

Digital Communication Management In Local Tourism Branding: A Study Of Collaborative Strategies Between Government, Influencers, And Creative Communities In Surakarta

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation of digital communication management in local tourism branding through collaborative strategies between government institutions, influencers, and creative communities in Surakarta. The rapid development of digital media has transformed tourism branding practices from conventional promotional approaches into participatory and network-based communication ecosystems involving multiple stakeholders. This research aims to analyze how collaborative digital communication strategies are managed and implemented in strengthening Surakarta's tourism image in the digital era. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography, and documentation studies involving tourism officials, local influencers, and creative communities actively engaged in tourism branding activities. The findings reveal that collaborative communication among stakeholders significantly contributes to strengthening tourism branding effectiveness through digital storytelling, audience engagement, and cultural representation. Government institutions function as communication coordinators and facilitators, while influencers and creative communities act as strategic communication intermediaries capable of producing authentic and engaging tourism narratives. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play central roles in disseminating tourism messages and encouraging participatory audience interaction through user-generated content. The study also identifies several challenges, including communication coordination differences, varying stakeholder objectives, and rapid digital media changes requiring adaptive communication management. Overall, the research demonstrates that successful local tourism branding increasingly depends on collaborative communication ecosystems integrating institutional legitimacy, digital creativity, and participatory audience engagement. This study contributes to the development of strategic communication studies, particularly in digital tourism branding, collaborative governance, and participatory communication management.

Keywords: digital communication management, tourism branding, collaborative communication, influencers, creative communities, Surakarta

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has significantly reshaped the tourism industry, particularly in the way destinations construct and disseminate their branding narratives through digital platforms. In the contemporary communication landscape, local tourism branding is no longer dependent solely on conventional promotional activities, but increasingly relies on strategic digital communication management involving multiple stakeholders such as government institutions, social media influencers, and creative communities. The emergence of social media platforms, user-generated content, and participatory digital culture has enabled local

governments to promote tourism destinations more interactively, collaboratively, and efficiently (Wang et al., 2021). In this context, communication strategies become central instruments in constructing destination image, strengthening audience engagement, and enhancing tourism competitiveness in regional contexts.

The city of Surakarta, widely known as Solo, represents one of Indonesia's local tourism destinations actively utilizing digital communication strategies to strengthen its cultural and creative tourism branding (Subandi et al., 2023). Through collaborations between the municipal government, local influencers, and creative communities, Surakarta has attempted to position itself as a city rich in cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to digital tourism trends. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of collaborative governance in communication management, where multiple actors jointly participate in planning, producing, and disseminating communication messages for public engagement. Such collaborations are increasingly relevant in the tourism sector because destination branding today requires participatory communication approaches that integrate governmental legitimacy, influencer credibility, and community creativity.

Recent studies indicate that digital tourism branding is highly influenced by social media engagement and collaborative communication ecosystems. Research conducted by Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020) explains that tourism branding effectiveness in digital environments depends on interactive communication patterns and emotional storytelling strategies distributed through social media platforms. Likewise, Ketter and Avraham (2021) argue that destination branding in the digital era requires integrated communication management capable of combining official narratives with organic community-based content. These findings demonstrate that tourism branding has evolved from institution-centered promotion into network-based communication practices involving various digital actors (Aman et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, the increasing role of influencers in tourism promotion has become a notable phenomenon in communication studies. Influencers function not only as promotional agents but also as symbolic intermediaries who shape audience perceptions regarding authenticity, lifestyle, and destination attractiveness (Fedorov et al., 2023). Their ability to generate engagement through visual storytelling and interactive communication has made influencers strategic partners for local governments in tourism campaigns. In Surakarta, collaborations between tourism offices and local content creators have become increasingly visible through campaigns on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where cultural events, culinary tourism, and local heritage are packaged into attractive digital narratives. This reflects the shift toward participatory branding strategies emphasizing co-creation between institutions and communities (Hanna et al., 2021).

