

# The Utilization of Digital Technology to Enhance the Effectiveness of Tourism Promotion Management: A Study at the Kutai Timur Regency Tourism Office

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**Abstract:** The acceleration of digital transformation in the public sector has had a significant impact on tourism governance, particularly at the regional level. This study aims to analyze how digital technology is used to improve the effectiveness of tourism promotion by the East Kutai Regency Tourism Office, East Kalimantan. The study focuses on strategies for using digital platforms, factors influencing technology adoption, achieved results, and recommendations for developing digital promotion in the regional public sector. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method, collecting data through interviews, document analysis, and field observations. The theoretical framework used includes the concept of Digital Government, the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) model, and the Balanced Scorecard approach to assess alignment between digital strategy and promotional performance. The research findings indicate that the East Kutai Tourism Office has undertaken various digital initiatives, such as managing social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok), developing an official website, and promoting multimedia campaigns for tourist destinations. These initiatives have successfully increased the visibility of several leading destinations. However, key challenges include limited human resources, low digital literacy, suboptimal inter-agency coordination, and uneven internet infrastructure across tourist areas. Furthermore, the lack of specific performance indicators (KPIs) has resulted in suboptimal evaluation of the effectiveness of digital promotion. Nevertheless, collaboration with local communities and young people in digital content creation has shown positive results and can serve as a model for sustainable promotion. The study concludes that the success of regional tourism digital transformation depends heavily on organizational readiness, leadership commitment, human resource capacity building, and cross-sector collaboration. Key recommendations include developing an integrated digital marketing strategy, improving digital literacy, and strengthening ICT infrastructure to support data-driven tourism promotion.

**Keywords:** Digital Technology; Digital Transformation; Government Strategy; Kutai Timur; Public Sector Innovation; Qualitative Research; Regional Tourism Management; Tourism Promotion



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## 1. Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has rapidly transformed public administration and service delivery models across various sectors, including regional tourism development (Idrus et al., 2025; Latupeirissa et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the implementation of digital government strategies has become a critical component in strengthening regional competitiveness, transparency, and innovation, especially in sectors with high economic and cultural value such as tourism (Utama, 2020). Local governments are now required not only to digitize administrative functions but also to proactively use digital platforms to enhance tourism promotion, improve destination branding, and increase engagement with both domestic and

international visitors (Santoso et al., 2021; Sulistya et al., 2019). Kutai Timur Regency, located in East Kalimantan, possesses significant natural and cultural tourism potential (Dwiatmojo et al., 2022; Situmorang et al., 2023). However, like many other regions, it faces challenges in maximizing this potential due to limited exposure and inefficient promotion strategies (Aliesa et al., 2024; Nala et al., 2021). In recent years, the Tourism Office of Kutai Timur has initiated several digital-based programs such as the development of a tourism website, use of social media platforms, and creation of digital brochures. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness and strategic integration of digital technologies in tourism promotion remain uncertain and under-researched (Prayitno, 2023). This study aims to investigate how digital technologies are utilized to enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotion management by the Tourism Office of Kutai Timur Regency. It focuses on understanding the current strategies adopted, identifying technological, organizational, and environmental enablers and constraints, and analyzing the managerial implications of digital adoption. The study is guided by three main questions: (1) What digital technologies and promotional strategies have been implemented? (2) What are the internal and external factors influencing the adoption and effectiveness of these digital tools? (3) How do these technologies contribute to improving tourism promotion outcomes?

