive oriented research, its capability to accommodate complex model structures, and its flexibility in handling data without requiring the assumption of normal distribution (Hair et al., 2021). Through this method, the study examines the interrelationships among variables, capturing both direct and indirect effects within the proposed research framework. This analytical strategy is aligned with the principles of quantitative research, which emphasize objective measurement of indicators in assessing the performance of latent constructs (Murhadi, 2013). The analysis is structured into two principal stages, namely the assessment of the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model), complemented by mediation analysis conducted through the bootstrapping procedure.

The assessment of the measurement model is undertaken to confirm the validity and reliability of the constructs. Convergent validity is evaluated by examining outer loading values exceeding 0.7 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.5. Reliability is determined using Composite Reliability, with an acceptable minimum threshold of 0.7. Furthermore, discriminant validity is assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), applying a cut off value below 0.90 to ensure that each construct is empirically distinct and free from overlap with other variables.

Subsequently, the evaluation of the structural model focuses on the coefficient of determination (R^2) to measure the extent to which exogenous variables explain the variance in endogenous variables, categorized as substantial (0.75), moderate (0.50), and weak (0.25). The hypothesized relationships between variables are tested using path coefficients, while the magnitude of each exogenous variable's contribution is assessed through effect size (f^2), classified into small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35).

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RESULT

This study involved 200 respondents who met the research criteria, namely individuals who had accessed information about Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango through Instagram within the past 12 months. In terms of gender, respondents were predominantly males (58%), while females accounted for 42%.

Based on the demographic profile, the majority of respondents were aged 17–25 years, indicating that the sample is dominated by individuals within the productive age group who are actively engaged in social media use. In terms of educational background, most respondents held a bachelor's degree, while the majority were students. Furthermore, regarding visit experience, most respondents had previously visited Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango (61.5%), while the remaining 38.5% had not visited the destination. This composition indicates that the sample includes both individuals with direct experience and potential visitors, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of visitation intention.

Table: 2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	84	42%
	Male	116	58%
Age	17–25 years	120	60%
	26–35 years	50	25%
	>35 years	30	15%
Education	High School	40	20%
	Bachelor's	130	65%
	Master's	30	15%
Occupation	Student	110	55%
	Employee	70	35%
	Others	20	10%
Visit Experience	Have visited	123	61.5%
	Never visited	77	38.5%

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the relationships among digital content marketing, destination image, and visitation intention in Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango. Before analyzing the structural model, the measurement model was first evaluated to ensure that all indicators met the required validity and reliability criteria.

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Table: 3 Results of Measurement Model Evaluation

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability
Digital Content Marketing (DCM)	DCM1	0.837	0.702	0.959
	DCM2	0.852	0.702	0.959
	DCM3	0.883	0.702	0.959
	DCM4	0.786	0.702	0.959
	DCM5	0.831	0.702	0.959
	DCM6	0.777	0.702	0.959
	DCM7	0.851	0.702	0.959
	DCM8	0.830	0.702	0.959
	DCM9	0.908	0.702	0.959
	DCM10	0.813	0.702	0.959
Destination Image (DI)	DI1	0.859	0.737	0.975
	DI2	0.852	0.737	0.975
	DI3	0.816	0.737	0.975
	DI4	0.910	0.737	0.975
	DI5	0.878	0.737	0.975
	DI6	0.871	0.737	0.975
	DI7	0.824	0.737	0.975
	DI8	0.831	0.737	0.975
	DI9	0.847	0.737	0.975
	DI10	0.904	0.737	0.975
	DI11	0.915	0.737	0.975
	DI12	0.837	0.737	0.975
	DI13	0.916	0.737	0.975
	DI14	0.745	0.737	0.975
Visitation Intention (VI)	VI1	0.826	0.690	0.947
	VI2	0.745	0.690	0.947
	VI3	0.899	0.690	0.947
	VI4	0.792	0.690	0.947
	VI5	0.871	0.690	0.947
	VI6	0.874	0.690	0.947
	VI7	0.816	0.690	0.947
	VI8	0.811	0.690	0.947

Based on the measurement model evaluation presented in Table 3, all indicators exhibit

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outer loading values above the recommended threshold of 0.7, ranging from 0.745 to 0.916. This indicates that all indicators have achieved satisfactory convergent validity and are able to adequately represent their respective constructs.

Furthermore, all constructs demonstrate Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.5 and Composite Reliability values exceeding 0.7, indicating that the measurement model meets the criteria for both convergent validity and internal consistency reliability. Overall, these results confirm that all constructs are valid and reliable, and therefore suitable for further analysis.

