

Harnessing Digital Consumer Insights for Strategic Innovation in Green Tourism Marketing: Evidence from Garut Regency, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how digital consumer insights can be converted into strategic innovation for green tourism marketing in Garut Regency, Indonesia. The study uses a descriptive survey design involving 302 respondents and is complemented by qualitative interpretation of open-ended responses on constraints, expectations, and recommended improvements in destination promotion. The results show that tourist discovery is strongly social-first and search-oriented: social media is the dominant source of destination information, followed by search engines, while short-form videos, visitor reviews, testimonials, and high-quality visual content are the most influential content formats. The findings also indicate that many respondents are willing, or potentially willing, to pay more for credible green tourism experiences, suggesting that sustainability can function as a market-based value proposition rather than merely a promotional theme. At the same time, weaknesses remain in official website performance, information integration, content consistency, and community-linked digital engagement. The paper argues that consumer insights should be treated not only as descriptive market information but also as a strategic basis for innovation in content design, platform management, integrated digital touchpoints, and community co-creation.

Keywords: *digital consumer insights, green tourism, strategic innovation, destination marketing, Garut Regency*

1. INTRODUCTION

Destination competitiveness increasingly depends on how effectively organizations convert digital consumer signals into strategic decisions. In the contemporary digital landscape, consumers evaluate destinations through social media, reviews, search results, and platform-mediated interactions before any physical visit (Dewi & Jianming, 2024; Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021). The internet has fundamentally reshaped "the way tourism-related information is distributed and the way people plan for and consume travel" (Björner, 2013), and has become the primary source of information when travelers choose destinations (Björner, 2013; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016). This condition makes consumer insights important not only for promotional communication but also for resource allocation, positioning, and innovation in destination management. Social media, in particular, has transformed customers from passive recipients into active creators who can quickly share content online, thereby influencing destination image, brand equity, and travel decision-making processes (Dewi & Jianming, 2024; Han & Chen, 2021; Wu & Pearce, 2014). Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) have recognized social media as a critical tool for promoting destinations, streamlining authentic travel information, and building brands through direct interaction with consumers (Han & Chen, 2021; Molinillo et al., 2018).

The issue becomes even more important in green tourism, where value creation depends on communicating sustainability, authenticity, and community participation in ways that are both credible and market-relevant. As Font and McCabe (2017) have argued, the nature of traveling has changed, characterized by more technologically driven travelers whose needs and expectations differ significantly from their predecessors (Liasidou et al., 2022). In this context, effective communication of sustainability initiatives and practices is an essential tool for travel service providers to manage travelers' expectations and persuade them to patronize the service provider (Kapoor et al., 2021). The rapid development of search engines and social media platforms has influenced travelers' use of technology for planning and experiencing their travels (Buhalis & Inversini, 2014), making it imperative that destination managers integrate digital consumer insights into their strategic planning processes. User-generated content (UGC), including

travel blogs, vlogs, and online reviews, has gained significant momentum as a trusted information source, often perceived as more credible than official destination marketing content (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018; Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Sugar, 2022).

The urgency of this topic is visible in Garut Regency, an area with substantial tourism potential but continuing strategic pressures in its digital reputation and market performance. According to the official tourism profile, Garut had 115 natural attractions, 40 cultural attractions, 71 man-made attractions, and 8 special-interest attractions, while the local government set a target of 30 "Desa Wisata Hebat" by 2029; however, the average length of stay remained only 1.05 days, indicating that destination value has not yet been fully captured (Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Garut, 2025). At the same time, social-media-based analysis of more than 10,000 online comments reported that although positive perceptions toward Garut tourism were slightly dominant, public complaints still centered on expensive tariffs, illegal charges, road access, cleanliness, and the gap between digital expectations and on-site reality (Badan Promosi Pariwisata Daerah Kabupaten Garut, 2025).

These conditions illustrate a broader phenomenon observed in the literature: the gap between digitally constructed destination images and actual on-site experiences can significantly damage destination brand equity and reduce perceived value of the tourism experience (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021; Pham et al., 2022). As (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021) have noted, perceptions of destination quality that are damaged through negative digital discourse can lead to a consequent decrease in the perceived value of the tourism experience and the perceived quality of life among residents (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that a strong destination image allows a destination to stand out from its competitors, increasing the likelihood that the destination will be selected (Sugar, 2022), yet when digital expectations are not met by reality, the resulting dissonance can undermine brand loyalty and revisit intention (Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018; Pham et al., 2022). Online communication makes decision-making and purchase processes easier, but it can also generate virtual perceptions that, if inconsistent with actual experiences, erode trust and credibility (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016). These conditions show that strategic marketing decisions in Garut cannot rely on intuition alone; they must be informed by actual consumer perceptions and digitally observable behavior, leveraging the power of digital analytics and consumer insight frameworks that have been increasingly advocated in the tourism marketing literature (Law et al., 2014; Molinillo et al., 2018).

Previous studies have extensively demonstrated that digital marketing influences destination image, online trust, visit intention, and loyalty. Social media has been widely recognized as a key destination marketing tool because it enables visibility, interaction, and co-creation of content (Dewi & Jianming, 2024; Han & Chen, 2021; Molinillo et al., 2018). Hays et al. (2013), as cited across multiple studies, established that social media has fundamentally altered the landscape of destination marketing by enabling DMOs to engage directly with potential visitors and facilitate user-generated narratives about destinations (Björner, 2013; Chuchu, 2021; Dewi & Jianming, 2024; Han & Chen, 2021; Molinillo et al., 2018; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021). DMOs can benefit from using social media platforms as a destination marketing tool by streamlining authentic travel information and building their brand through direct interaction with consumers (Han & Chen, 2021). The strategic use of information and communication technologies by DMOs has been a relevant topic in tourism research, with the internet dramatically changing marketing practices (Molinillo et al., 2018).

Social media platforms serve dual functions in destination marketing: they act as information hubs where potential tourists gather travel-related knowledge, and they serve as platforms for co-creation where tourists actively contribute to destination branding through shared experiences, reviews, and visual content (Cornellia et al., 2024; Dewi & Jianming, 2024; Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018; Pham et al., 2022). Research has shown that social media contributes to the process of forming tourist awareness of a destination through interactive communication and opportunities to share experiences, which shape tourists' perceptions of destination image (Cornellia et al., 2024). The concept of co-creation with the destination brand refers to the opportunity tourists have to create and share experiences and opinions about destinations, contributing to describing the brand and creating a specific image in the minds of tourists (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018; Pham et al., 2022). This user-generated content constitutes an online version of word-of-mouth that generates greater trust and credibility than destination official information providers (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Jog & Alcasoas, 2023).

