

The Influence of Social Media Engagement and Online Reviews on the Decision to Visit Bandung's Natural Tourist Destination

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article history:	
Received Jan, 2026	
Revised Jan, 2026	
Accepted Jan, 2026	
Keywords:	
Social Media Engagement	
Online Reviews	
Visit Decision	
Natural Tourism	
Digital Tourism Marketing	
	<p>The rapid development of digital platforms has significantly transformed tourists' decision-making processes, particularly in the context of natural tourism destinations. This study aims to analyze the influence of social media engagement and online reviews on tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung, Indonesia. A quantitative research approach was employed by distributing structured questionnaires to 150 respondents who actively use social media and access online tourism reviews. The measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, and data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The results of multiple linear regression analysis indicate that social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on tourists' visit decisions. Similarly, online reviews were found to have a significant positive influence on the decision to visit. Furthermore, the simultaneous test results demonstrate that both variables jointly contribute significantly to explaining tourists' visit decisions, accounting for 52.7% of the variance. These findings highlight the crucial role of digital interaction and electronic word-of-mouth in shaping tourists' behavior. The study provides practical implications for tourism managers and policymakers in Bandung, emphasizing the importance of integrating engaging social media strategies with effective online review management to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of natural tourism destinations.</p>
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1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has undergone a profound transformation in recent decades, driven largely by the rapid development of digital technology and the widespread use of social media. Tourists today are no longer passive recipients of information provided by destination managers or travel agencies; instead, they actively search for, share, and evaluate information through various online

platforms [1], [2]. Social media, in particular, has become a dominant source of travel-related information, enabling users to access visual content, experiences, and recommendations from other travelers in real time. This shift has fundamentally changed how potential tourists perceive destinations and make decisions regarding where to travel [2], [3].

Natural tourism destinations have benefited significantly from this digital transformation. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook allow destinations to showcase natural landscapes, unique experiences, and environmental attractions through engaging visual and interactive content [2], [4]. Social media engagement—manifested through likes, comments, shares, and user interactions—plays a critical role in shaping tourists' awareness, interest, and emotional connection to destinations. High levels of engagement can enhance destination visibility and credibility, ultimately influencing tourists' intentions and decisions to visit [5], [6]. As competition among tourism destinations intensifies, understanding how social media engagement affects tourists' decision-making has become increasingly important for destination marketers and policymakers.

In addition to social media engagement, online reviews have emerged as a key determinant in tourists' travel decisions. Online reviews, often referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), provide firsthand evaluations of destinations, services, and experiences from previous visitors [7], [8]. Potential tourists tend to perceive these reviews as more credible and trustworthy than traditional promotional messages because they are generated by fellow consumers. Positive reviews can reduce perceived risk, build trust, and increase tourists' confidence in their travel choices, while negative reviews may deter potential visitors. Consequently, online reviews have become a powerful tool that can significantly influence tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions.

Bandung, one of Indonesia's most popular tourism cities, offers a wide range of natural tourism destinations, including mountains, forests, waterfalls, hot springs, and eco-tourism sites. Its proximity to major urban centers, such as Jakarta, combined with its cool climate and scenic landscapes [9], [10], makes Bandung an attractive destination for both domestic and international tourists. In recent years, the promotion of Bandung's natural tourism has increasingly relied on

digital platforms, particularly social media and travel review websites. Tourists frequently share their experiences online, creating a vast amount of user-generated content that shapes the city's destination image and influences potential visitors' decisions.

Despite the growing importance of social media engagement and online reviews in tourism marketing, empirical studies that specifically examine their combined influence on tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung remain limited. Most previous research has focused on urban tourism, hospitality services, or general destination branding, providing insufficient attention to natural tourism contexts at the city level, particularly within the Indonesian tourism setting. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media engagement and online reviews on tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung using a quantitative approach. Data were collected from respondents and analyzed using SPSS version 25 to provide empirical evidence on how digital engagement and online information shape tourists' decision-making processes. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on digital tourism marketing and consumer behavior, and practically by offering valuable recommendations for destination managers and tourism stakeholders in developing effective digital marketing strategies to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of natural tourism destinations in Bandung.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Tourism Decision-Making Process*

The decision to visit a tourism destination is the outcome of a complex decision-making process influenced by both internal and external factors, in which tourists pass through several stages, including problem recognition,

information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-visit evaluation [11], [12]. In the tourism context, the information search stage plays a particularly critical role because tourism products are intangible, experiential, and often associated with high levels of perceived risk, prompting potential tourists to depend on information sources that can reduce uncertainty and shape their expectations of destinations. With the advancement of digital technology, online information sources have become increasingly dominant in this process, as social media platforms and online review websites provide easily accessible, real-time, and experience-based information that strongly influences tourists' perceptions, attitudes, destination image, trust, and emotional engagement [12]–[14]. Consequently, these digital sources significantly affect tourists' visit decisions, making an understanding of their influence essential for the development of effective tourism marketing strategies.