In addition to influencers, creative communities also play an important role in strengthening local tourism branding through digital innovation and cultural communication practices. Creative communities contribute to tourism branding by producing local cultural content, organizing digital campaigns, and creating creative events that reinforce destination identity (Acar et al., 2024). Their participation is particularly significant because community-based branding often generates more authentic and culturally embedded narratives compared to purely institutional promotions. In the context of Surakarta, creative communities involved in arts, photography, music, and digital media have become active collaborators in promoting local tourism identities through various digital platforms and cultural events.

However, despite the increasing implementation of collaborative digital communication strategies, challenges remain in coordinating communication management among stakeholders. Differences in institutional objectives, communication styles, and digital competencies often create fragmentation in tourism branding efforts (S.E Mandaru et al., 2025). Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital media trends requires adaptive communication management capable of responding to audience behavior changes and platform algorithms. This situation highlights the importance of strategic communication management frameworks that can facilitate collaboration, maintain message consistency, and optimize digital engagement in tourism branding practices.

Previous research has extensively discussed digital tourism marketing and destination branding, yet limited studies specifically examine how collaborative communication strategies are managed among government institutions, influencers, and creative communities within local tourism branding contexts, particularly in medium-sized Indonesian cities such as Surakarta (Walenta et al., 2024). Most existing studies focus primarily on marketing effectiveness or tourist perceptions rather than on communication

management processes and stakeholder collaboration dynamics. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how digital communication management is implemented collaboratively in Surakarta's local tourism branding initiatives.

Based on these considerations, this research aims to analyze the collaborative strategies between government institutions, influencers, and creative communities in managing digital communication for local tourism branding in Surakarta. Specifically, the study investigates how communication coordination, content co-creation, and digital engagement practices contribute to strengthening Surakarta's tourism image in the digital era. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of communication studies, particularly in strategic communication management, digital tourism branding, and collaborative communication governance (Muhammad, 2024).

II. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study design to examine the implementation of digital communication management in local tourism branding in Surakarta. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because this research seeks to understand communication processes, collaborative interactions, and strategic practices among stakeholders involved in tourism branding activities. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore social phenomena contextually and interpretively, particularly regarding how communication strategies are constructed, negotiated, and implemented within digital environments. According to Creswell and Poth (Perreault, 2021), qualitative inquiry is highly relevant for studies that focus on understanding meaning, interaction, and social realities from the perspectives of participants involved in the phenomenon being studied. In this context, the research focuses on the collaborative communication practices carried out by government institutions, influencers, and creative communities in strengthening local tourism branding through digital platforms.

The study adopts a case study method because it allows an in-depth exploration of contemporary communication phenomena within real-life settings. The case study design is particularly suitable for investigating collaborative digital communication strategies implemented in Surakarta, considering that the city has actively developed tourism branding initiatives involving multiple stakeholders (Notoatmodjo, 2021). Through this approach, the researcher can comprehensively analyze communication management processes, stakeholder interactions, digital content production, and audience engagement practices occurring within tourism branding activities. The research also emphasizes strategic communication perspectives to identify how tourism branding messages are coordinated and disseminated across various digital platforms (Ilhami et al., 2024).

The research is conducted in Surakarta, a city recognized for its cultural heritage and growing digital tourism promotion initiatives. Surakarta was selected as the research location because the city has demonstrated active collaboration between governmental institutions, local influencers, and creative communities in promoting tourism destinations and cultural events through digital media (Ridlo, 2023). The research subjects consist of three major stakeholder groups involved in tourism branding activities. First, representatives from government institutions, particularly tourism and public communication agencies, are included because they play central roles in designing tourism branding policies and digital promotional strategies. Second, local influencers and digital content creators are selected because they actively participate in promoting tourism destinations through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Third, creative communities involved in arts, visual communication, photography, music, and digital campaigns are also included because they contribute to the production of authentic local tourism narratives and creative promotional content. Participants are selected purposively based on their relevance, experience, and active involvement in collaborative tourism branding activities in Surakarta (Hasanah, 2017).

Data collection in this study utilizes several qualitative techniques to ensure comprehensive and triangulated findings. The first technique is in-depth interviews conducted semi-structurally with representatives from government institutions, influencers, and creative communities. The interviews aim to explore participants' experiences, communication strategies, collaborative practices, and perceptions regarding digital tourism branding in Surakarta. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for participants to explain their experiences and perspectives in detail while allowing the researcher to maintain focus on the main research objectives. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2021), semi-structured interviews are effective in qualitative communication research because they facilitate deeper exploration of meanings, interactions, and social experiences.

