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The Tourism Office's Digital Promotion Strategy for The Development of Religious Tourism in Buru Subdistrict, Karimun Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the digital promotion strategies employed by the Tourism Office of Karimun Regency in developing religious tourism in Buru District. The research adopted a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving the Tourism Office, religious tourism site managers, and tourists. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, referring to the Promotion Mix theory proposed by Kotler and Keller (2016), which includes advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct and digital marketing. The findings reveal that the Tourism Office has utilized various digital media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and official websites, as promotional tools. However, the implementation has not yet been optimal due to inconsistent promotional activities, limited information regarding religious tourism attractions, low levels of digital interaction with tourists, and the absence of an integrated digital information service. As a result, the promotion of religious tourism remains largely driven by site managers and local communities. Therefore, strengthening an integrated digital promotion strategy is necessary to expand promotional reach, enhance tourist engagement, and increase visitation to religious tourism destinations in Buru District.

Keywords : Buru District, Digital Promotion Strategy, Promotion Mix, Religious Tourism, Tourism Office.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital communication technologies has transformed the global tourism industry by reshaping how destinations are promoted, consumed, and experienced, creating a competitive environment in which destination visibility increasingly depends on the strategic utilization of digital platforms. Tourism development is no longer determined solely by the attractiveness of physical resources but also by the capacity of destination managers and public institutions to construct compelling digital narratives capable of reaching geographically dispersed audiences. Within this evolving landscape, religious tourism has emerged as a significant segment that combines spiritual motivations, cultural heritage, and experiential travel, attracting increasing scholarly attention because of its contribution to local economic development and cultural preservation. The integration of digital promotion into tourism governance has consequently become a strategic imperative, particularly for destinations seeking to enhance accessibility, strengthen destination branding, and expand market reach through online channels. Contemporary marketing perspectives emphasize that digital communication enables organizations to establish more interactive and personalized relationships with potential visitors, allowing tourism stakeholders to influence destination image and travel decisions in increasingly sophisticated ways (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021; Kotler & Keller, 2016). The growing importance of digital promotion has further reinforced its relevance within sustainable tourism development frameworks that advocate the integration of innovation, community participation, and destination competitiveness as interconnected dimensions of tourism governance (Hendrayady, Sulistyowati, & Putra, 2023).

Existing studies examining digital tourism promotion consistently demonstrate that online platforms play a substantial role in increasing destination awareness and influencing visitor behavior, particularly within niche tourism segments such as religious tourism. Research on religious tourism

promotion indicates that digital media facilitates broader dissemination of cultural and spiritual values while enabling destinations to communicate unique experiences to prospective visitors beyond traditional geographical limitations (Faidah, 2017). More recent investigations reveal that social media platforms have become especially influential because they allow tourism managers to combine visual storytelling, interactive engagement, and user-generated content in ways that strengthen destination attractiveness and visitor trust (Hasyam, 2023). Studies focusing on digital tourism marketing further argue that destination competitiveness increasingly depends on the ability to integrate promotional content with strategic branding and audience targeting mechanisms (Mahaliani & Masnita, 2024). A critical synthesis of this literature suggests that successful digital promotion is not merely a technical activity involving online dissemination but rather a strategic process requiring organizational capacity, institutional coordination, and sustained content management capable of translating destination potential into actual visitation outcomes (Abidin, 2025).

Despite the growing volume of scholarship concerning digital tourism marketing, several conceptual and empirical limitations remain apparent. A substantial proportion of existing studies concentrate on large-scale tourism destinations, urban tourism centers, or commercially established attractions, leaving relatively limited understanding regarding digital promotion strategies implemented in emerging religious tourism destinations located in peripheral regions. Research frequently emphasizes marketing outcomes such as destination visibility or visitor intention while paying less attention to the institutional processes through which public agencies formulate, implement, and evaluate digital promotion strategies. Empirical findings also present inconsistencies regarding the relative effectiveness of different digital platforms, communication approaches, and stakeholder involvement models, suggesting that the success of digital promotion remains highly dependent on contextual factors. These limitations indicate the need for more place-based investigations capable of explaining how public institutions operationalize digital promotion strategies within specific socio-cultural and geographical environments characterized by unique tourism assets and developmental challenges (Mu'taz, 2023; Hasyam, 2023).