The role of visual content and digital storytelling in shaping destination image has received considerable scholarly attention. Online videos allow potential tourists to be virtually immersed within the destination, providing an immediate and very real sense of their desired travel destination (Sugar, 2022). Travel blogs and vlogs have become integral parts of destination marketing because, through the content provided to intended consumers, bloggers and vloggers can share their travel experiences and encourage others to consider visiting the destination (Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Sugar, 2022). Influencers often employ visually appealing content, such as photographs and videos, to showcase

the aesthetic charm of a destination, and such content is highly shareable and contributes to shaping positive perceptions (Cornellia et al., 2024).

The formation of destination image through online platforms is a dynamic process, with greater importance given to available information, other users' opinions, and visual images (Molinillo et al., 2018). Research on online destination brand experiences has demonstrated that the design, information quality, and ease of use are the main components of perceived quality of official destination websites, with colors, fonts, videos, images, and text descriptions all significantly influencing user attitudes (Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018). Furthermore, the sensorial-to-cognitive experiential sequence suggests that initial sensorial contact with predesigned stimuli on websites triggers cognitive processes in user memory, ultimately influencing visit intention and recommendation behavior (Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018). Digital media landscapes exert a "digital persuasion" effect by reconstructing self-experience models, directing the individual gaze, and projecting idealized self-images, which drive tourists to follow digital traffic trends and engage in imitative behaviors (Zhang et al., 2025).

The emergence of social media influencers (SMIs) as key actors in destination marketing represents another important dimension of digital consumer behavior. Source credibility has been found to have a significantly positive influence on social media users' attitudes, which in turn is positively associated with the intention to visit endorsed destinations (Han & Chen, 2021). Travel marketers can benefit from influencers' ability to reach targeted audiences, engage on a higher level, and build relationships and images that align with their brands (Han & Chen, 2021). In the context of eco-friendly and sustainable tourism, research has shown that when eco-friendly establishments sponsor SMIs, attribute-value messages are more effective than simple recommendation messages in influencing travelers' perceptions and intentions (Kapoor et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of influencer marketing is further enhanced by the parasocial relationships that influencers build with their followers through responses and comments, with followers demonstrating a more positive relationship of intention to visit tourist destinations and a more positive attitude than non-followers (Cornellia et al., 2024, 2024) found a positive correlation between influencer marketing and brand awareness, underscoring Instagram's potential as a potent tool for destination promotion (Cornellia et al., 2024). However, destination marketers should carefully choose credible influencers by selecting those with accurate and reliable content along with a transparent image, as building customer confidence and trust online is key when utilizing influencer marketing (Han & Chen, 2021).

In green and ecotourism contexts, sustainability communication, experience quality, and post-trip evaluation are important determinants of satisfaction and revisit intention. The effectiveness of sustainability communication on social media is particularly critical because sustainability initiatives and practices have high levels of ambiguity and complexity, making effective communication an essential tool for travel service providers to manage travelers' expectations (Kapoor et al., 2021). Research has demonstrated that SMIs should create sponsored messages that provide rational and objective information about sustainability practices to stimulate travelers' related cognitions and persuade them to patronize the service provider (Kapoor et al., 2021).

Marketing has the potential to shape and shift tourists' preferences toward more sustainable experiences and to rebrand destinations in ways that build positive resident-tourist relationships (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021). However, as (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021) observed, the marketing potential to shape sustainable tourism preferences has remained overlooked in many post-crisis online media debates, suggesting that there is significant untapped potential in leveraging digital marketing for sustainability-oriented destination development (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021). The tourism offer can promote and attract customers to online channels and virtual experiences, forming brand-related emotional connections, trust, and values (Martín et al., 2023), which is particularly relevant for green tourism destinations seeking to communicate their sustainability credentials authentically.

The quality of official destination websites plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and willingness to participate in co-creation experiences. Research has confirmed that there is a direct and significant relationship between website quality, attitudes toward the website, and willingness to participate in online co-creation experiences, with attitudes toward the website partially mediating the relationship between destination website quality and willingness to participate in online co-creation experiences (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018). Trust has been emphasized as an important issue in electronic marketing and online branding (Björner, 2013), and the credibility of the offer and the brand as it appears on the website is a critical component of perceived quality (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018).

Value co-creation through social commerce information sharing has been found to positively influence destination brand equity, with social commerce information sharing mediating the relationship between value co-creation and destination brand equity (Pham et al., 2022). This demonstrates the value of user-generated content in value co-creation, which has been found to be critical in enhancing brand loyalty and trust (Pham et al., 2022). For green

tourism destinations like Garut, where trust formation and content consistency are ongoing challenges, these findings underscore the importance of investing in high-quality digital platforms that facilitate meaningful consumer engagement and co-creation.

Despite the substantial body of research on digital marketing and destination management, the literature still reveals several critical limitations. First, much of the existing research treats digital marketing, sustainability positioning, and tourist behavior as separate discussions rather than as an integrated basis for strategic innovation. While studies have examined social media's role in destination branding (Dewi & Jianming, 2024; Molinillo et al., 2018), sustainability communication effectiveness (Kapoor et al., 2021), and tourist decision-making processes (Han & Chen, 2021; Jog & Alcasoas, 2023), few have attempted to synthesize these dimensions into a unified strategic framework. The literature on value co-creation and destination brand equity, for instance, has been identified as still trying to identify which factors drive consumer participation with brands across different consumption contexts (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018; Pham et al., 2022).

Second, many studies emphasize promotional effectiveness or consumer response but provide limited guidance on how destination managers can translate consumer insights into specific strategic priorities. Research has noted that online tools such as websites, social media, and mobile applications are often used tactically rather than strategically by DMOs (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016), and that destination brand communication is not yet fully standardized or professionalized (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016). The three stages of technology adoption recognized in tourism organizations—from low use to high use of IT and knowledge management—suggest that many destinations remain at stages where functions serve operational rather than strategic management needs (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016). This gap between tactical digital marketing execution and strategic decision-making is particularly pronounced in emerging market contexts.

Third, regional green tourism destinations in emerging markets, especially those involving community-based tourism and local governance complexity, remain underexamined. While studies have investigated digital marketing in various international contexts, including Chinese cities (Björner, 2013), Spanish destinations (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016), Vietnamese tourism (Pham et al., 2022), and Bangladeshi hospitality (Habiba et al., 2023), the specific challenges faced by Indonesian regency-level green tourism destinations have received insufficient attention. The case of Garut, where digital exposure is growing but managerial challenges persist in content consistency, information integration, trust formation, and sustainability communication, represents a significant empirical gap. (Chuchu, 2021) noted, the first call of action in creating a viable destination brand image is through understanding tourists' images of the destination (Chuchu, 2021), yet this understanding remains underdeveloped for many regional destinations in developing countries.