The second data collection technique is participant observation. The researcher observes various tourism branding activities, including digital campaigns, tourism events, cultural festivals, and online promotional practices conducted through social media platforms. Observation is intended to identify communication patterns, stakeholder participation, digital engagement strategies, and interactions occurring among audiences and tourism branding actors. In addition, digital ethnographic observation is employed to analyze online communication practices, including social media content, hashtags, audience responses, and visual branding strategies. Through observation, the researcher can gain contextual understanding regarding how collaborative communication strategies are implemented in practice.

The third technique involves documentation studies. Documentation data include government tourism campaign materials, promotional videos, social media content, event publications, policy documents, photographs, digital advertisements, and online news articles related to tourism branding activities in Surakarta. Documentation analysis serves as supporting evidence to strengthen interview and observation findings while also helping researchers identify communication narratives and branding representations used by stakeholders in digital environments.

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation are analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is applied because it allows researchers to identify recurring themes, communication patterns, and strategic meanings emerging from stakeholder interactions and collaborative tourism branding practices. Braun and Clarke (2021) explain that thematic analysis is useful for systematically interpreting qualitative data by categorizing patterns and themes relevant to the research objectives. The analysis process in this study consists of several stages, including data transcription, data organization, initial coding, categorization of communication themes, interpretation of stakeholder collaboration patterns, and drawing conclusions. The analysis focuses particularly on collaborative communication strategies, digital branding narratives, audience engagement approaches, and challenges faced in implementing tourism branding initiatives.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings, this study applies triangulation techniques involving multiple data sources and collection methods. Data obtained from interviews are compared with findings from observations and documentation studies to verify consistency and credibility. The researcher also conducts member checking by confirming selected findings with participants to ensure interpretive accuracy and reduce potential misinterpretation. Furthermore, prolonged engagement and reflective interpretation are applied throughout the research process to strengthen contextual understanding and minimize researcher bias during data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (2020) emphasize that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are important components in maintaining rigor within qualitative research.

Ethical considerations are also prioritized throughout the research process. Before conducting interviews or observations, participants are informed about the objectives, procedures, and confidentiality policies of the study. Participation is voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage without consequences. The researcher ensures that all collected information is used solely for academic purposes and reported responsibly to maintain participant privacy and institutional integrity. Through these methodological procedures, the study aims to provide comprehensive and credible insights into collaborative digital communication management practices in local tourism branding in Surakarta.