The unresolved questions surrounding the institutional dimensions of digital tourism promotion possess particular relevance for regions seeking to diversify their tourism economy through the development of religious tourism destinations. Religious tourism sites often possess strong historical, cultural, and spiritual significance yet remain underrepresented within broader tourism markets because of limited promotional capacity and inadequate digital visibility. The consequences of insufficient promotion extend beyond visitor numbers, affecting local economic opportunities, community participation, cultural preservation efforts, and destination sustainability. Public tourism agencies therefore occupy a critical position in bridging the gap between destination potential and market recognition through strategic communication interventions. Understanding how digital promotion strategies are formulated and implemented becomes increasingly important in regions where tourism development depends on the ability of government institutions to effectively leverage digital technologies as instruments of destination development and regional competitiveness (Abidin, 2025; Hendrayady, Sulistyowati, & Putra, 2023).

This study is situated within the intersection of tourism governance, destination marketing, and digital communication research by focusing specifically on the Tourism Office's digital promotion strategy for the development of religious tourism in Buru Subdistrict, Karimun Regency. Existing literature has largely concentrated on promotional outcomes or platform utilization, whereas comparatively limited attention has been directed toward understanding how government tourism agencies strategically design, coordinate, and implement digital promotion initiatives within the context of religious tourism development. The case of Buru Subdistrict offers a valuable analytical setting because it represents a developing religious tourism destination whose growth is closely connected to the effectiveness of institutional promotional efforts. Examining this context provides an opportunity to explore how digital promotion functions not only as a marketing tool but also as a governance instrument capable of influencing destination development trajectories, stakeholder engagement, and tourism competitiveness (Faidah, 2017; Mahaliani & Masnita, 2024).

This research aims to analyze the digital promotion strategy implemented by the Tourism Office in supporting the development of religious tourism in Buru Subdistrict, Karimun Regency. The study seeks to identify strategic approaches, promotional practices, institutional challenges, and supporting factors that shape the effectiveness of digital tourism promotion within a religious tourism

context. Theoretically, the research is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on tourism governance and digital destination marketing by providing a deeper understanding of how public institutions utilize digital communication to promote religious tourism destinations. Methodologically, the study offers an in-depth qualitative perspective capable of capturing the complex interactions among institutional actors, promotional strategies, digital platforms, and destination development processes within an emerging tourism environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore and understand the Tourism Office's digital promotion strategy in the development of religious tourism in Buru Subdistrict, Karimun Regency. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth examination of social phenomena, institutional practices, and stakeholder perspectives within their natural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving key informants from the Tourism Office, tourism managers, community leaders, and local stakeholders directly involved in religious tourism development. Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in tourism promotion activities. Data collection focused on identifying digital promotion strategies, the utilization of social media and online platforms, institutional coordination mechanisms, as well as challenges and opportunities encountered in promoting religious tourism destinations.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation was conducted by selecting, categorizing, and organizing relevant information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. The organized data were subsequently presented in thematic matrices and descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation and pattern identification. The credibility of the findings was enhanced through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking to ensure consistency and trustworthiness. This analytical procedure enabled the study to generate a comprehensive understanding of how digital promotion strategies are formulated and implemented by the Tourism Office in supporting the development of religious tourism in Buru Subdistrict, Karimun Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Promotion Strategy Implemented by the Tourism Office for Religious Tourism Development

The findings reveal that the Tourism Office of Karimun Regency has positioned digital promotion as a central instrument for increasing the visibility of religious tourism destinations in Buru Subdistrict. Interviews with tourism officials indicated that social media platforms, official government websites, and digital publication channels are used to disseminate information regarding religious events, historical sites, and local cultural attractions. Informants emphasized that digital promotion has become increasingly important because tourist information is now predominantly accessed through online platforms before travel decisions are made. This finding aligns with the argument that digital promotion functions as a strategic marketing instrument capable of influencing destination awareness and visitor interest (Tjiptono, 2015).