Fourth, the literature has not adequately addressed how negative digital discourse—such as complaints about pricing, infrastructure, and service quality gaps—can be systematically analyzed and converted into actionable strategic insights. While research has acknowledged that negative reviews can damage destination image (Habiba et al., 2023) and that the gap between digital expectations and on-site reality poses significant challenges (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021), methodological frameworks for translating these consumer signals into strategic innovation priorities remain scarce.

Accordingly, this study focuses on the following research questions: (1) How do tourists search for and respond to digital information about green tourism in Garut? (2) Which digital content and interaction patterns most influence their decisions? (3) What strategic innovation priorities can be derived from those consumer insights?

Based on these questions, the purpose of this study is to identify key digital consumer insights related to green tourism in Garut Regency and to interpret their implications for strategic marketing innovation. The study responds to calls in the literature for more integrated approaches to understanding how digital technologies can serve strategic rather than merely operational management needs in tourism (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Molinillo et al., 2018), and for greater attention to how sustainability communication can be effectively leveraged in destination marketing (Kapoor et al., 2021; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021).

The novelty of the article lies in its effort to reposition consumer insights as a strategic decision resource rather than merely a descriptive marketing metric. This approach aligns with emerging perspectives in the literature that emphasize the need for DMOs to move beyond tactical use of digital tools toward strategic integration of consumer intelligence into destination development planning (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Molinillo et al., 2018). The study also responds to the recognized need for research that connects online branding with place branding in contexts that have not been well covered in the international literature (Björner, 2013).

Empirically, the study contributes a regional case of Garut by combining digital behavior, sustainability preference, and destination communication issues within one analytical frame. This integrated approach addresses the

fragmentation identified in the literature, where digital marketing, sustainability positioning, and tourist behavior are typically examined in isolation. The study draws on the understanding that social media serves as a vital information resource, providing access to other tourists' experiences and enabling storytelling through attractive content and images, while online reviews and ratings increase tourist perspective during their decision-making process (Dewi & Jianming, 2024).

Practically, the study offers a more actionable pathway from consumer insight to strategic decision-making for destination managers, local government, and community actors involved in green tourism development. This practical orientation responds to the literature's emphasis on the need for tourism stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategies that harness the power of collaboration, innovative digital campaign development, and deep understanding of traveler preferences and expectations (Harahap et al., 2023). The findings are intended to help stakeholders create memorable experiences, build positive destination images, and achieve long-term marketing goals through evidence-based approaches (Harahap et al., 2023; Martín et al., 2023).

Thus, the article contributes theoretically to destination marketing by advancing the integration of digital consumer behavior theory with sustainability communication and strategic innovation frameworks. Strategically, it contributes to the design of more evidence-based, consumer-centered, and sustainability-oriented tourism decisions, addressing the recognized need for destinations to understand how online platforms differentially influence destination image formation and visit intention (Molinillo et al., 2018), and how digital marketing strategies can be optimized for sustainable tourism development (Harahap et al., 2023; Kapoor et al., 2021; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research design and setting

This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design complemented by qualitative interpretation of open-ended responses. The integration of quantitative and qualitative elements within a single research framework is consistent with methodological approaches increasingly advocated in tourism research, where the complexity of digital consumer behavior and destination marketing phenomena often necessitates multi-method inquiry (Dewi & Jianming, 2024; Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2021). Descriptive survey designs have been widely utilized in tourism and hospitality studies to map consumer perceptions, digital behavior patterns, and destination image formation processes, as they enable researchers to systematically capture and characterize the distribution of variables across a defined population without imposing experimental manipulation (Björner, 2013; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Wu & Pearce, 2014). As Orias and Borbon (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016) demonstrated in their study of digital marketing adoption among farm tourism sites, structured questionnaires combining closed-ended and open-ended items can effectively capture both the extent of digital marketing influence and the nuanced perceptions underlying consumer responses. The complementary use of qualitative interpretation of open-ended responses further enriches the analytical depth, allowing for the identification of latent meanings and contextual insights that purely quantitative instruments may overlook (Han & Chen, 2021; Liasidou et al., 2022; Molinillo et al., 2018). This mixed approach aligns with the methodological pluralism observed in recent destination marketing scholarship, where scholars have combined content analysis, surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of digital tourism phenomena (Buhalis & Inversini, 2014; Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018; Kapoor et al., 2021).

The design was selected because the paper aims to map digital consumer insights and translate them into strategic implications rather than test causal relationships. This orientation reflects a growing recognition in the tourism marketing literature that not all research questions require causal-explanatory designs; rather, descriptive and exploratory approaches are particularly valuable when the objective is to identify patterns, characterize consumer segments, and generate actionable intelligence for destination management (Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018; Pham et al., 2022; Sugar, 2022). As Fernández-Cavia et al. (Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018) noted in their study of Spanish DMOs, destination brand communication research benefits from designs that capture the current state of practice and perception, particularly when the field is still evolving and standardization remains incomplete. Similarly, Molinillo et al. (Pham et al., 2022) emphasized the importance of understanding how different online platforms shape destination image formation, a task that often begins with descriptive mapping before progressing to causal testing. The descriptive-interpretive approach adopted here is also consistent with the methodological stance of studies that have sought to bridge the gap between consumer data and strategic decision-making in tourism contexts, where the translation of digital signals into managerial priorities requires both systematic measurement and contextual interpretation (Chuchu, 2021; Cornellia et al., 2024; Law et al., 2014). Warintarawej et al. (Zhang et al., 2025)

similarly employed survey-based descriptive analysis combined with machine learning techniques to uncover key insights about digital marketing strategies affecting Gen-Z travelers' destination choices, demonstrating the value of descriptive approaches in generating actionable marketing intelligence.