Table: 4 Results of Discriminant Validity Testing (HTMT)

Variable	DCM	DI	VI
Digital Content Marketing (DCM)	-		
Destination Image (DI)	0.832	-	
Visitation Intention (VI)	0.836	0.890	-

In addition to convergent validity and reliability, discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to ensure that each construct is sufficiently distinct. As presented in Table 4, all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.90, with the highest value of 0.890 found between destination image and visitation intention. Although this value is relatively close to the threshold, it is still considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that discriminant validity has been achieved and that the constructs do not exhibit problematic overlap.

Following this, the analysis proceeds to the structural model (inner model) to examine the relationships among variables. This stage includes the evaluation of the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, and effect size (f^2).

Table: 5 Structural Model Results

Direct Effects						
Hypothesis	Path	f^2	Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	DCM → DI	1.844	0.805	18.618	0.000	Accepted
H2	DCM → VI	0.131	0.299	2.258	0.024	Accepted
H3	DI → VI	0.554	0.614	4.417	0.000	Accepted

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Indirect Effect					
Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H4	DCM → DI → VI	0.494	4.382	0.000	Accepted

R-Square (R^2)	
Endogenous Variable	R^2
Destination Image (DI)	0.648
Visitation Intention (VI)	0.761

The structural model results are presented in Table 5. The R^2 values indicate that digital content marketing explains the variance of destination image (R^2 = 0.648), while visitation intention is explained by both digital content marketing and destination image (R^2 = 0.761). In terms of effect size, digital content marketing has a very large effect on destination image (f^2 = 1.844), but its direct effect on visitation intention is relatively small (f^2 = 0.131). In contrast, destination image shows a large effect on visitation intention (f^2 = 0.554). The bootstrapping results indicate that all proposed relationships are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), including the indirect effect through destination image.

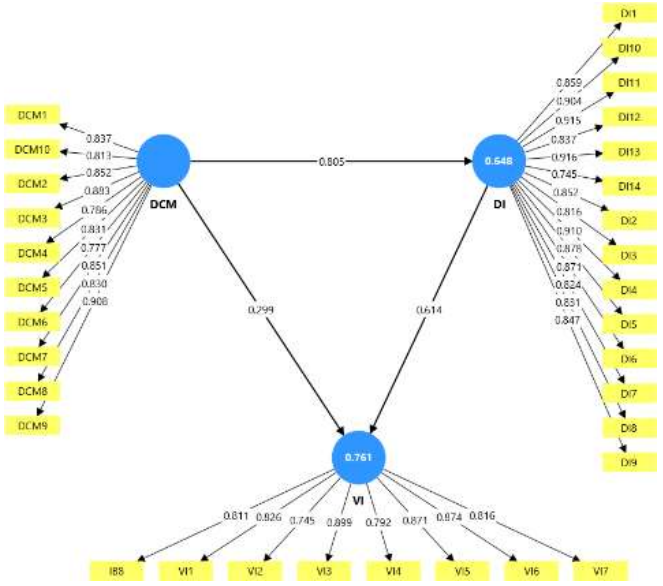


Figure 4. Structural Model Results

Figure 4 shows the structural model and the relationships among the variables. The effect

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of digital content marketing on destination image appears stronger than its direct effect on visitation intention. The R^2 values also indicate that the model explains a considerable proportion of variance in the endogenous variables.

In addition to the quantitative results, field data indicate that high engagement with digital content does not always lead to actual visits. Based on an interview with the social media administrator of Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango (March 2026), several practical constraints were identified, including visitor quotas, hiking regulations, and physical preparation requirements.

As stated by the administrator, "Interaction on Instagram is indeed high, but not everyone can immediately visit because there are hiking quotas and physical readiness requirements." This was echoed by a prospective hiker, who mentioned that "it is quite difficult to get a hiking slot because of the limited quota, even though the interest to visit is high."

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that digital content marketing plays an important role in shaping destination image and influencing tourists' visitation intention. In the context of this research, the content presented through social media, particularly Instagram, functions not only as a source of information but also as a medium that forms tourists' initial perceptions of the destination. This is reflected in the high level of audience engagement with the content, indicating strong interest and attention toward the destination. These findings also suggest that respondents tend to respond positively to the digital content presented, especially content that is visual and informative.