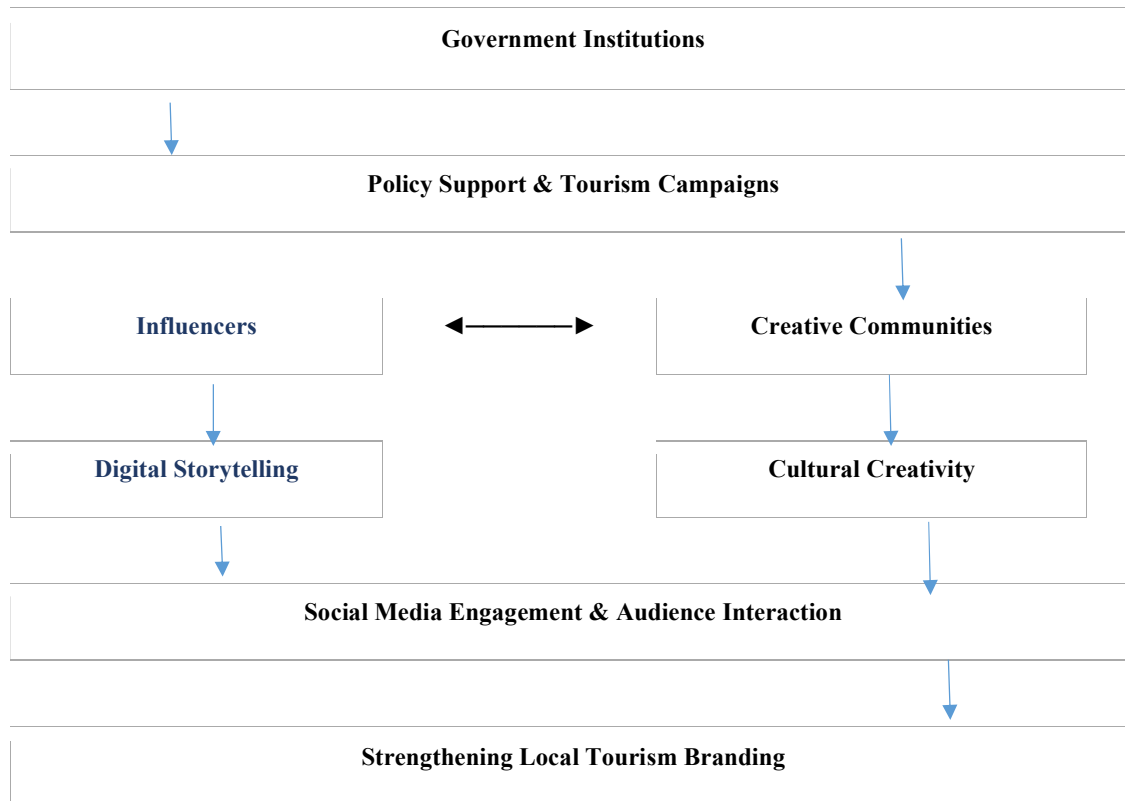
III. Result and Discussion

A. Overview of Collaborative Strategies Implemented by Stakeholders

The findings of this study reveal that digital communication management in local tourism branding in Surakarta is strongly influenced by collaborative interactions among government institutions, influencers, and creative communities. These collaborations are implemented through coordinated digital campaigns, social media promotions, creative cultural events, and participatory tourism branding activities. The Surakarta municipal government, particularly through tourism and communication agencies, plays a central role in facilitating tourism branding initiatives by providing official narratives, institutional legitimacy, and strategic communication direction. Meanwhile, influencers and creative communities contribute through digital storytelling, audience engagement, and the production of creative tourism content.

The collaboration pattern identified in this study demonstrates that tourism branding in Surakarta no longer operates through a top-down communication model. Instead, communication management has shifted toward a participatory and network-based approach in which stakeholders jointly construct tourism narratives. This collaborative model enables tourism messages to become more flexible, authentic, and audience-oriented. Findings indicate that local influencers are often involved in tourism campaigns because of their ability to reach younger audiences and create emotionally engaging content through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

Figure 1. Collaborative Digital Communication Ecosystem in Surakarta Tourism Branding



The figure above illustrates the collaborative communication ecosystem found in this study. Government institutions function as facilitators and coordinators of tourism branding strategies, while influencers and creative communities act as communication amplifiers and cultural intermediaries. Social media platforms become the central communication space where tourism narratives are distributed, negotiated, and consumed by audiences.