Data obtained from interviews demonstrate that the Tourism Office has adopted a content-based promotional strategy focusing on destination uniqueness, religious values, and local cultural identity. Officials explained that promotional materials frequently highlight religious heritage sites, annual religious celebrations, and historical narratives associated with the development of Islam in Buru Subdistrict. The emphasis on destination storytelling reflects a broader shift in tourism marketing from transactional promotion toward experience-oriented communication. Such an approach corresponds with contemporary tourism development perspectives emphasizing destination differentiation and cultural authenticity (Yoeti, 2016).

Several informants noted that social media platforms constitute the most frequently utilized promotional channel because of their accessibility and broad audience reach. Content is generally distributed through Facebook, Instagram, and short-form video platforms that enable visual representation of religious tourism attractions. Tourism managers reported that visual content receives stronger engagement than text-based information, particularly among younger audiences. Similar

observations have been documented in studies highlighting the growing role of digitalization in tourism communication and destination marketing (Nurhayati et al., 2025).

Interviews further revealed that promotional activities are not conducted solely by government institutions but involve collaboration with local communities and tourism stakeholders. Community participation appears in the form of content sharing, event documentation, and destination promotion through personal social media accounts. Informants argued that local involvement contributes to greater authenticity and credibility in tourism communication. Community-based tourism promotion has been recognized as an important factor supporting sustainable tourism development and destination competitiveness (Mahmudah et al., 2026).

The collected qualitative data indicate that promotional messages are designed to emphasize both religious significance and tourism attractiveness. Officials explained that content development seeks to balance spiritual values with destination appeal to attract diverse visitor segments. Religious tourism is therefore framed not only as a spiritual journey but also as a cultural and educational experience. Such strategic positioning reflects principles of tourism marketing that encourage the integration of emotional and informational communication dimensions (Tjiptono, 2015).

The implementation of digital promotion activities identified during fieldwork is summarized in Table 1. The table presents the principal digital channels and promotional objectives utilized by the Tourism Office. These findings illustrate the diversification of communication strategies across multiple digital platforms. The observed pattern indicates an effort to maximize audience reach through integrated promotional mechanisms.

Table 1. Digital Promotion Channels Used by the Tourism Office

Digital Platform	Main Promotional Function	Target Audience
Instagram	Visual destination promotion	Young travelers
Facebook	Community engagement and information dissemination	General public
Official Website	Destination information and tourism news	Domestic tourists
Online News Portals	Publicity and event coverage	Regional audiences
Video Platforms	Storytelling and destination branding	Digital users

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that Instagram and video-based platforms are perceived as the most effective channels for increasing destination visibility. Informants explained that visual communication facilitates the presentation of religious tourism attractions in a more attractive and persuasive manner. The preference for visual media reflects changing patterns of information consumption among contemporary travelers. Similar trends have been identified in studies examining digital tourism promotion strategies in culturally significant destinations (Kariadna, Johannes, & Mulawarman, 2026).

Another important finding concerns the alignment between promotional activities and tourism development objectives established by national tourism policy. Tourism officials emphasized that digital promotion is intended not only to increase visitor numbers but also to support destination sustainability and local economic development. The promotion of religious tourism is therefore integrated into broader regional tourism planning initiatives. This orientation is consistent with the principles outlined in Indonesian tourism policy, which emphasize sustainable destination development and community welfare enhancement (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 10 Tahun 2009).

Field observations revealed that promotional content increasingly incorporates elements of local identity, cultural heritage, and community participation. Informants argued that tourists are more attracted to destinations presenting authentic cultural experiences rather than generic tourism imagery. The integration of local narratives strengthens destination branding while simultaneously preserving cultural values. Such findings support contemporary perspectives emphasizing the strategic role of local identity in tourism competitiveness (Priadyantika & Setiaji, 2026).