The role of digital content marketing in shaping destination image appears to be quite strong, indicating that visual content and narratives are able to influence how tourists understand and evaluate a destination. This condition occurs because visual and narrative content enables tourists to construct mental representations and imagine travel experiences prior to actual visitation. This finding is consistent with the concept of content marketing proposed by Pulizzi and Piper (2023), which emphasizes that valuable and relevant content can build audience perception and engagement. Furthermore, this result is in line with previous studies indicating that social media plays a significant role in shaping destination image, both cognitively and affectively (Rodrigues et al., 2023). Empirically, the findings of this study show that respondents tend to perceive the presented content as attractive, relevant, and capable of conveying a sense of the travel experience, thereby strengthening the formation of destination image. This finding is

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further supported by interview results, in which the administrator of the TNGGP Instagram account emphasized the importance of visually appealing, educational content that can effectively illustrate the travel experience to potential visitors.

On the other hand, destination image is found to be a more dominant factor in driving tourists' visitation intention. This indicates that the decision to visit is not solely dependent on the information received, but also on how tourists interpret that information into meaningful perceptions. In this context, the findings of this study are consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2005), in which attitude is one of the key determinants of intention formation. Destination image in this study can be understood as a representation of tourists' attitudes toward the destination, formed through the evaluation of the information they receive. Empirically, this is reflected in respondents' tendency to exhibit positive perceptions of the destination, both in terms of its attractiveness and the anticipated experience, which in turn encourages the intention to visit.

However, the direct effect of digital content marketing on visitation intention is relatively weaker compared to its influence on destination image. The findings highlight that the primary role of digital content marketing is more closely associated with building awareness and stimulating initial interest, rather than directly driving visitation decisions. Although respondents show a certain level of interest in the presented content, this does not necessarily translate into a readiness to undertake an actual visit. This is reflected in the high level of interaction observed on social media, which is not consistently accompanied by a corresponding increase in tourist visits.

This phenomenon points to the presence of an intention–behavior gap, referring to the discrepancy between interest generated in the digital sphere and tourists' actual behavior. In the context of Gunung Gede Pangrango National Park, this can be understood given the characteristics of a conservation-based destination, which involves various constraints such as visitor quota limitations, permit systems, and the requirement for physical readiness in hiking activities. This is consistent with field findings, where the social media administrator highlighted that high engagement does not always translate into actual visits due to these limitations. A similar point was also expressed by a prospective hiker, who noted that obtaining a hiking slot can be difficult due to limited quotas, despite having a strong interest in visiting.

The findings further reveal that destination image serves as a significant mediating variable in linking digital content marketing to visitation intention. This indicates that the impact of digital content marketing on tourists' behavioral tendencies does not manifest instantaneously, but

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instead occurs through an intermediate stage involving the formation of perceptions. Such results align with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, where digital content marketing operates as the stimulus, destination image represents the organism reflecting internal cognitive and affective processing, and visitation intention emerges as the behavioral response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the effectiveness of digital content marketing is not solely determined by the level of engagement it generates, but also by its ability to build a strong and meaningful destination image. Therefore, in the context of destination management, digital marketing strategies should not only focus on increasing interaction but also on delivering content that is informative, educational, and capable of fostering positive and sustainable perceptions in the minds of tourists. Accordingly, this study offers a novel contribution by explaining the intention–behavior gap within the context of conservation based destinations, where structural constraints such as visitor quotas and regulations influence the realization of tourists' actual behavior.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that digital content marketing has a positive effect on destination image and also influences visitation intention, although its direct effect is not dominant. On the other hand, destination image is proven to have a strong influence on tourists' visitation intention. In addition, destination image serves as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between digital content marketing and visitation intention.

These findings suggest that the influence of digital content marketing on visitation intention does not occur directly, but rather through the formation of destination image as part of tourists' psychological processes. Therefore, destination image becomes a key factor in bridging the relationship between exposure to digital content and the intention to visit. The effectiveness of digital content marketing lies in its ability to build positive perceptions, rather than merely increasing digital engagement.

The results also indicate the presence of an intention–behavior gap, where high levels of digital engagement do not necessarily translate into actual visitation decisions. Theoretically, this study reinforces the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model in the context of digital tourism and extends its application to conservation based destinations, which possess distinct characteristics compared to general tourism destinations.

Future research is recommended to examine additional variables such as trust, perceived

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risk, and accessibility factors, as well as to employ longitudinal or mixed method approaches to better understand the process through which intention is transformed into actual behavior. Moreover, future studies may expand the scope of research to different types of destinations and conduct comparative analyses across digital platforms to identify the effectiveness of various media in destination marketing.

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