

DIGITAL NARRATIVE IN CAFÉ SAWAH PUJON KIDUL PROMOTION

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Abstract

Amidst the growing number of tourism villages and intensifying competition among destinations, tourism village managers face the challenge of devising digital marketing strategies that are not merely informative but also capable of sustainably building meaning, experiences, and destination competitiveness. This study aims to examine the social media-based digital marketing strategies implemented by a specific attraction within Pujon Kidul Tourism Village identifying supporting and inhibiting factors and to analyze the role of digital narratives in shaping the destination's image and competitiveness. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews with tourism village managers (BUMDes), the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), tourism-related MSMEs, village officials, and tourists. Data analysis was conducted thematically, utilizing source triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings. The study reveals that social media management remains reactive and unplanned, characterized by the absence of content calendars, creative direction, and performance evaluation mechanisms. Furthermore, there is a misalignment between the digital narratives used and the core identity of Cafe Sawah Pujon Kidul as a culinary destination rooted in the rural experience. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to be leveraged, such as hosting TikTok live streams which have proven effective for content collaboration with local SMEs and communities as well as the management's openness to learning and guidance.

Keywords: Digital Narrative, Social Media Marketing, Destination Image, Community-Based Tourism, Tourism Village

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism villages in Indonesia has seen a significant increase in recent years, driven by national policies and programs aimed at strengthening community-based destinations (Mukti, 2025). One such program is the Indonesian Tourism Village Award (ADWI), established by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, with an emphasis on improving destination quality, digital promotion, and the competitiveness of tourism villages at the national level (Is-Nurwanda et al., 2022; Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021). The ADWI program in 2024 demonstrated a massive expansion of the tourism village ecosystem, as reflected in the increasing number of tourism villages registered in the government's promotional network (Antara, 2024).

The expansion of tourism villages also contributes to increased competition, attention, and differentiation among destinations, particularly in the digital space (Efrinal et al., 2026). Here, the promotion of tourism villages is not merely a means of disseminating information about the existence of a destination but rather a strategic process in building the

destination's image, experience, and value through planned digital content management. Social media can serve as a primary tool that enables two-way interaction, the formation of perceptions, and social legitimacy through mechanisms of evaluation and recommendations by tourists (Reinhold et al., 2023). The digital transformation in the tourism sector indicates that social media marketing and digital destination marketing have been dominant topics over the past decade (Christou et al., 2025; Mandagi et al., 2024; Marbun et al., 2024; Tran & Rudolf, 2022). This may indicate an increasing complexity in managing tourism destination promotion strategies (Madzik et al., 2023). In this context, the success of promotion is not only determined by the frequency of posts but also by the consistency of the strategy, the relevance of the message to tourists, and the ability to integrate sustainability values into digital communication.

Although various studies have discussed the use of social media in tourism destination promotion, most research still focuses on the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool, audience engagement levels, or the influence of content on visitation interest (Pramudhita & Madiawati, 2021; Putri et al., 2024; Fitriani & Lestari, 2020). Studies that specifically examine how digital narratives are constructed, managed, and consistently maintained as a destination communication strategy remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of community-based tourism villages in Indonesia. These limitations highlight the need for research capable of uncovering how digital narratives are constructed and utilized within the context of dynamically evolving tourism destinations.

Furthermore, existing approaches fail to explain how digital narratives are consistently constructed to represent destination identity, maintain image, and build long-term relationships with tourists. Therefore, this study utilizes a digital storytelling perspective as an analytical framework to understand the process of destination narrative formation in the context of community-based tourism villages. As competition among destinations in the digital space intensifies, the success of promotion is no longer determined solely by the frequency of posts or the visual quality of content. Tourist destinations are also required to build consistent and authentic storytelling to differentiate themselves from other destinations (Pachucki et al., 2022). In this context, digital narratives serve as a strategic element by connecting local identity, tourist experiences, and the destination's desired image through social media.