2.2 Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement refers to the level of interaction between users and content on social media platforms, encompassing activities such as liking, commenting, sharing, saving, and participating in online discussions, and in the context of tourism marketing it reflects both the intensity of user interaction with destination-related content and the emotional connection formed with a destination [2], [4]. High levels of engagement indicate

stronger involvement, greater interest, and wider exposure to destination information, which previous studies have shown to positively influence tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Engaging visual content, storytelling, and interactive features on social media can stimulate curiosity, inspire travel desire, and enhance destination awareness, while the ability to observe others' experiences through photos, videos, and narratives creates social proof and authenticity that further shape travel decisions [8], [15]. This influence is particularly strong in natural tourism contexts, where attractions are highly visual and experiential, as scenic landscapes and nature-based activities can be effectively communicated through images and videos, making social media a powerful promotional tool that encourages potential tourists to develop positive perceptions and stronger intentions to visit the destination.

2.3 Online Reviews (Electronic Word-of-Mouth)

Online reviews, commonly referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), are consumers' evaluations, opinions, and experiences shared through digital platforms such as travel websites, social media, and online forums, and they play a critical role in tourism by providing firsthand information from previous visitors that is often perceived as more credible and unbiased than traditional advertising [16], [17]. The literature consistently indicates that online reviews significantly influence tourists' trust, perceived value, and decision-

making processes, as positive reviews can enhance destination image, reduce perceived risk, and increase confidence in travel choices, while negative reviews may discourage potential visitors and damage a destination's reputation. The impact of online reviews is largely determined by their volume, valence, and credibility, particularly in the context of natural tourism destinations where reviews commonly address environmental quality, accessibility, safety, facilities, and overall experience [18], [19]. These evaluations help potential tourists assess whether a destination aligns with their expectations and preferences, making online reviews an essential reference point during the evaluation of alternatives in the travel decision-making process.

2.4 Decision to Visit Natural Tourism Destinations

The decision to visit a tourism destination refers to an individual's final choice to travel to a specific place after evaluating various information sources and available alternatives, and this decision is shaped by a combination of cognitive factors such as knowledge and beliefs, affective factors such as emotions and feelings, and social factors including recommendations and social influence. In the digital era, social media engagement and online reviews have emerged as dominant external influences that significantly shape tourists' visit decisions [20], [21]. This influence is particularly relevant for natural tourism destinations, which offer distinctive experiences related to

nature, relaxation, adventure, and environmental appreciation, and are often chosen based on tourists' desires for escape, wellness, and authenticity. Digital content that successfully communicates these experiential values can strengthen tourists' intentions and actual visit decisions, making an understanding of the determinants of visit decisions in natural tourism contexts essential for effective marketing strategies and sustainable destination development [22], [23].

2.5 Empirical Studies and Hypothesis Development

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between social media, online reviews, and tourists' decision-making, with prior research indicating that social media engagement positively influences destination image and visit intention, as higher levels of engagement are associated with stronger behavioral intentions [17], [24]. Other studies have also demonstrated that online reviews significantly affect tourists' trust and purchase decisions, particularly within tourism and hospitality contexts, highlighting the importance of electronic word-of-mouth in shaping consumer behavior. Despite confirming the critical role of digital factors in tourism decisions, existing research that simultaneously examines social media engagement and online reviews in the context of natural tourism destinations remains limited, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia; therefore, based on the theoretical framework and previous empirical findings, this

study proposes the following hypotheses.

H1: Social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on the decision to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung.

H2: Online reviews have a positive and significant effect on the decision to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung.

H3: Social media engagement and online reviews simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on the decision to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach with an explanatory design to examine the influence of social media engagement and online reviews on tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung. The quantitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows for the measurement of relationships between variables using numerical data and statistical analysis. The explanatory design aims to test hypotheses and explain the causal relationships between independent variables (social media engagement and online reviews) and the dependent variable (decision to visit).

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of individuals who have visited or are interested in visiting natural tourism destinations in Bandung, and due to the large and undefined nature of this population, a non-probability sampling technique was employed. Specifically, purposive sampling was used to select respondents who met predetermined criteria, namely being active social media users and having experience in accessing online reviews related to tourism destinations. A total of 150 respondents were

included as the study sample, a size considered adequate for quantitative analysis using multiple linear regression and consistent with common practices in social science research, while also meeting minimum statistical requirements and enhancing the reliability of the research findings.