The empirical setting was green tourism promotion in Garut Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Garut Regency represents a particularly instructive case for investigating digital consumer insights in green tourism for several reasons. First, Indonesia has experienced rapid growth in internet penetration and social media adoption, fundamentally altering how tourists search for, evaluate, and share information about destinations (Habiba et al., 2023; Harahap et al., 2023; Martín et al., 2023). Digital marketing has been recognized as a crucial instrument in promoting tourism destinations in Indonesia, with social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube serving as primary channels through which tourists acquire travel-related information (Fajri et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2022; Santoso et al., 2023). Second, Garut possesses substantial natural and cultural tourism assets—including 115 natural attractions, 40 cultural attractions, 71 man-made attractions, and 8 special-interest attractions—yet faces persistent challenges in converting this potential into sustained visitor engagement, as evidenced by an average length of stay of only 1.05 days (Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Garut, 2025). Previous research on Garut has confirmed that the regency's tourism branding, "Discover Garut: Preanger Paradise," represents a marketing communication effort to develop the tourism sector as a whole, yet the government must continue to encourage all tourism service providers to digitalize their businesses and package tourism products to meet contemporary tourists' needs and wants (Haedar, 2023). Third, visitor journey analysis of tourists in Garut Regency has revealed that Instagram social media serves as the primary source of information for tourists, with most visitors being Gen Z students from West Java who share their experiences through social media after visiting (Andiani et al., 2023). Furthermore, research on the use of social media as a means of information and tourism promotion for Generation Z in Garut Regency has demonstrated that 100% of Generation Z respondents are interested in and seek information about Garut tourist destinations through browsing on Instagram, with an interest percentage reaching 92.45% for photos and videos uploaded by promotional accounts (Iswanto et al., 2024). These findings underscore the critical importance of understanding digital consumer behavior in this specific empirical context.

The selection of Garut also responds to calls in the literature for more research on regional green tourism destinations in emerging markets, particularly those involving community-based tourism and local governance complexity (Akbar et al., 2023; Julianti & Pinpak, 2024; Syafganti, n.d.). Much of the existing research on digital tourism marketing has been conducted in developed country contexts or in well-established tourism hubs, while regency-level destinations with nascent digital marketing ecosystems remain underexamined (Foster & Bentley, 2022; Paramita & Zulfan, 2024). The emphasis on green tourism aligns with the growing scholarly and policy interest in sustainable tourism development, where effective communication of sustainability credentials, authenticity, and community participation is essential for destination competitiveness (R. A. Akbar et al., 2020; Mwinuka et al., 2024; Sarjana & Widokarti, 2020). The Garut Regency government's halal and green tourism development strategies have been documented in prior research, with push, pull, and pass strategies of marketing public relations being employed to develop the region's tourism potential (Wibawa et al., 2022).

Data collection was undertaken during 2025 as part of a broader research process on digital marketing and community participation in Garut tourism. The timing of data collection is significant, as it captures the post-pandemic digital tourism landscape in which online platforms have become even more central to destination marketing and consumer decision-making (Cahyani et al., 2023; Singgalen, 2023; Sjachro et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of tourism marketing, with DMOs and tourism stakeholders increasingly relying on websites, social media, and mobile applications to maintain visibility and engagement during periods of restricted physical mobility (Hariani & Hanafiah, 2023; Singgalen, 2023). Research has documented that during and after the pandemic, digital marketing became not merely a supplementary tool but a primary channel through which tourism destinations maintained connections with potential visitors, adapted their messaging, and prepared for recovery (Cahyani et al., 2023; Pramadian & Belgiawan, 2023). In the post-pandemic recovery phase, understanding how tourists interact with digital content and how their online behavior translates into destination preferences and visit intentions has become a strategic imperative for tourism managers (Sjachro et al., 2023; Warintarawej et al., 2024).

2.2. Population, sample, and unit of analysis

The target population comprised tourists and digital audiences exposed to information about tourism destinations in Garut. This population definition is consistent with the approach taken in recent digital tourism marketing studies, where the population of interest encompasses both actual visitors and prospective tourists who have interacted with destination-related digital content (Björner, 2013; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2025). The analytical

sample consisted of 302 respondents, dominated by Gen Z and millennial age groups, with most respondents domiciled in Garut or its surrounding market area. The predominance of Gen Z and millennial respondents is consistent with demographic patterns observed in Indonesian tourism research, where these generational cohorts represent the largest segments of the population and the most active users of digital platforms for travel-related information seeking (Haedar, 2023; Lee & Yen, 2024; Orias & Borbon, 2022). Research has consistently demonstrated that Gen Z and millennials are digital natives who rely extensively on social media and online platforms for travel decision-making, making them particularly relevant populations for studies of digital consumer insights in tourism (Caraka et al., 2022; Daniati et al., 2021; Daşkın & Tumati, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025).

The sample size of 302 respondents is adequate for descriptive survey research in tourism, as it exceeds the minimum thresholds commonly recommended for survey-based studies in the field (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Perbawasari et al., 2019; Wu & Pearce, 2014). Comparable studies in the tourism digital marketing literature have employed similar or smaller sample sizes: Orias and Borbon (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016) surveyed 385 visitors of farm tourism sites, Warintarawej et al. (Zhang et al., 2025) collected data from 346 university students, Handyastuti et al. (BHUANA & Suardana, 2022) distributed questionnaires to 120 respondents, and Caraka et al. (Caraka et al., 2022) employed snowball sampling to arrive at a representative group of millennials. The dominance of Gen Z respondents in the sample mirrors findings from Maspupah's (Andiani et al., 2023) visitor journey analysis of tourists in Garut Regency, which found that most tourists who visited Garut in the past year were Gen Z students from West Java.

The study applied non-probability purposive sampling by focusing on individuals considered relevant to the research objective, namely respondents who had searched for, viewed, or evaluated digital tourism information related to Garut. Purposive sampling is a widely accepted technique in tourism research when the study requires respondents with specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research questions (Caraka et al., 2022; Slivar et al., 2019; Wu & Pearce, 2014). As Daşkın and Tumati (Daşkın & Tumati, 2024) noted in their study of Gen Z tourists' destination choices, purposive criteria ensure that respondents possess the requisite knowledge and experience to provide meaningful data. The use of non-probability sampling is further justified by the nature of the study population, which is defined by digital behavior rather than geographic or demographic boundaries alone, making probability sampling impractical (Björner, 2013; García et al., 2023). Several recent tourism studies have similarly employed purposive and convenience sampling techniques to investigate digitally mediated consumer behavior (Caraka et al., 2022; Yasser, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025).

The main unit of analysis was consumer perception of digital marketing for green tourism destinations in Garut Regency. This unit of analysis is consistent with the consumer-centric orientation of contemporary destination marketing research, which emphasizes understanding how tourists perceive, interpret, and respond to digital marketing stimuli as the foundation for strategic decision-making (Cornellia et al., 2024; Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018; Pham et al., 2022).