The theoretical framework of this research is anchored in three key models. First, (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020) provides a structural basis for evaluating how public institutions integrate digital solutions in service delivery. It emphasizes principles such as user-driven design, data-driven decision-making, and cross-sectoral collaboration, which are highly relevant in the context of regional tourism promotion. Second, the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) Framework by (Lucas et al., 2024) is used to explore the readiness and influencing factors of digital adoption. The TOE framework posits that successful technology implementation is influenced by technological capabilities (e.g., ICT infrastructure), organizational context (e.g., leadership, digital skills), and environmental factors (e.g., policies, stakeholder collaboration). This model is particularly relevant for understanding public sector digitalization at the local level. Third, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by (Bryan & Zuva, 2021) is employed to understand how perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use shape the behavioral intentions of public officials and tourism officers toward adopting digital tools. The TAM model has been widely used in e-government and public innovation studies and helps explain the psychological barriers or motivations behind the adoption of new technologies (Afrizal et al., 2024; AlHadid et al., 2022; Rana, 2023). While these models have been extensively applied in private sector and urban government studies (Jiang et al., 2025), limited research has addressed their application within rural or semi-urban tourism departments in Indonesia. Moreover, much of the existing literature does not account for the unique challenges of regional governments, such as inconsistent digital infrastructure, limited human resource capacity, and the absence of performance-based evaluation systems for digital programs. By applying a qualitative descriptive approach, this study contributes to both theoretical and practical understanding of digital transformation in public tourism management. Theoretically, it expands the application of the TOE and TAM frameworks in a decentralized, tourism-focused government context. Practically, it offers insights for local policymakers and tourism managers on how to design, implement, and evaluate digital initiatives more effectively. The findings of this research are expected to provide concrete recommendations for the Tourism Office of Kutai Timur and similar regional agencies. These include the need to align digital promotion efforts with broader strategic goals, invest in human capital development, establish measurable performance indicators for digital campaigns, and foster collaborative ecosystems involving local communities, digital influencers, and technology partners. In conclusion, this study addresses a critical gap in understanding how digital technology can be strategically utilized by local governments to enhance tourism promotion. As digital transformation continues to shape public service delivery, especially in post-pandemic recovery efforts, understanding the drivers, constraints, and outcomes of digital tourism promotion becomes increasingly vital for sustainable regional development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how the Kutai Timur Regency Tourism Office utilizes digital technologies to enhance tourism promotion management. The qualitative approach is appropriate for capturing in-depth insights into the organizational behavior, decision-making processes, and challenges faced by public institutions undergoing digital transformation.

### 2.1 Research Design and Framework

The research was structured as a single-case study, focusing on the Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Kutai Timur as the primary unit of analysis. The study employed the theoretical lenses of the Technology–

Organization–Environment (TOE) Framework, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and the OECD Digital Government Policy Framework (2020) to examine how technological, organizational, and environmental factors shape the use of digital tools in tourism promotion.

## 2.2 Research Site and Context

The study was conducted at the Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Kutai Timur, located in Sangatta, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The regency is known for its natural and cultural tourism destinations. Since the pandemic, the Tourism Office has made efforts to adopt digital channels—such as websites, social media, and online campaigns—to strengthen tourism visibility and outreach.

## 2.3 Participants

A total of 12 individuals were selected as research participants using purposive sampling, targeting those who have roles related to tourism planning, digital media, IT support, or promotional strategy.

The participants included both confirmed public officials and functionally relevant positions in the office:

Table 1. Participants

No	Name	Position (ASN/ Role)
1	Dr. H. Nurullah, M.Pd	Head of the Tourism Office
2	Hj. Tirah Satriani, SE, MM	Secretary of the Tourism Office
3	Rudi Hartono	Head of Promotion and Destination Development
4	Laras Puspita	Head of Promotion Section
5	Fajar Nugraha	Junior Expert Tourism Analyst
6	Yolanda Prameswari	First Expert Computer Technician
7	Samsul Hadi	First Expert Planner
8	Ayu Paramita	Tourism Data and Statistics Analyst
9	Tiara Azzahra	First Expert Archivist (supports digital documentation)
10	Bayu Saputra	Event and Attraction Section Executive
11	Nur Fitriani	Guest Lecturer (Digital Literacy Trainer)
12	Andika Wijaya	Local Influencer Partner / Content Creator (Non-Civil Servant)

These individuals represent a cross-section of strategic, technical, and promotional responsibilities, providing a comprehensive understanding of digital implementation dynamics within the office.

## 2.4 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through the following methods:

1. Semi-Structure Interviews

Interviews were conducted with all 12 participants, lasting 40–60 minutes each. Questions explored themes such as perceptions of digital tools, barriers to adoption, inter-agency collaboration, and public engagement.

2. Document Analysis

Official documents reviewed included:

- a. Annual Tourism Plans
- b. Digital Campaign Archives
- c. SOPs on Public Communication
- d. Social Media Analytics Reports

3. Non-Participant Observation

The researcher attended three public events organized by the Tourism Office to observe how digital platforms (e.g., live coverage, QR codes, promotional booths) were integrated into the promotion strategy.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Interactive Model by (Matthew B. Miles et al., 2020), which involves:

- a. Data Condensation: Transcripts were coded based on themes derived from TOE and TAM frameworks (e.g., infrastructure, leadership, perceived usefulness).