Pujon Kidul Tourism Village itself is an example of a tourism village that has grown rapidly since its establishment in 2014. The village is widely known for its various innovative tourist attractions, such as rice field cafés, agrotourism, and the strengthening of village-based institutions (Pambudi et al., 2021). In addition to its achievements at the local and national levels, Pujon Kidul Tourism Village is also active in utilizing social media and digital platforms as promotional tools, whether through the village's official accounts, tourism content, or narratives of their success in managing the tourism village. However, increased competition among tourism villages, shifting tourist preferences, and limited facilities and resources necessitate an evaluation of the digital marketing strategies that have been implemented (Wulandari et al., 2024). The achievements and offline reputation already established by Pujon Kidul Tourism Village do not automatically translate into strengths in digital communication if their social media-based promotional strategies are not managed strategically, adaptively, and sustainably (Alhaddar & Kummita, 2025).

In this context, the concept of digital narrative becomes relevant as an analytical framework for understanding how social media-based digital promotion strategies are constructed, communicated, and interpreted by tourists. Previous research confirms that a strong narrative, supported by visual content and consistent message management, plays a crucial role in shaping a tourist destination's image, reputation, and crisis mitigation in the digital space (Adzani et al., 2024). Pujon Kidul Tourism Village presents an intriguing case study because it has successfully established a reputation as one of the nation's leading tourism villages, yet simultaneously faces the challenge of maintaining the relevance of its digital communication amid shifting social media trends, changing tourist behavior, and increasing competition among destinations. Therefore, this study aims to examine the social media promotion strategies implemented by Pujon Kidul Tourism Village and to formulate a model for strengthening digital marketing strategies that align with the principles of sustainable tourism destinations amidst the dynamics of local tourism.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative, case-study-based approach. This approach was chosen in light of the study's objective, which is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within a specific, real-world context, without intending to make generalizations or comparisons between cases. This case study-based research focuses on answering a number of questions or research questions regarding the practices, processes, and dynamics occurring within the context under study. Through the research approach employed, the hope is to gain a deep understanding of the process of shaping digital narratives and social media-based promotional strategies for tourism villages in response to local tourism dynamics.

2.2 Research Location and Time

This research was conducted in Pujon Kidul Tourism Village, located in Pujon District, Malang Regency. The reason for choosing this location is because Pujon Kidul Tourism Village has become one of the fastest-growing tourism villages since its establishment in 2014. The area, previously dominated by agriculture and dairy farming, has now developed into an area with new economic activities such as informal trade, culinary, tourism, and accommodation since the village's establishment. However, this tourism village still faces challenges in maintaining the effectiveness of digital communication amidst changes in social media algorithms, the dynamics of tourist behavior, and increasing competition between tourist destinations. These conditions make Pujon Kidul Tourism Village a representative case study to study digital marketing strategies and digital storytelling in building and maintaining the competitiveness of tourist destinations. Therefore, further research is needed regarding the process of implementing social media-based digital marketing strategies in Pujon Kidul Tourism Village. The research period lasted for three months, from April to June 2026.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was conducted using several key techniques, including in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were the primary technique

used in this study to understand how managers and stakeholders perceive destination identity, formulate messages, select content, and respond to changing trends in social media. A total of three in-depth interview sessions were conducted face-to-face at the research location, with each session lasting approximately 45 minutes on average. All interviews were audio-recorded with the informants' consent to ensure accuracy in data transcription and analysis. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach with open-ended questions. This interview guide allowed informants to share their stories freely and reflectively. The second data collection technique was observation. Observations were conducted both directly and indirectly; the researcher conducted direct observations in the Pujon Kidul Tourism Village area. Indirect observation, on the other hand, was conducted by utilizing videos and documentation available on social media, such as news articles and digital promotional content. This technique was employed to complement the understanding and provide a broader context. Finally, there was documentation, which refers to videos or photos depicting on-site situations. Through this documentation, the hope is to identify patterns of visitor interaction, communication styles, and the image being cultivated.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis, which involves several stages. First, all data obtained and collected including interview transcripts, observation results, and documentation are systematically organized. Next, the data is coded, with each data segment labeled based on relevant meanings. Afterward, similar codes were grouped to form main themes, from which patterns, relationships, and meanings were identified. Through this technique, insights regarding digital marketing strategies, inhibiting factors, supporting factors, and the use of digital narratives on social media in the Pujon Kidul Tourism Village will be revealed. To strengthen the depth of analysis, data obtained from different informant groups namely tourism village managers, MSME operators, village officials, and tourists—were systematically compared. This cross-source comparison was conducted to identify convergences and divergences in how each group perceives and experiences the digital promotion strategies at Café Sawah, thereby enabling a more comprehensive and balanced interpretation of the findings.