The findings suggest that the Tourism Office has adopted a relatively adaptive digital promotion strategy characterized by platform diversification, content innovation, and stakeholder involvement. Interview evidence demonstrates that digital promotion functions not merely as an information dissemination tool but as a strategic mechanism for destination development and market

positioning. The effectiveness of this approach is reflected in increasing public awareness regarding religious tourism attractions in Buru Subdistrict. The observed strategy corresponds with contemporary tourism marketing and destination development frameworks emphasizing innovation, participation, and digital engagement (Abidin, 2025; Yoeti, 2016; Nurhayati et al., 2025).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Digital Promotion Strategies

The findings indicate that the implementation of digital promotion strategies for religious tourism development in Buru Subdistrict is influenced by a combination of supporting and inhibiting factors originating from institutional, technological, and community dimensions. Interviews with Tourism Office officials revealed that the growing penetration of internet access and social media usage has created favorable conditions for digital-based tourism promotion. Informants emphasized that digital platforms enable tourism information to reach broader audiences with relatively low promotional costs. This finding reflects the growing importance of digital communication technologies in enhancing destination competitiveness and tourism marketing effectiveness (Nurhayati et al., 2025).

One of the most significant supporting factors identified during fieldwork is the existence of attractive religious tourism resources that possess strong historical, cultural, and spiritual value. Tourism managers explained that several religious sites in Buru Subdistrict have distinctive characteristics capable of generating public interest when promoted through digital media. Informants argued that destination attractiveness constitutes the primary content asset supporting promotional activities. Tourism development literature consistently emphasizes that effective promotion depends on the ability to communicate unique destination attributes to prospective visitors (Yoeti, 2016).

Interviews also revealed strong community participation in supporting promotional efforts. Local residents frequently share tourism-related content through personal social media accounts and participate in documenting religious events organized within the area. Informants suggested that community involvement contributes to expanding the reach of promotional messages beyond official government channels. Similar findings have been reported in studies emphasizing the role of community-based tourism in strengthening destination branding and tourism sustainability (Mahmudah et al., 2026).

The research findings further indicate that institutional commitment within the Tourism Office serves as an important enabling factor. Officials demonstrated awareness regarding the strategic value of digital promotion and actively encouraged the utilization of various online communication platforms. Informants noted that tourism promotion has become an integral component of local tourism development planning. Such institutional support reflects the importance of strategic management in tourism governance and destination development (Priadyantika & Setiaji, 2026). Despite these supporting conditions, several challenges continue to limit the effectiveness of digital promotion initiatives. Interviews revealed that limitations in human resource capacity remain a recurring issue, particularly regarding digital content production, social media management, and promotional analytics. Some officials acknowledged difficulties in maintaining consistent content updates because of workload constraints and limited technical expertise. Similar challenges have been identified in tourism promotion studies highlighting the need for stronger digital competencies among tourism stakeholders (Kariadna, Johannes, & Mulawarman, 2026).

The supporting and inhibiting factors identified through interviews and observations are summarized in Table 2. The table presents key elements affecting the implementation of digital promotion strategies in Buru Subdistrict. These findings demonstrate that promotional effectiveness is influenced by both internal and external conditions. The interaction among these factors shapes the overall performance of tourism communication initiatives.

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Digital Promotion

Factor Category	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Destination Resources	Religious heritage and cultural uniqueness	Limited destination documentation
Human Resources	Institutional commitment	Limited digital marketing skills
Community Participation	Active local involvement	Uneven digital literacy

Technology	Social media accessibility	Technical limitations	infrastructure
Promotion Management	Multi-platform utilization	Inconsistent content production	

The information presented in Table 2 indicates that destination resources and community participation function as major strengths supporting tourism promotion. Informants consistently identified local religious heritage as the most valuable promotional asset. At the same time, limitations in digital competencies and content management reduce the potential impact of online communication efforts. These findings support arguments that successful tourism promotion depends on the integration of destination attractiveness with organizational capabilities (Tjiptono, 2015).