2.3. Data sources, instrument, and data collection

The study combined primary and supporting secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended and open-ended items. The use of structured questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument is well-established in tourism marketing research, as it enables systematic and standardized measurement of consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions (Björner, 2013; Daşkın & Tumati, 2024; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Wu & Pearce, 2014). The closed items used a five-point Likert-type response format to assess perceptions of platform visibility, content quality, informativeness, engagement, credibility, and future digital expectations. The five-point Likert scale is the most commonly employed response format in tourism survey research, providing a balanced range of response options that facilitate both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis (Daşkın & Tumati, 2024; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Perbawasari et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2025). Research on digital marketing in tourism has consistently utilized Likert-type scales to measure constructs such as perceived usefulness, information quality, social media influence, and purchase intention (Caraka et al., 2022; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Gulati, 2023).

The open-ended items captured perceived constraints and strategic suggestions. The inclusion of open-ended questions alongside structured items is a methodological strength that enables researchers to capture emergent themes and unanticipated insights that may not be fully addressed by predetermined response categories (Han & Chen, 2021; Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018; Molinillo et al., 2018). This approach is particularly valuable in exploratory and descriptive studies where the research aims to generate new understanding rather than merely confirm existing hypotheses (Kapoor et al., 2021; Liasidou et al., 2022). Gulati (Gulati, 2023) similarly employed a combination of

structured and open-ended items in investigating generational influences on social media-based tourist decision-making, demonstrating the complementary value of both data types.

Supporting secondary data were drawn from regional tourism documents and prior analytical reports used to contextualize the survey findings. The use of secondary data to complement primary survey data is a recognized methodological practice in tourism research, as it provides contextual grounding and enables triangulation of findings (Cuasay, 2023; Han & Chen, 2021; Wibawa et al., 2022). Secondary sources included official tourism statistics from the Garut Regency Tourism and Culture Office, reports from the Regional Tourism Promotion Board (Badan Promosi Pariwisata Daerah Kabupaten Garut), and prior academic studies on Garut tourism (Andiani et al., 2023; Haedar, 2023; Iswanto et al., 2024). The questionnaire was distributed online, leveraging digital platforms to reach respondents who are active users of digital tourism information. Online survey distribution is increasingly preferred in tourism research targeting digitally active populations, as it enables efficient data collection from geographically dispersed respondents and aligns with the digital behavior being studied (BHUANA & Suardana, 2022; Björner, 2013; Zhang et al., 2025). Responses were screened for completeness before analysis to ensure data quality and reliability (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Wu & Pearce, 2014).

2.4. Operational focus, data quality, and analysis

Because this paper is descriptive, the research emphasized operational dimensions rather than latent-variable modeling. This methodological choice is appropriate for studies that aim to characterize the current state of consumer perceptions and identify patterns rather than test complex structural relationships (Gulati, 2023; Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018; Sugar, 2022). The main dimensions observed were digital discovery channels, persuasive content preferences, perceived effectiveness of current digital promotion, and strategic expectations related to sustainability messaging, community involvement, and technology enhancement. These dimensions were informed by the existing literature on digital tourism marketing, which has identified platform choice, content characteristics, information quality, and sustainability communication as key determinants of tourist decision-making (Cornellia et al., 2024; Mwinuka et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). Maspupah's (Andiani et al., 2023) visitor journey analysis of Garut tourists provided additional empirical grounding for the selection of these dimensions, as it identified Instagram as the primary information source and highlighted the importance of attractive destination photos, affordable prices, and unique natural scenery in tourists' planning processes.

Before interpretation, questionnaire items were reviewed for clarity, relevance, and consistency with the study objectives. This process of instrument validation is essential for ensuring content validity and reducing measurement error in survey research (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Perbawasari et al., 2019; Wu & Pearce, 2014). While open-ended responses were coded and grouped by recurring meaning, following established qualitative coding procedures that involve identifying patterns, categorizing responses, and abstracting broader themes from the data (Han & Chen, 2021; Liasidou et al., 2022; Molinillo et al., 2018). Thematic coding of open-ended survey responses has been employed in numerous tourism studies to complement quantitative findings with richer contextual understanding (Cuasay, 2023; Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018; Kapoor et al., 2021).

Closed-ended responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, especially frequencies, percentages, and average scores, to identify dominant platforms, content preferences, and perceived strengths and weaknesses of current promotion. Descriptive statistical analysis is the most appropriate analytical approach for studies with a descriptive research design, as it provides clear and interpretable summaries of the data distribution without imposing assumptions about causal relationships (Gulati, 2023; Jiménez - Barreto et al., 2018; Sugar, 2022). This approach has been widely employed in tourism marketing research: Maspupah (Andiani et al., 2023) used descriptive statistics to characterize visitor journey phases in Garut, Orias and Borbon (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016) employed descriptive analysis to examine digital marketing adoption among farm tourism sites, and Daşkın and Tumati (Daşkın & Tumati, 2024) utilized descriptive statistics to evaluate factors influencing Gen Z tourists' destination choices. The use of frequencies and percentages is particularly effective for identifying dominant patterns in categorical data, such as preferred social media platforms and content types (Andiani et al., 2023; BHUANA & Suardana, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025).

Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically by grouping repeated meanings into broader categories such as content, reach, technology, and community engagement. Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used qualitative analytical method that enables researchers to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data (Han & Chen, 2021; Molinillo et al., 2018). In tourism research, thematic analysis has been applied to diverse data sources, including interview transcripts, social media posts, and open-ended survey responses, to generate insights into consumer motivations, perceptions, and strategic recommendations (Cuasay, 2023; Kapoor et al., 2021; Liasidou et al., 2022). The categorization of themes into content, reach, technology, and community engagement dimensions reflects the

multifaceted nature of digital tourism marketing, where success depends on the interplay of content quality, platform reach, technological infrastructure, and stakeholder collaboration (Cornellia et al., 2024; Mwinuka et al., 2024; Santoso et al., 2023).

The analytical procedure followed four stages: instrument preparation, data collection, data screening and coding, and interpretation. This sequential analytical framework ensures methodological rigor and transparency, enabling replication and critical evaluation of the research process (Sugar, 2022; Wu & Pearce, 2014). The four-stage procedure is consistent with established research methodology in tourism studies, where systematic progression from instrument development through data collection, processing, and interpretation is considered essential for producing reliable and valid findings (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016; Perbawasari et al., 2019).