2.5 Data Validity Testing

To ensure that a study is valid and credible, validity testing is necessary; in this study, source triangulation was employed. Source triangulation involves comparing data from various sources with different experiences but related to the same phenomenon (e.g., local merchants, community leaders, and economic actors from outside the region). In this study, the key informants interviewed included tourism village managers (BUMDes), the Tourism Development Group (Pokdarwis), attraction managers, tourism MSME operators, village officials, and tourists. Additionally, the responses provided by the informants were clarified and validated through follow-up interviews to ensure that the meanings captured by the researcher aligned with the informants' intended meanings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The State of Social Media Management at Café Sawah Pujon Kidul

Social media management at Café Sawah Pujon Kidul is currently sporadic and lacks a structured plan. The café's marketing team states that content is posted on an ad-hoc basis or whenever time permits, without using a content calendar or creative brief to guide digital communications. This situation aligns with the findings of Akasse and Ramansyah (2023), who emphasize that the effectiveness of digital promotion heavily depends on the consistency of posts and creativity in crafting promotional messages to attract people to visit a destination. Consequently, when consistency is lacking, the potential reach of social media cannot be fully utilized.

Novi: "So right now, we don't have a set schedule yet. We don't have a content calendar to determine how many times a week or a month we'll post. We just post whenever we have time it's not planned out."

According to the Café Sawah marketing team—who manage the social media accounts despite having no marketing background and are self-taught—the team members are primarily farmers and guesthouse staff. This highlights their limited knowledge of digital marketing, a situation further compounded by a lack of promotional budget and the absence of any performance evaluation mechanisms for the accounts. Ardinata, Susanti, and Rahmat (2023) found in their study that social media has a direct impact on tourist interest in visiting a destination; however, this impact is only realized if content quality and posting frequency are consistently managed by adequate personnel. Without trained managers and a functioning evaluation system, digital promotional efforts struggle to yield measurable results.

Head of Marketing: "As for the creation process, I'm still self-taught, ma'am. There aren't any briefs or themes prepared in advance before posting. Besides, my own background is as a farmer I used to work at a hotel, but only as a housekeeper. So when it comes to marketing, I've taught myself; I just had the courage to give it a try."

Currently, the only active social media platform is TikTok, while Instagram hasn't been fully optimized yet. Dewa and Safitri (2021), in their study on the use of TikTok as a promotional medium for the culinary industry in Yogyakarta, showed that TikTok's effectiveness for culinary promotion requires a well-planned content strategy—not just randomly uploading videos. This means that even though TikTok is already being used, without careful planning, the platform has not yet contributed to the fullest extent to increasing foot traffic. A consistent presence across multiple platforms is essential for Café Sawah to reach tourists with a wider range of digital preferences.

3.2 Competitive Pressure and Local Tourism Dynamics

The manager of Café Sawah revealed that there is significant competitive pressure from new tourist destinations around the Malang area, which is said to have led to a decline

in tourist visits to Pujon Kidul. This reflects the increasingly competitive dynamics of local tourism, where a destination's competitive edge can no longer rely solely on natural attractions but must be reinforced by a responsive and well-planned digital communication ecosystem. In this context, Saputra and Nugraha (2024) emphasize that the effectiveness of Instagram marketing strategies for tourist destinations can be significantly hindered by low content posting frequency and minimal interaction with followers—a situation that is currently playing out at Cafe Sawah and presents an opportunity for competing destinations to capitalize on in their digital promotions.

Ms. Novi: “We actually don’t have enough funds to promote it, especially since we’re not marketing specialists, so it’s a bit hard to compete. Plus, with the new Santera tourist spot popping up, it’s getting even quieter here.”