Another challenge identified through interviews concerns the uneven level of digital literacy among tourism stakeholders. Some community members possess adequate knowledge regarding social media utilization, whereas others remain unfamiliar with digital promotional practices. Informants suggested that differences in technological skills influence the consistency and quality of destination-related content shared online. Research on community-based digital tourism promotion similarly highlights digital literacy as a critical determinant of promotional effectiveness (Kariadna, Johannes, & Mulawarman, 2026).

Field observations further revealed that promotional activities occasionally encounter limitations related to content availability and documentation quality. Tourism officials acknowledged that many religious tourism activities have not been systematically documented in formats suitable for digital dissemination. The absence of high-quality visual materials restricts opportunities to create engaging promotional campaigns. Tourism marketing theory emphasizes that visual storytelling significantly influences destination image formation and visitor interest (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The findings suggest that the success of digital promotion strategies in Buru Subdistrict depends on the interaction between destination potential, institutional capacity, technological readiness, and community participation. Supporting factors provide a strong foundation for tourism promotion, while existing constraints highlight areas requiring strategic intervention and capacity development. Informants consistently emphasized the importance of improving digital competencies, strengthening content management practices, and expanding stakeholder involvement in promotional activities. These observations align with contemporary tourism development perspectives emphasizing collaboration, innovation, and digital adaptation as essential elements of destination competitiveness (Abidin, 2025; Nurhayati et al., 2025; Priadyantika & Setiaji, 2026).

The Effectiveness of Digital Promotion Strategies in Supporting Religious Tourism Development

The findings demonstrate that the digital promotion strategies implemented by the Tourism Office have contributed to increasing public awareness of religious tourism destinations in Buru Subdistrict. Interviews with tourism officials indicated that information regarding religious sites, cultural events, and pilgrimage activities has become more accessible through digital platforms. Informants reported receiving inquiries from prospective visitors who obtained destination information through social media and online publications. These observations suggest that digital promotion has strengthened destination visibility within an increasingly competitive tourism environment (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021).

Interviews with tourism managers revealed that the expansion of digital communication channels has facilitated broader interaction between destination managers and potential tourists. Social media platforms enable rapid dissemination of tourism information while simultaneously providing opportunities for audience feedback and engagement. Informants explained that online interactions often generate further interest through content sharing and electronic word-of-mouth communication. Such patterns are consistent with contemporary tourism marketing frameworks emphasizing interactive communication and audience participation (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Several community representatives observed that digital promotion has encouraged greater recognition of local religious tourism assets among regional audiences. Informants noted that destinations previously known only within local communities have gained wider exposure through online promotional activities. Increased visibility has contributed to growing interest in religious tourism events organized in Buru Subdistrict. Similar findings have been identified in studies examining

the role of digitalization in supporting sustainable tourism development and destination competitiveness (Nurhayati et al., 2025).

The findings further indicate that digital promotion contributes to destination image formation by communicating narratives related to spirituality, culture, and local identity. Tourism officials emphasized that promotional content is intentionally designed to highlight the historical significance and cultural uniqueness of religious tourism attractions. Informants argued that these narratives strengthen the attractiveness of destinations by creating meaningful visitor expectations. Tourism development literature recognizes destination image as a critical determinant influencing travel decisions and visitor behavior (Yoeti, 2016).

Interviews also revealed that digital promotion supports broader tourism development objectives beyond visitor attraction. Tourism stakeholders emphasized that increased destination exposure has created opportunities for local economic activities, including culinary businesses, transportation services, and small-scale tourism enterprises. Informants associated tourism promotion with community empowerment and local economic diversification. Community-centered tourism studies similarly demonstrate that tourism growth can generate wider socio-economic benefits when supported by effective stakeholder participation (Mahmudah et al., 2026).