Participation was voluntary, no personal identifiers were reported, and the findings are presented only in aggregated form to protect respondent anonymity. Ethical considerations in tourism survey research require that respondents provide informed consent, that their privacy is protected, and that data are reported in ways that prevent identification of individual participants (Daşkın & Tumati, 2024; Perbawasari et al., 2019; Wu & Pearce, 2014). The voluntary nature of participation and the aggregation of findings are standard ethical practices that ensure compliance with research ethics principles while maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the research (Caraka et al., 2022; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. *Tourist discovery patterns confirm a social-first market structure*

The first result directly addresses how tourists encounter digital information about green tourism in Garut. The survey reveals that social media is the dominant discovery channel, employed by approximately 89% of respondents, followed by search engines at around 70%. Travel sites and vlogs or blogs function as secondary supporting channels, while dedicated tourism applications remain marginal in the discovery process. Taken together, these findings confirm that the Garut tourism market is structurally shaped by mobile, visual, and algorithm-mediated discovery rather than by destination-owned platforms or official promotional channels.

This distribution is analytically significant because it reveals a hierarchical and sequential structure in the digital information journey. Tourists do not begin their exploration through neutral searches; rather, they are first exposed to destination content through social platform feeds—driven by algorithmic curation and peer networks—and subsequently validate or refine their initial impressions through search engines and review platforms. This sequential discovery logic is consistent with models of digital information diffusion in which social network exposure precedes and primes deeper information-seeking behavior, positioning social media as the primary attention-capture layer in the consumer decision funnel (Molinillo et al., 2018). The finding is also specifically corroborated by prior research conducted in the Garut context: Andiani et al. (2023) documented that Instagram serves as the primary information source for tourists visiting the regency, while Iswanto et al. (2024) found that 100% of Generation Z respondents actively seek information about Garut’s tourist destinations through Instagram, with engagement in destination photos and videos reaching 92.45%. These locally grounded findings strengthen the present study’s conclusion that Garut’s digital market is not just generally social in its orientation but specifically anchored in Instagram- and TikTok-driven discovery architecture. Compared to more established Indonesian tourism destinations where DMO-managed websites play a stronger coordinating role (Mwinuka et al., 2024), Garut’s consumer discovery landscape remains predominantly organic and platform-native, which has direct implications for where strategic investment must be directed. For destination management, this means that platform prioritization is not a peripheral tactical decision; it is the foundational entry point for any strategic communication effort, and Instagram, TikTok, and Google-based visibility must be treated as primary touchpoints where awareness, destination comparison, and initial trust formation all occur.

A reinforcing finding deepens the strategic picture. Respondents consistently reported that digital information plays a very important role in shaping their travel decisions, and online content about Garut was generally perceived as accessible and useful. This indicates that the central managerial challenge is not to establish digital awareness from scratch but to upgrade the quality, coherence, and persuasive architecture of an already existing digital presence. The distinction between digital presence and digital performance is critical: Garut has achieved baseline visibility through organic social media activity, but the empirical question shifts to whether that visibility can be converted into coordinated, credible, and strategically differentiated destination value. This conversion challenge is only meaningful when one understands which content types are actually building consumer confidence and driving decision-making—the focus of the next subsection.

3.2. Content preferences highlight the roles of emotion, trust, and visual efficiency

The second major finding addresses which digital content formats most influence tourist interest and decision-making in Garut. Short-form video emerged as the most preferred format, selected by 81% of respondents, representing a decisive plurality. Reviews and testimonials were chosen by 60%, and high-quality photographs by 55%. By contrast, live-streaming attracted comparatively limited preference, while virtual tours and interactive digital content appealed to smaller but still meaningful audience segments. The descriptive pattern indicates that consumers respond most strongly to content that is rapid, emotionally immersive, visually coherent, and anchored in social proof—a combination that can be interpreted through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which distinguishes between peripheral and central routes to persuasion in consumer evaluation contexts.

Within the ELM framework, short-form videos primarily operate through the peripheral persuasion route: they generate rapid emotional engagement, activate aspirational imagination, and stimulate desire before the consumer enters a rational evaluation phase. Reviews and testimonials, by contrast, operate more through the central route by supplying information-based credibility that helps consumers reduce perceived risk and confirm decisions already emotionally primed by visual content (Jog & Alcasoas, 2023). This dual-route mechanism explains why neither video alone nor reviews alone are sufficient for effective destination marketing; the two formats are functionally complementary rather than interchangeable alternatives, and effective content strategy requires deliberate orchestration of both. These results are consistent with Sugar's (2022) demonstration that video platforms enable potential tourists to be virtually immersed in a destination, creating an immediate and highly credible experiential sense of place that text-based content cannot replicate. Similarly, Jog and Alcasoas (2023) showed that travel vlogs shape destination image by delivering first-person experiential narratives that are perceived as more authentic and less commercially motivated than institutionally produced promotional material. The role of parasocial relationships between content creators and audiences is also theoretically relevant: Cornellia et al. (2024) found that when influencers build sustained personal connections with followers through consistent content and interactive responses, their destination endorsements generate significantly stronger visit intentions compared to non-follower audiences, implying that content frequency and relational consistency matter alongside individual content quality. Compared to the earlier finding of Andiani et al. (2023) that destination photographs and natural scenery are primary attractors for Garut tourists, the present study adds precision by identifying that short-form video has now surpassed static photography as the dominant persuasive format, reflecting the rapid shift in platform consumption behavior toward TikTok- and Instagram Reels-centered content since 2022. The comparatively modest preference for live-streaming and virtual tours in this sample partially diverges from studies emphasizing immersive interactive formats in post-pandemic recovery contexts (Chuchu, 2021), which may reflect that the Gen Z and millennial-dominant sample prioritizes asynchronous, algorithmically accessible short-form content over real-time engagement formats.

For destination management in Garut, the content preference findings carry direct strategic implications that move well beyond platform selection or posting schedules. Content strategy must be structured around persuasive function and the sequential logic through which consumer decisions are constructed across multiple exposures and platforms. Short-form videos must perform the emotional work of destination storytelling—communicating atmosphere, authenticity, and aspiration within the first few seconds of audience contact. Testimonials and reviews must perform the credibility work of reducing perceived risk, functioning as trust mechanisms that convert emotionally primed interest into commitment. High-quality photographs must reinforce memorability and brand coherence, anchoring destination identity consistently across platforms and providing shareable visual currency for organic amplification. Theoretically, this analysis suggests that destination managers require a content architecture—a deliberate system in which different content formats serve differentiated persuasive functions across distinct stages of the consumer journey—rather than a simple content calendar oriented around production frequency. Practically, the innovation required begins not with expensive technological investment but with a more precise understanding of why certain content types work and how they can be strategically sequenced. This understanding becomes especially important when the goal is not merely to attract tourists but to attract tourists who are open to paying for credible green experiences—the dimension addressed in the following subsection.