B. Impact of Digital Communication on Local Tourism Branding

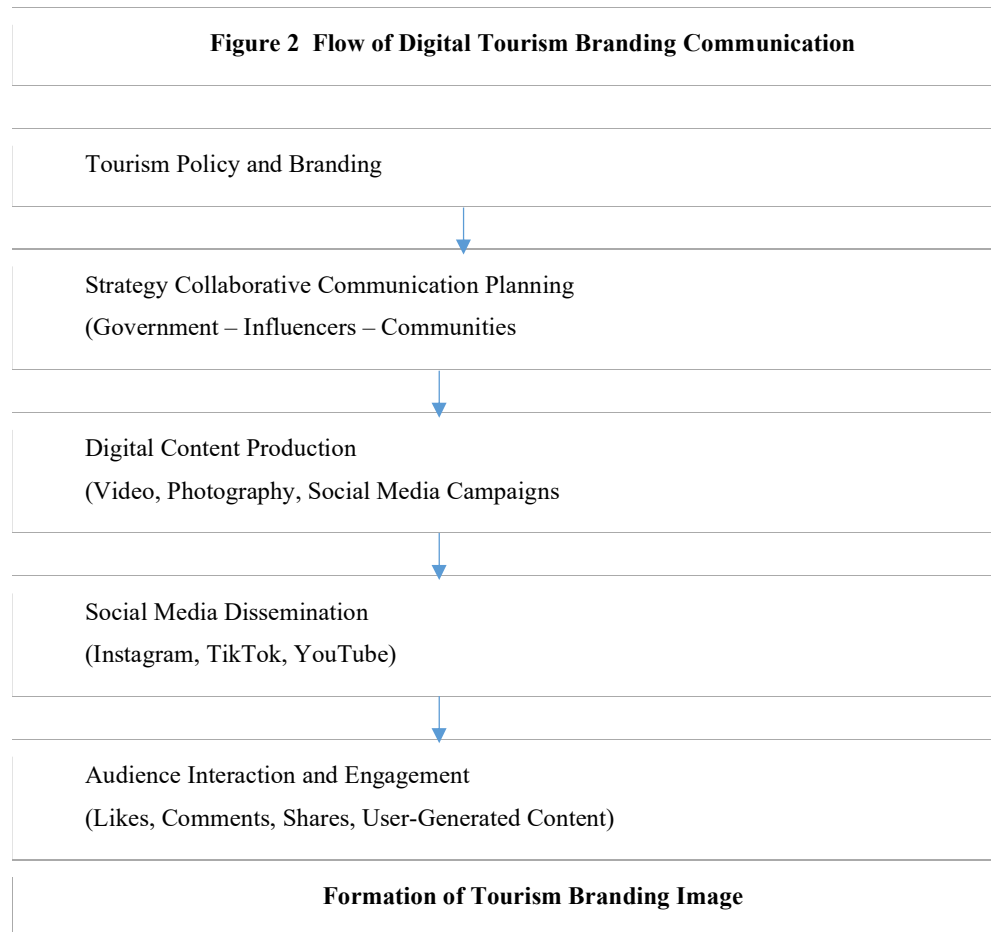
The findings demonstrate that digital communication strategies have significantly contributed to strengthening the tourism image of Surakarta. Social media platforms enable stakeholders to disseminate tourism information rapidly and interactively while simultaneously increasing public awareness regarding local cultural destinations, culinary tourism, and creative tourism events. Digital communication also allows tourism branding messages to reach broader audiences beyond regional boundaries.

One of the most notable impacts identified in this study is the increased visibility of Surakarta's cultural identity through visual storytelling strategies. Influencers and creative communities frequently use visual narratives emphasizing traditional heritage, local cuisine, cultural festivals, and urban creative spaces. These communication practices help construct a modern yet culturally rooted tourism image for Surakarta.

In addition, digital communication enables the formation of audience engagement through comments, shares, hashtags, and user-generated content. Tourism audiences are not merely passive recipients of promotional information but actively participate in reproducing tourism narratives through their own digital experiences. This participatory communication process strengthens destination branding because audiences become co-creators of tourism image.

Table 1. Forms of Digital Communication Strategies in Surakarta Tourism Branding

Stakeholder	Communication Strategy	Digital Platform	Main Objective
Government Institutions	Official tourism campaigns	Instagram, Website, YouTube	Strengthening city tourism identity
Influencers	Digital storytelling and promotional content	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube	Increasing audience engagement
Creative Communities	Cultural event promotion and creative campaigns	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter	Preserving cultural identity and attracting tourists
Tourism Communities	User-generated tourism content	TikTok, Instagram	Expanding tourism visibility



The communication flow above demonstrates how tourism branding messages are collaboratively produced and distributed through digital platforms. Audience engagement becomes an important indicator of branding effectiveness because digital communication success is increasingly measured not only through exposure but also through interaction and participation.

C. Success Factors and Best Practices

This study identifies several factors contributing to the success of collaborative digital communication management in Surakarta tourism branding. First, stakeholder collaboration and communication coordination play essential roles in maintaining branding consistency. Regular communication between government institutions, influencers, and creative communities allows tourism campaigns to be implemented more cohesively.

Second, cultural authenticity becomes an important factor in attracting audience attention. Tourism branding content emphasizing local culture, heritage, culinary identity, and community creativity tends to receive higher audience engagement compared to generic promotional content. Authentic storytelling strengthens emotional connections between audiences and tourism destinations.