The perceived outcomes of digital promotion identified during fieldwork are summarized in Table 3. The table illustrates the principal impacts reported by informants regarding tourism development in Buru Subdistrict. These findings provide insight into the broader implications of digital promotion beyond marketing performance alone. The evidence highlights both tourism and community development dimensions.

Table 3. Perceived Outcomes of Digital Promotion Strategies

Outcome Dimension	Observed Impact
Destination Visibility	Increased public awareness
Visitor Interest	Higher information requests and inquiries
Community Participation	Greater involvement in tourism promotion
Destination Image	Stronger religious and cultural branding
Local Economy	Expanded opportunities for tourism-related businesses

The information presented in Table 3 indicates that destination visibility represents the most immediate outcome of digital promotion activities. Informants consistently emphasized that online platforms have significantly expanded the reach of tourism information compared to conventional promotional methods. Increased visibility subsequently contributes to higher levels of visitor interest and stakeholder engagement. Similar relationships between digital exposure and tourism attractiveness have been identified in studies examining tourism marketing strategies and destination branding (Abidin, 2025).

Another important finding concerns the role of digital promotion in strengthening destination branding. Tourism officials explained that repeated dissemination of religious tourism content has helped establish a clearer identity for Buru Subdistrict as a religious tourism destination. Informants suggested that branding efforts become more effective when promotional messages consistently communicate distinctive destination characteristics. Strategic destination branding has been recognized as a key factor influencing tourism competitiveness and long-term destination development (Tjiptono, 2015).

Field observations also revealed that the effectiveness of digital promotion remains influenced by the quality, consistency, and relevance of promotional content. Informants acknowledged that audience engagement tends to increase when content incorporates visual storytelling, cultural narratives, and timely information regarding tourism events. The effectiveness of digital communication therefore depends not only on platform utilization but also on content management capabilities. Research concerning digital tourism communication similarly highlights the importance of content quality in shaping audience responses and destination perception (Kariadna, Johannes, & Mulawarman, 2026).

The findings suggest that digital promotion has become a strategic instrument supporting religious tourism development in Buru Subdistrict by enhancing destination visibility, strengthening branding, encouraging community participation, and creating opportunities for local economic growth. Interview evidence demonstrates that promotional effectiveness emerges from the interaction of technological utilization, destination attractiveness, institutional commitment, and stakeholder collaboration. Informants consistently emphasized that sustained tourism development requires continuous innovation in digital communication strategies and stronger integration between promotional activities and destination management initiatives. These findings align with contemporary perspectives on tourism development that position digital promotion as an essential component of sustainable destination governance and competitiveness (Priadyantika & Setiaji, 2026; Nurhayati et al., 2025; Abidin, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Tourism Office of Karimun Regency has implemented digital promotion strategies as a key instrument for supporting the development of religious tourism in Buru Subdistrict. The findings reveal that the utilization of social media platforms, official websites, online publications, and digital content marketing has increased the visibility of religious tourism destinations and strengthened destination branding. The effectiveness of these promotional efforts is supported by the uniqueness of religious tourism attractions, institutional commitment, and active community participation in disseminating tourism-related information. Digital promotion has functioned not only as a communication tool but also as a strategic mechanism for enhancing destination competitiveness, expanding market reach, and promoting the cultural and spiritual values embedded within local tourism resources.

The study also identifies several factors that influence the effectiveness of digital promotion, including the availability of human resources with digital competencies, the consistency of content management, the quality of destination documentation, and the level of digital literacy among stakeholders. Despite these challenges, digital promotion has contributed to increased public awareness, stronger destination image formation, broader stakeholder engagement, and greater opportunities for local economic development through tourism activities. The findings indicate that sustainable religious tourism development requires continuous innovation in digital communication strategies, stronger collaboration among government institutions and local communities, and the integration of promotional activities with broader destination management initiatives. These conditions are essential for ensuring that digital promotion contributes not only to visitor attraction but also to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of religious tourism destinations in Buru Subdistrict.

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