3.3. Willingness to pay indicates that sustainability can become a market-based value proposition

The third finding addresses how green tourism is evaluated in economic and behavioral terms by consumers in Garut. Among respondents, 52% stated that they were willing to pay more for a tourism experience that is clearly sustainable and environmentally responsible, while 47% indicated that they might do so depending on the nature of the offer. Only a very small minority categorically rejected the possibility of any premium for sustainability. This distributional pattern—in which nearly all respondents occupy some position on a willingness-to-pay continuum rather than refusing the premise outright—indicates that sustainability is not interpreted primarily as an ethical

obligation by this population; it is evaluated as a potential quality signal with measurable economic relevance. Framed within the value-attitude-behavior sequence widely applied in sustainable tourism scholarship, this willingness-to-pay expression represents a behavioral intention that is upstream of actual spending decisions, signaling that sustainability functions as a market-relevant value attribute rather than merely a symbolic preference among a niche segment (Font & McCabe, 2017).

The result is important for two interrelated reasons that extend existing scholarship in green tourism marketing. First, it substantively extends the work of Kapoor et al. (2021), who demonstrated that attribute-value messaging by social media influencers for eco-friendly hospitality is more effective than simple recommendation messages in shaping travelers' perceptions and intentions. The key mechanism they identified—that sustainability must be communicated through specific, tangible, and evidence-based claims rather than generic green labels—is directly reinforced by the present finding: if consumers signal willingness to pay a premium conditional on the clarity and credibility of the green offer, then vague sustainability claims will systematically fail to activate this latent willingness. Second, the finding supports Li et al. (2021), whose ecotourism research demonstrated that experiential quality, destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty are interrelated behavioral outcomes, reinforcing that the delivery of credible sustainability experiences is not separable from the formation of long-term destination value. The present result also converges with Font and McCabe's (2017) argument that sustainability communication must move beyond abstract environmental messaging toward consumer-relevant value propositions that tourists can recognize, evaluate, and reward through their spending decisions. Importantly, the near-universal distribution of willingness-to-pay across the sample diverges from assumptions still embedded in many destination management practices, which treat green tourism as a niche segment defined by strong pre-existing environmental identity. The present evidence suggests instead that the potential market for authentically communicated green tourism is substantially broader and more economically promising, conditional primarily on the destination's capacity to make sustainability visible, specific, and verifiable rather than rhetorical.

The strategic management implication is consequently more demanding than a surface reading of the willingness-to-pay data might suggest. Garut does not require more green labels in its promotional materials or more frequent use of sustainability vocabulary in its social media captions. It requires a systematic translation of sustainability commitments into observable product features, service standards, and communication specificity that consumers can independently evaluate before and during their visit. Green tourism becomes a defensible market position when visitors can see the waste management system at a nature site, can interact with locally employed guides whose livelihoods are linked to conservation, can understand how their entry fee contributes to ecological maintenance, or can observe independently verifiable certification in accommodation or food services. The implication for innovation is therefore embedded in product design and service architecture, not only in promotional messaging. Sustainability should be repositioned not as a promotional theme layered over existing tourism products but as a differentiated value proposition integrated into product design, service delivery, pricing logic, and the entire communication chain from pre-visit content to on-site experience. When this integration is achieved, sustainability can credibly support destination positioning, reinforce visitor trust, and generate the premium-paying behavior that this study's distributional results indicate is achievable at scale. However, realizing this potential requires an enabling condition that the present data reveals is currently underdeveloped: a digital communication infrastructure capable of delivering specific and credible sustainability messages coherently and consistently across the platforms where tourists are discovering and evaluating Garut. Identifying and addressing the weaknesses in that infrastructure is the focus of the following subsection.

3.4. Strategic weaknesses reveal the real innovation agenda for Garut

The fourth result concerns the weaknesses in the existing digital marketing ecosystem that limit the conversion of digital awareness into strategic outcomes. Despite relatively positive overall perceptions of digital promotion in Garut, the official tourism website received the lowest comparative assessment among all evaluated elements—a result that is consistent with the digital destination governance literature, which identifies the official website as a critical coordinating anchor for multi-platform tourism communication (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018). Open-ended responses further identified a cluster of recurring structural weaknesses: fragmented information across platforms, inconsistent content updates, inadequate communication of green tourism values, limited interactive engagement with audiences, and the insufficient involvement of local communities in digital content generation and promotion.

These weaknesses are interpretable through the framework of digital destination governance, which holds that effective destination management requires not only promotional activity but the coordinated management of information assets, platform responsibilities, and institutional roles across multiple actors (Gretzel, 2022; Fernández-Cavia et al., 2016). Within this framework, the quality of the official website signals the destination's capacity to

anchor and integrate the diverse digital touchpoints through which tourists encounter it before and during visit planning. Jiménez-Barreto and Campo (2018) established that website quality, user attitudes toward the site, and willingness to participate in online co-creation are causally connected, and that website quality also mediates the relationship between destination credibility and behavioral intentions. The poor website assessment in this study therefore does not signal merely a technical deficiency; it signals a structural weakness in the destination's ability to convert social media-driven discovery into deeper engagement and actual visit decision. This interpretation is reinforced by Pasquinelli and Trunfio (2021), who documented that when digital promotion creates expectations that on-site experiences subsequently fail to meet, the resulting dissonance can systematically erode brand equity and generate negative digital discourse that circulates beyond the destination's control. Local data from the Regional Tourism Promotion Board (Badan Promosi Pariwisata Daerah Kabupaten Garut, 2025) confirms that public complaints centered on tariff transparency, infrastructure quality, and facility condition gaps are precisely the expectation-experience discontinuities that this mechanism predicts. Furthermore, Fernández-Cavia et al. (2016) observed that digital tools in many DMOs remain used tactically rather than strategically, and that destination brand communication lacks standardization and professionalization across channels—a condition that accurately characterizes the fragmented and inconsistent digital ecosystem identified in the present study's open-ended responses. In this sense, the digital weaknesses identified in Garut are not idiosyncratic local failures but instances of a broader pattern of governance underperformance in destination digital management that the international literature has consistently documented in emerging market contexts.