3.3 Research Variables and Operational Definitions

This study involves three main variables: social media engagement (X_1), online reviews (X_2), and the decision to visit natural tourism destinations (Y). Social media engagement refers to the level of interaction and involvement of users with tourism-related content on social media platforms and is measured through indicators such as the frequency of liking, commenting, sharing, and interacting with content related to natural tourism destinations in Bandung. Online reviews represent tourists' perceptions of the quality, credibility, and usefulness of reviews available on online platforms, measured through indicators including perceived trustworthiness, the positivity or negativity of reviews, and their influence on travel planning. The decision to visit refers to tourists' intention and actual decision to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung, measured through indicators such as willingness to visit, preference for Bandung's natural destinations, and likelihood of recommending the destination to others. All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.4 Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to respondents both online and offline, consisting of two main sections: demographic information and statements related to the research variables. The measurement statements were developed based on relevant literature and adapted to the context of natural tourism in Bandung to ensure content validity. Prior to the main data collection, a preliminary review of the questionnaire was

conducted to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, their participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality and anonymity of all responses were strictly maintained.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 through several analytical stages, including descriptive statistics to describe respondents' characteristics and summarize responses to each research variable, validity testing using item-total correlation to ensure that each questionnaire item accurately measured the intended construct, and reliability testing

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 150 respondents who actively use social media and access online reviews related to natural tourism

using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests—comprising normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests—were conducted to confirm that the data met the requirements for multiple linear regression analysis. Multiple linear regression was then applied to examine the partial and simultaneous effects of social media engagement and online reviews on the decision to visit, followed by hypothesis testing using the t-test for partial effects and the F-test for simultaneous effects, while the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to measure the proportion of variance in the decision to visit explained by the independent variables.

destinations in Bandung. The demographic profile indicates that the respondents are dominated by young and productive-age individuals, reflecting the main segment of digital tourism consumers.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	45.3
	Female	82	54.7
Age	17–25 years	56	37.3
	26–35 years	61	40.7
	36–45 years	23	15.3
	>45 years	10	6.7
Social Media Usage	Daily	132	88.0
	Occasionally	18	12.0

The respondent characteristics presented in Table 1 indicate that the sample is dominated by female respondents (54.7%) and individuals within the productive age range of 17–35 years, which together account for 78.0% of the total respondents. This demographic profile reflects the primary segment of tourists who are highly active in digital environments and more inclined to use social media as a source of travel information. The high proportion of respondents aged 26–35 years (40.7%) further suggests that young adults play a significant role in natural tourism consumption in Bandung, as this group typically has greater mobility,

purchasing power, and exposure to digital platforms. In terms of social media usage, the vast majority of respondents (88.0%) reported using social media on a daily basis, highlighting the relevance of social media as an influential communication channel in shaping tourism-related perceptions and decisions.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine respondents' perceptions of social media engagement, online reviews, and

decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Engagement (X_1)	150	2.80	5.00	4.12	0.53
Online Reviews (X_2)	150	2.67	5.00	4.25	0.49
Decision to Visit (Y)	150	2.75	5.00	4.18	0.51

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 indicate that respondents generally hold positive perceptions of social media engagement, online reviews, and their decision to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung. Social media engagement (X_1) has a mean score of 4.12, suggesting that respondents actively interact with tourism-related content on social media and perceive such engagement as influential in shaping their travel considerations. Online reviews (X_2) record the highest mean value of 4.25, highlighting that respondents place strong importance on online reviews as a credible and useful source of information when evaluating tourism destinations. Meanwhile, the decision to visit (Y) shows a mean score of

4.18, indicating a relatively high level of intention and willingness to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung. The relatively low standard deviation values across all variables suggest a consistent pattern of responses among respondents, reinforcing the reliability of the data and confirming the significant role of digital information sources in influencing tourists' decision-making processes.

4.3 Validity and Reliability Test Results

Validity testing was conducted using item-total correlation, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Status
Social Media Engagement (X_1)	6	0.842	Reliable
Online Reviews (X_2)	5	0.861	Reliable
Decision to Visit (Y)	5	0.827	Reliable

The reliability test results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that all research variables exhibit strong internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Social media engagement (X_1) achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.842, indicating that the six measurement items consistently capture the construct of user interaction with tourism-related content on social media platforms. Online reviews (X_2) show the highest reliability coefficient at 0.861, reflecting a high level of consistency among the five items measuring respondents' perceptions of review credibility, usefulness, and influence on travel decisions. Similarly, the decision to visit (Y) variable records a Cronbach's alpha of 0.827, confirming that the items used to

measure tourists' visit intentions and decisions are reliable.