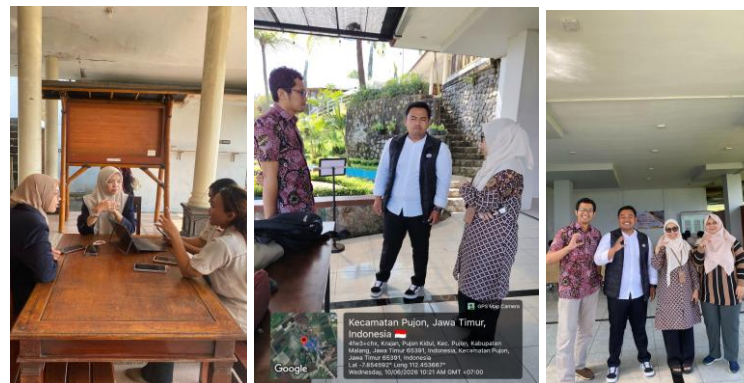


Figure 1. Interview with a Key Informant

Wardhana (2024) states that a Social Media Marketing (SMM) strategy is the process of utilizing social media platforms to promote products or services to achieve specific marketing goals, such as increasing brand awareness, reaching a wider market, and attracting the attention of potential customers. For Cafe Sawah, the differentiation that needs to be built and communicated through SMM is the authentic rural tourism experience that's hard to replicate: dining amidst vast rice fields, cuisine made with local ingredients, and direct interaction with the agricultural and livestock life of Pujon Kidul. Sinaga et al. (2024) reinforce this argument by showing that social media content showcasing the authentic activities, interactions, and context of a rural tourism destination can significantly increase tourist visits; thus, the key to surviving in a competitive market lies not in the size of the promotional budget, but in the ingenuity of producing content that reflects the uniqueness of Pujon Kidul.

3.3 Digital Narratives as Tools for Shaping Destination Image and Competitiveness

Beyond content management issues, the findings of this study indicate that Cafe Sawah's fundamental challenge is actually strategic in nature: the absence of a well-planned digital narrative as a tool for shaping the destination's image. Reinhold, Zach, and Krizaj (2023) emphasize that in the era of social media, destination image-building is no longer entirely controlled by managers but is shaped through dynamic interactions between uploaded content, audience responses, and social recommendation mechanisms operating on

digital platforms. In this context, Café Sawah Pujon Kidul possesses strong legitimacy capital through national recognition from the ADWI program and a solid community base; however, this capital has not yet been translated into a digital narrative capable of competing in an increasingly crowded digital space. Pambudi, Supriyadi, and Nugroho (2021), in their study on the development of the Pujon Kidul Tourism Village, found that the strength of this tourism village lies in its community institutions and active resident participation. However, the findings of this study indicate that the community's potential has not yet been integrated into a more systematic digital narrative strategy.

Madzik, Rydén, and Kärrholm (2023), in their literature review on digital destination marketing, show that the latest trend in digital tourism destination marketing is moving toward content co-creation involving local communities, rather than merely one-way posts from managers. A digital narrative model that involves various stakeholders managers, SME operators, residents, and tourists has been proven to produce a more authentic and credible destination image that is difficult for competitors to replicate. Therefore, strengthening Café Sawah's digital narrative requires more than just improving the frequency and themes of its content; it must be accompanied by a transformation toward a more participatory and community-based content management model. According to Wulandari, Prasetyo, and Lestari (2024), even premier tourist destinations are vulnerable to decline if they fail to adaptively update their digital communication strategies a warning that is highly relevant for Pujon Kidul amid the emergence of new destinations in the Malang region.

3.4 The Importance of a Content Calendar and a Data-Driven Evaluation System

Based on the findings, two pressing needs continue to emerge: the development of a theme-based content calendar and the implementation of a routine content performance evaluation system. Nurjayanti et al. (2024), in a study on the development of tourism village promotion through social media, emphasize that structured content planning and communication strategies have proven effective in enhancing managers' understanding of the importance of consistency and quality in building a tourism destination's brand. Without a content calendar, promotional messages become unfocused; this led the Café Sawah marketing team to post whatever was available rather than what was strategic, so the narrative they sought to build never took shape consistently in the audience's minds.