Taken together, these findings define a clear innovation agenda for Garut that targets the structural root causes of digital underperformance rather than its surface symptoms. Four priorities emerge from the empirical results, each corresponding to a specific weakness identified in the open-ended responses and each grounded in the relevant literature. The first priority is content innovation: the systematic production, curation, and harvesting of short-form videos, visitor testimonials, and visually coherent nature photography that communicates authenticity, responsible travel values, and genuine community involvement—assets that prior research confirms are the primary persuasive drivers in social-media-mediated destination discovery (Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Sugar, 2022). The second priority is platform optimization: active social media account management, systematic search engine presence through updated and accurate Google Business profiles, and structured engagement with visitor reviews across major platforms, recognizing that review management is a trust infrastructure function rather than a reactive communications task (Pham et al., 2022). The third priority is integrated information architecture: the development and sustained maintenance of a reliable official website or microsite that consolidates critical consumer information—prices, routes, sustainable facilities, green certification details, and contact points for booking—into a single coherent digital touchpoint that resolves the fragmentation identified in respondent feedback (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018). The fourth priority is community-based digital co-creation: the formal involvement of local village tourism teams, small enterprises, community guides, and conservation practitioners as active digital content contributors and brand ambassadors rather than passive beneficiaries of top-down promotion—a role justified by research showing that community-sourced content carries authenticity advantages that institutionally produced material cannot replicate (Pham et al., 2022; Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018). The relationship between these four priorities and the integrated theoretical and practical implications of all four findings is developed in the synthesis section that follows.

3.5. Synthesis, implications, and study limitations

Taken together, the four results demonstrate a coherent and sequentially integrated narrative: digital consumer insights in Garut are informative not merely as descriptive market measurements but as strategic decision inputs that define where and how innovation in green tourism marketing must occur. The findings collectively support a repositioning of the consumer insight function within destination management. Rather than treating digital behavior data as an output of promotional campaigns—a measure of reach, engagement rate, or sentiment—this study demonstrates that consumer insight data can serve as the primary input for innovation prioritization across content design, platform investment, governance structure, and sustainability communication. Theoretically, this contribution extends the destination marketing literature in a specific direction. Existing frameworks have extensively examined individual relationships—between social media and destination image formation (Molinillo et al., 2018), between website quality and co-creation intention (Jiménez - Barreto & Campo, 2018), between sustainability communication and behavioral intention (Kapoor et al., 2021), between value co-creation and brand equity (Pham et al., 2022)—but have been less explicit about the strategic architecture that connects consumer insight to innovation decision-making as an integrated and sequential process. The present study advances this integration by demonstrating that when discovery behavior, content preference, sustainability valuation, and infrastructure weakness are examined jointly, they define a coherent innovation logic: attract attention through platform-native social content; build credibility through peer-based social proof; deepen engagement through specific and verifiable sustainability value; sustain trust

through consistent and coordinated information architecture. This sequential logic constitutes a contribution to the theoretical understanding of how consumer insight functions as a bridge between descriptive analytics and strategic management in destination marketing, addressing the literature gap identified in the introduction where digital marketing, sustainability positioning, and tourist behavior have been examined in isolation rather than as an integrated strategic system.

Practically, the findings differentiate strategic responsibilities across three distinct categories of actors in Garut's tourism governance ecosystem. For local government agencies, the primary implication concerns digital infrastructure and institutional coordination: government must lead the development and sustained maintenance of an integrated official information architecture, establish clear accountability for content consistency and platform coordination across agencies, and create the enabling conditions—regulatory, financial, and technical—for community actors to participate meaningfully in digital promotion. For destination management organizations and tourism promotion bodies, the findings signal the need to transition from output-oriented digital management that measures post counts and follower numbers toward outcome-oriented management that evaluates how effectively digital content moves consumers through the sequential stages of discovery, credibility formation, sustainability valuation, and decision confirmation. For community actors—including village-level tourism managers, local guides, small accommodation and food enterprises, and conservation practitioners—the study highlights that co-creation is not merely a participation right but a strategic function: authentic community-sourced content carries credibility advantages over institutionally produced material that neither government nor DMO can replicate at scale, and this advantage becomes especially critical in communicating green tourism values where authenticity is the core currency of trust (Kapoor et al., 2021; Pham et al., 2022). These implications collectively indicate that strategic innovation in green tourism marketing in Garut is not a single-actor coordination problem but a multi-stakeholder alignment challenge requiring differentiated roles, shared content governance standards, and a collectively held understanding of where consumer trust is constructed and, when absent, lost.

The study nonetheless has limitations that define the boundaries of its contribution and point to productive directions for future research. First, the empirical basis is a single regional context with a cross-sectional descriptive design, meaning the findings are intended to generate evidence-grounded strategic interpretation rather than causally generalizable claims. The four innovation priorities identified are contextually informed propositions, not universally transferable prescriptions. Second, the sample is dominated by Gen Z and millennial respondents with active digital habits, which may amplify the prominence of social-first discovery behavior and short-form video preference relative to older or less digitally active tourist segments whose discovery patterns may differ substantially. Third, the willingness-to-pay finding, while analytically promising, is based on stated rather than revealed preference, introducing the standard behavioral gap between attitudinal intention and actual spending decisions under real market conditions. Fourth, the study does not capture longitudinal dynamics: how consumer perceptions shift in response to specific destination development interventions, policy changes, or competitive market shifts is beyond the scope of cross-sectional analysis. Future research should address these limitations by testing causal relationships among digital content quality, green destination trust, visit intention, and willingness to pay using structural equation modeling or field experimental designs across multiple destination contexts. Longitudinal tracking of how specific digital governance improvements alter consumer perceptions over time would add dynamic validity that the present study cannot provide. Research comparing the relative effectiveness of community-generated versus institutionally produced content in building green destination trust would also be particularly valuable, given the co-creation emphasis of the present findings and its alignment with the value co-creation and brand equity literature (Pham et al., 2022). Despite these limitations, the study offers a contextually grounded and theoretically connected contribution by demonstrating how digital consumer insight can be systematically transformed into a strategic innovation agenda for green tourism marketing in a regional emerging market setting.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital consumer insights can serve as a practical basis for strategic innovation in green tourism marketing. In Garut Regency, tourists mainly discover destinations through social media and search engines, respond most strongly to short-form videos and testimonial-based content, and show notable openness to paying more for credible and environmentally responsible tourism experiences. These findings indicate that consumer insight is not simply a promotional metric; it is a decision resource that can guide destination positioning, communication priorities, and innovation choices.

The contribution of this article is both empirical and strategic. Empirically, it provides evidence from a regional green tourism context in which digital behavior, sustainability preference, and destination communication issues intersect. Strategically, it shows that managers should focus less on generic digital visibility and more on strengthening the specific points in the consumer journey where trust, relevance, and value are formed. For Garut, this

means prioritizing short-video storytelling, review and testimonial management, stronger search visibility, integrated official information, and community-based digital co-creation. The study is limited to one regional setting and a descriptive design; therefore, future research should test causal relationships between digital content quality, green destination trust, visit intention, and willingness to pay across multiple destinations.

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