Third, the utilization of visual communication strategies significantly enhances tourism branding effectiveness. Short videos, cinematic photography, and interactive social media content are highly effective in increasing digital engagement, particularly among younger audiences. Influencers and creative communities demonstrate strong capabilities in adapting tourism messages into visually attractive formats suitable for contemporary digital culture.

Fourth, participatory communication practices contribute to sustainable tourism branding. User-generated content, hashtag campaigns, and interactive online discussions enable audiences to actively participate in promoting tourism destinations. This participatory model reduces dependence on one-way institutional communication and strengthens community involvement in tourism promotion.

The findings also reveal that digital communication management contributes to tourism branding effectiveness through integrated communication practices. Government institutions often collaborate with influencers by inviting them to tourism events, cultural festivals, and promotional programs. Influencers subsequently produce personalized tourism content that attracts audience attention and encourages tourism participation. Such collaborative practices reflect the increasing importance of digital communication ecosystems in modern destination branding strategies.

Audience members actively participate in promoting tourism destinations. This participatory model reduces dependence on one-way institutional communication and strengthens community involvement in tourism promotion.

Table 2. Thematic Findings and Data Categorization

Main Theme	Data Category	Indicators	Sources of Data
Collaborative Communication	Stakeholder Coordination	Joint campaigns, event collaboration, communication meetings	Interviews, observation
Digital Storytelling	Tourism Narrative Construction	Visual storytelling, cultural narratives, influencer content	Social media documentation
Audience Engagement	Interactive Participation	Comments, shares, hashtag usage, user-generated content	Observation, digital ethnography
Cultural Branding	Local Identity Representation	Traditional culture, culinary tourism, festivals	Interviews, documentation
Communication Challenges	Coordination and Digital Adaptation	Different communication styles, algorithm changes	Interviews

The thematic findings indicate that collaborative communication practices are central to the effectiveness of digital tourism branding. Stakeholders perceive collaboration as a strategic necessity because tourism branding in the digital era requires integrated communication ecosystems capable of combining institutional legitimacy, cultural authenticity, and audience engagement.

IV. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital communication management in local tourism branding increasingly reflects collaborative and participatory communication models. The collaboration between government institutions, influencers, and creative communities in Surakarta aligns with the concept of collaborative governance, where multiple actors collectively participate in communication planning and implementation processes. This finding supports Ansell and Gash's collaborative governance perspective, which emphasizes the importance of stakeholder interaction and shared communication objectives in public sector initiatives.

The study also reveals that influencers function as strategic communication intermediaries capable of translating institutional tourism messages into more relatable and emotionally engaging narratives. This role is particularly important in digital

communication environments where audience trust is often influenced by perceived authenticity and interpersonal engagement. Influencers' ability to combine entertainment, lifestyle representation, and tourism promotion enables tourism branding messages to reach broader and younger audiences.

Meanwhile, creative communities contribute to strengthening cultural authenticity within tourism branding practices. Their involvement demonstrates that tourism branding is not merely a marketing activity but also a cultural communication process involving identity representation and community participation. This finding is consistent with contemporary tourism communication studies emphasizing that authentic local narratives are increasingly valued within digital tourism cultures.

Another important finding concerns the role of audience participation in tourism branding. Digital communication platforms facilitate interactive engagement in which audiences actively reproduce and disseminate tourism narratives through user-generated content. This indicates a shift from one-way promotional communication toward participatory communication ecosystems. Audiences become co-creators of tourism image rather than passive consumers of promotional messages.

However, the study also identifies several challenges affecting collaborative communication management. Differences in communication styles, institutional priorities, and digital competencies among stakeholders occasionally create coordination difficulties. Government institutions generally emphasize formal communication and policy consistency, whereas influencers prioritize creativity and audience engagement. Creative communities, meanwhile, often focus on cultural representation and artistic expression. Balancing these different orientations requires adaptive communication management capable of facilitating collaboration while maintaining branding coherence.