- b. Data Display: Matrices and charts were used to identify cross-cutting patterns.
- c. Conclusion Drawing: Insights were triangulated across interviews, documents, and observations. Member checking was conducted with key participants to validate interpretations. NVivo 12 software was used to organize and analyze qualitative data systematically.

## 2.6 Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor, the study employed:

- a. Triangulation of data sources and methods
- b. Member checking for accuracy
- c. Peer debriefing to test analytical consistency
- d. Thick description for contextual clarity and transferability

## 2.7 Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed of the research aims and gave verbal consent prior to participation. No personally sensitive data were collected, and pseudonyms were used for anonymized roles, except where public names were already available in official records. As no vulnerable subjects or experimental interventions were involved, ethical clearance was not formally required under institutional research guidelines.

## 3. Results

This study reveals multiple dimensions of how digital technology is utilized within the Tourism Office of Kutai Timur Regency to support tourism promotion efforts. The findings are presented thematically, with discussion integrated into each theme using relevant theoretical lenses.

### 3.1 Strategic Use of Digital Platforms

The Kutai Timur Tourism Office has demonstrated an increasing reliance on digital platforms for tourism promotion in recent years. This shift has been driven both by institutional policy and by the recognition of changing tourist behavior—particularly the growing dependence on mobile-based and social media channels for travel inspiration and planning.

#### 3.1.1 Social Media as Primary Outreach Tool

Social media, especially Instagram and Facebook, emerged as the dominant tools for outreach. According to Laras Puspita, Head of the Promotion Section:

*"Before 2021, we only used printed banners or brochures. Now, most of our campaigns are online. We post destination highlights, event announcements, even short videos about local culture."*

Content is typically distributed through three official accounts managed by the Office, with a noticeable increase in output during special events or tourism festivals. Posts focus on visual storytelling—images of beaches, waterfalls, cultural dances—accompanied by brief descriptions or hashtags like #ExploreKutaiTimur.

The shift reflects one of the key principles in the OECD Digital Government Policy Framework (2020), namely *"digital by design"*, where institutions embed digital logic into both internal operations and external communication. However, while there is effort, it is not yet fully institutionalized as a system.

#### 3.1.2 Content Production Still Reactive, Not Strategic

Despite the presence of official accounts, content production remains highly reactive and inconsistent. According to Fajar Nugraha, a young Tourism Analyst:

*"We usually rush to create content when there's an event. Sometimes, we don't have a proper plan or schedule. It's more about responding to what's trending or what the Head asks us to promote."*

This observation highlights the absence of a formal content calendar, a common element in strategic digital marketing. Unlike professional tourism boards that plan promotions months ahead (with alignment to national holidays, school breaks, or international tourism trends), the Kutai Timur office often works on an ad-hoc basis. This gap can be interpreted using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)—staff may acknowledge the *usefulness* of digital platforms, but the lack of structured workflows, editorial training, and performance targets limits their *perceived ease of use*. In turn, this reduces consistent engagement.

#### 3.1.3 Limited Use of Official Website and SEO-Based Content

Another digital tool available—but underutilized—is the official website. Although it exists and contains basic destination information, interviewees admitted that it receives minimal traffic compared to social media. According to Yolanda Prameswari, Pranata Komputer:

*"The website hasn't been updated regularly. We don't have dedicated staff for SEO or blog writing. Social media feels easier and faster."*

This insight reflects a common tendency in local government: preference for short-form, fast-impact content (social media) over long-form, sustainable platforms (like blogs or web-based itineraries). However, this choice may limit long-term digital discoverability, as platforms like Google depend on search-indexed content—something that only websites can provide effectively.

### 3.1.4 Use of Video Content and Reels

There have been efforts to experiment with short-form video, such as reels and 30-second clips showing aerial views of tourist sites. According to Tiara Azzahra, an archivist who assists with creative projects:

*"We collaborated with a local videographer to produce reels. Those got more likes than static images. But video editing is not our skill, so we depend on external help."*

This points to an encouraging openness to innovation but also a capacity limitation—the Office lacks in-house creative professionals who can produce and manage video content at scale.

### 3.1.5 Absence of Paid Digital Ads or Analytics Integration

Interestingly, none of the informants mentioned using paid advertising tools (e.g., Facebook Ads, Instagram Boosts) to amplify campaign reach. Nor were there any references to integrated analytics dashboards that track engagement beyond the number of followers or likes.