4.4 Classical Assumption Test Results

Prior to regression analysis, classical assumption tests were conducted. The normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov showed a significance value of 0.200 (>0.05), indicating normally distributed data. Multicollinearity testing showed tolerance values above 0.10 and VIF values below 10, confirming the absence of multicollinearity. The heteroscedasticity test indicated no clear pattern in the scatterplot, suggesting homoscedastic data.

4.5 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of

social media engagement and online reviews on the decision to visit.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Variable	Regression Coefficient (β)	t-value	Sig.
Constant		3.112	0.002
Social Media Engagement (X_1)	0.421	5.986	0.000
Online Reviews (X_2)	0.389	5.437	0.000

The multiple linear regression results presented in Table 4 indicate that both social media engagement and online reviews have a significant positive effect on tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung. The regression coefficient for social media engagement ($\beta = 0.421$) with a t-value of 5.986 and a significance level of 0.000 demonstrates that higher levels of interaction with tourism-related content on social media substantially increase the likelihood of tourists deciding to visit. Similarly, online reviews show a positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.389$) with a t-value of 5.437 and a significance level of 0.000, indicating that favorable perceptions of online reviews significantly strengthen tourists' visit decisions. The positive and significant coefficients for both independent variables suggest that social media engagement and online reviews independently contribute to shaping tourists' decision-making processes, while the significant constant value further confirms the robustness of the regression model in explaining visit decisions.

The results of the simultaneous test (F-test) show an F-value of 68.214 with a significance level of 0.000, which is lower than the 0.05 threshold, indicating that social media engagement and online reviews simultaneously have a significant effect on tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung. This finding suggests that the two independent variables collectively contribute to explaining variations in visit decisions and confirms the suitability of the regression model for analyzing the combined influence of digital engagement and online information on tourists' behavior.

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination analysis reveals an R Square value of 0.527 and an adjusted R Square of 0.520, indicating that 52.7% of the variation in tourists' visit decisions can be explained by social media engagement and online reviews. This relatively high explanatory power demonstrates the substantial role of digital factors in shaping tourism decision-making. However, the remaining 47.3% of the variation is influenced by other factors not included in this study, such as destination accessibility, pricing, personal preferences, and socio-cultural influences, suggesting opportunities for future research to incorporate additional variables to further explain tourists' visit decisions.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that social media engagement has a significant and positive effect on tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.421$) indicates that higher interaction with tourism-related content on social media—such as liking, commenting, and sharing—increases tourists' likelihood of visiting. This finding supports the notion that engaging visual content and interactive communication on social media platforms strengthen emotional connections and destination awareness, particularly for nature-based tourism [18], [19].

Online reviews also show a significant positive influence on visit decisions ($\beta = 0.389$). This finding confirms the critical role of electronic word-of-mouth in reducing perceived risk and building trust among potential tourists. Positive reviews regarding scenery, facilities, safety, and

overall experience provide reassurance and confidence, making tourists more inclined to choose natural tourism destinations in Bandung. This result aligns with prior studies emphasizing the credibility of peer-generated information in tourism decision-making [25], [26].

The simultaneous effect of social media engagement and online reviews highlights the complementary nature of these digital factors. Social media engagement primarily stimulates initial interest and desire, while online reviews support the evaluation and confirmation stages of the decision-making process. Together, they create a strong digital influence that significantly shapes tourists' behavior. These findings suggest that tourism managers in Bandung should integrate social media marketing strategies with active online review management to enhance destination competitiveness and attract more visitors.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media engagement and online reviews play a significant role in influencing tourists' decisions to visit natural tourism destinations in Bandung, as higher levels of interaction

with tourism-related content on social media positively affect tourists' willingness and intention to visit by fostering interest and emotional attachment through engaging visual content, active communication, and social interaction. In addition, online reviews were found to have a strong positive influence on visit decisions, as tourists rely on evaluations from previous visitors as credible sources of information to assess destinations, reduce perceived risks, and build trust, with positive reviews enhancing destination image and confidence while negative reviews potentially discouraging visits. Simultaneously, social media engagement and online reviews collectively explain a substantial proportion of tourists' visit decisions, indicating that digital engagement and online information function as complementary factors in the tourism decision-making process; therefore, tourism stakeholders in Bandung are encouraged to implement integrated digital marketing strategies that actively promote engaging social media content while consistently managing and responding to online reviews to strengthen destination competitiveness, increase tourist visits, and support the sustainable development of natural tourism in Bandung.

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