The findings further indicate that algorithmic changes and rapidly evolving digital media trends require stakeholders to continuously adapt their communication strategies. Tourism branding success increasingly depends on the ability to produce visually engaging and interactive content suitable for changing audience preferences. Therefore, strategic flexibility and digital innovation become essential elements in tourism communication management.

Overall, this study demonstrates that collaborative digital communication management contributes significantly to strengthening local tourism branding in Surakarta. The integration of governmental support, influencer engagement, and community creativity creates a dynamic communication ecosystem capable of enhancing destination visibility, cultural representation, and audience participation. These findings contribute to communication studies by emphasizing the importance of collaborative governance, participatory communication, and digital storytelling within contemporary tourism branding practices.

Table 3. Summary of Major Research Findings

Research Focus	Main Findings	Communication Implications
Stakeholder Collaboration	Tourism branding implemented collaboratively among government, influencers, and communities	Strengthens communication integration and branding consistency
Digital Communication Strategy	Social media-based storytelling dominates tourism branding	Enhances audience reach and interaction
Audience Participation	Audiences actively engage through digital interaction and user-generated content	Tourism branding becomes participatory
Cultural Representation	Local identity and cultural authenticity increase audience attraction	Strengthens destination uniqueness
Communication Challenges	Coordination differences and digital adaptation difficulties	Requires adaptive communication management

The results suggest that local tourism branding in the digital era requires not only technological adaptation but also collaborative communication ecosystems capable of integrating multiple stakeholders and participatory audiences. In the context of Surakarta, digital communication management has evolved into a multidimensional process involving institutional coordination, cultural creativity, digital storytelling, and audience engagement. Consequently, successful tourism branding increasingly depends on communication strategies that are collaborative, adaptive, and culturally authentic.

V. Conclusion

This study concludes that digital communication management plays a crucial role in strengthening local tourism branding in Surakarta through collaborative strategies involving government institutions, influencers, and creative communities. The findings demonstrate that tourism branding in the digital era has shifted from conventional top-down promotional practices toward participatory and network-based communication ecosystems where multiple stakeholders jointly construct tourism narratives and destination identities. Such collaboration enables tourism communication to become more adaptive, interactive, and culturally relevant to contemporary digital audiences.

Government institutions function primarily as facilitators and coordinators responsible for developing tourism branding policies, organizing promotional campaigns, and ensuring communication consistency. At the same time, influencers contribute significantly through digital storytelling practices capable of creating emotional engagement and expanding tourism visibility across social media platforms. Meanwhile, creative communities strengthen branding authenticity by producing culturally embedded content reflecting local identity, heritage, and creativity. The integration of these actors creates a collaborative communication ecosystem that enhances tourism promotion effectiveness and public engagement.

The study further reveals that social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become central communication spaces for tourism branding activities. Through visual communication, interactive content, and user-generated participation, audiences are no longer passive recipients of promotional messages but active participants in reproducing tourism narratives. This participatory communication model strengthens destination branding because audiences contribute directly to the dissemination and legitimization of tourism images within digital environments.

In addition to identifying the strengths of collaborative communication practices, this study also highlights several challenges affecting digital tourism branding management. Differences in communication styles, institutional priorities, and digital competencies among stakeholders occasionally create coordination difficulties. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving nature of digital media trends and platform algorithms requires continuous adaptation and innovation in communication strategies. Consequently, effective tourism branding increasingly depends on flexible communication management capable of balancing institutional objectives, audience preferences, and cultural authenticity.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of communication studies, particularly in the fields of strategic communication, digital tourism branding, collaborative governance, and participatory communication. The findings reinforce the argument that tourism branding in digital environments should be understood not merely as a marketing activity but as a multidimensional communication process involving interaction, collaboration, identity representation, and audience participation. Practically, the study provides recommendations for local governments and tourism stakeholders to strengthen communication coordination, encourage community participation, and optimize digital storytelling strategies in tourism branding initiatives.

Finally, this study suggests that future research may further explore comparative tourism branding practices across different cities, investigate audience perception and digital engagement metrics quantitatively, or examine the influence of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual tourism experiences on destination branding communication. Through continuous innovation and collaborative communication management, local tourism branding can become more sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive in the evolving digital era.

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