As for content performance evaluation, the Café Sawah team admitted they had never done so because they did not understand how to interpret the platform's analytics data. Features like Instagram Insights and TikTok Analytics—which provide insights into audience demographics, optimal posting times, and the types of content that generate the most engagement from past posts—can help in creating a content calendar. However, this data is only useful if managers possess sufficient digital literacy to interpret it and make decisions based on it. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) emphasize that the plan-do-check-act cycle in digital marketing can only function effectively if the data-driven evaluation phase is carried out consistently. Therefore, improving digital analytics literacy is a fundamental requirement for Café Sawah to learn from its own performance and continuously refine its promotional strategies.

Discussion

Overall, the findings of this study reveal a consistent pattern: Café Sawah Pujon Kidul possesses strong destination assets but has not yet been able to translate them into an effective digital communication strategy. A theoretical interpretation of this situation can be examined through three interrelated conceptual lenses

First, from the perspective of the digital marketing capability gap, managing TikTok content without a content calendar or evaluation represents an imbalance between the availability of the platform and the capacity of its users. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) emphasize that the effectiveness of digital promotional channels is not determined by access to the platform, but rather by the managers' ability to systematically plan, execute, and evaluate content. This gap is the root cause of the various promotional inefficiencies identified in this study.

Second, from the perspective of destination image construction, the mismatch between Café Sawah's content narrative and its core product identity can be observed through the framework proposed by Reinhold, Zach, and Krizaj (2023), which states that a destination's image is formed through the consistent accumulation of digital impressions. When the content features more natural scenery than the culinary experiences that are its main selling point, the image formed in the minds of potential tourists is that of a photo destination, not a culinary destination a condition referred to in the research as "involuntary destination image drift."

Third, from the perspective of the collaborative content ecosystem, Pambudi, Supriyadi, and Nugroho (2021) identified Pujon Kidul's strength in community participation; however, their findings indicate that this potential has not yet been integrated into the digital content production system. Madzik, Rydén, and Kärholm (2023) also emphasize that contemporary destination marketing is moving toward content co-creation involving various stakeholders. Consequently, improvements to Café Sawah's promotional efforts must be structural in nature to build a participatory content ecosystem, rather than merely training a single member of the marketing team.

From these three perspectives, this study concludes that Café Sawah's digital challenge lies in narrative management, not merely in the technical aspects of uploading content. Wulandari, Prasetyo, and Lestari (2024) point out that even well-established destinations are vulnerable to decline if they fail to adaptively update their digital communication strategies; this serves as a highly relevant warning for Pujon Kidul amid the emergence of new destinations in the Malang region.

4. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study reveals that Cafe Sawah, in the Pujon Kidul Tourism Village, faces structural challenges in managing its social media-based promotional strategy, characterized by the absence of a content calendar, creative briefs, and performance evaluation mechanisms. There is also a mismatch between the current digital narrative dominated by natural landscape content and Cafe Sawah's core product identity as a village-based culinary destination, a situation exacerbated by competitive pressure from new tourist destinations in the Malang region. Theoretically, this study introduces the concept of "involuntary destination image drift" to explain how unplanned digital narratives inadvertently shape a destination's image that deviates from its desired positioning. This study also reinforces the argument that the challenges of digital promotion for rural tourism destinations must be understood as issues within a collaborative narrative ecosystem, rather than merely a matter of individual capacity.

Nevertheless, this study identified tangible opportunities, including TikTok's responsive live-streaming format, the potential for content collaboration with local SMEs, and the management's openness to guidance. Based on this, the study recommends the development of a participatory monthly content calendar, periodic performance evaluations based on platform analytics, and the development of a collaborative content ecosystem involving SMEs, Pokdarwis, and the village community. This study has limitations in that the scope of informants was restricted to the Café Sawah management team, so the perspectives of tourists and other stakeholders are not fully represented. Further research is recommended to incorporate tourist perspectives through a mixed-methods approach and to conduct comparative studies across tourist villages to test the generalizability of these findings.

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