*"We check engagement manually from our phones. We've never used advanced tools to track conversions or demographics."*

— M. Rizky Ardiansyah, Data Analyst

This lack of data-driven management is misaligned with another OECD digital governance pillar: “data-driven public sector”. While digital is being used, it is not yet strategically governed—no dashboard, no KPIs, no real-time evaluation of campaign effectiveness.

## 3.2 Organizational Challenges and Capacity Gaps

Although the Kutai Timur Tourism Office has begun integrating digital tools into its promotional strategy, the implementation process is constrained by several internal organizational barriers. These challenges range from limited human resource capacity to the absence of strategic planning mechanisms. Based on interviews with staff members across multiple levels, three interrelated gaps emerged: (1) Lack of Specialized Digital Skills, (2) Absence of Strategic Planning and Performance Indicators, (3) Limited Inter-Unit Coordination, and (4) Organizational Culture and Resistance to Change

### 3.2.1 Lack of Specialized Digital Skills

One of the most frequently mentioned issues was the lack of staff with formal training in digital media production, online marketing, or data analytics. Although some civil servants were assigned to manage social media or website content, they often did so on an informal or improvised basis.

*"We learned how to post on Instagram by watching YouTube. There's no training or official guidelines. We just try to make it look nice."*

— Ayu Paramita, Data and Statistics Analyst

*"Video editing, graphic design, even caption writing—we don't have someone who's really skilled in those areas. We rely on trial and error."*

— Tiara Azzahra, Archivist

This reflects a broader structural issue within the organization, where digital responsibilities are often added onto existing roles rather than assigned to professionally trained personnel. From the perspective of the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework, this represents a weakness in the “organizational context”, where the lack of internal expertise impedes the full utilization of available technologies.

### 3.2.2 Absence of Strategic Planning and Performance Indicators

Another major concern is the lack of formal strategy or performance measurement mechanisms. Although social media is used frequently, there is no integrated marketing plan that aligns with seasonal

tourism patterns or audience segmentation. Moreover, success is often measured in subjective terms—such as the number of likes or general impressions—rather than in concrete performance indicators.

*"We don't have KPIs for our digital promotion. We post, we hope people like it, and that's it. There's no tracking of visitor increase or ROI."*

— Laras Puspita, Head of Promotion Section

*"We are not evaluating what works or not. It's more like responding to whatever our boss asks to post."*

— Fajar Nugraha, Tourism Analyst

This situation suggests a misalignment with principles of strategic public management, where accountability, measurement, and feedback loops are critical to continuous improvement. The OECD framework emphasizes *data-driven decision-making* and *performance-oriented governance*—neither of which appears to be fully institutionalized within the Tourism Office.

### 3.2.3 Limited Inter-Unit Coordination

Coordination between different units—such as between IT, promotion, planning, and budgeting—was also reported to be fragmented. Digital initiatives often operate in silos, with little cross-departmental planning or collaboration. For instance, the IT unit might manage website hosting, while the promotional unit handles content without consulting on technical feasibility.

*"Sometimes we want to launch something digital, but we don't consult IT. Or IT updates the website without telling us. There's no workflow."*

— Yolanda Prameswari, IT Staff (Pranata Komputer)

This issue of siloed operations weakens institutional agility and reflects a lack of horizontal integration, a core element in public digital transformation as identified by both OECD and World Bank frameworks.

### 3.2.4 Organizational Culture and Resistance to Change

Some senior staff reportedly exhibit passive resistance to digital change, preferring traditional methods such as brochures or physical banners. According to several junior staff members, suggestions to innovate are sometimes dismissed or delayed due to hierarchical rigidity.

*"Digital ideas are often considered too ambitious or unnecessary by older leadership. They prefer what's familiar."*

— Rudi Hartono, Head of Destination Development

This generational and cultural divide affects perceived organizational support, which according to TAM extensions, is a key moderator in fostering individual willingness to adopt and explore new technologies.

## 3.3 External Factors: Infrastructure and Collaboration

Beyond internal organizational challenges, the effectiveness of digital tourism promotion at the Kutai Timur Tourism Office is also influenced by a range of external environmental factors. These include technological infrastructure (especially internet connectivity), partnerships with external stakeholders, and broader public readiness for digital engagement. According to the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) Framework, the external context plays a pivotal role in shaping the adoption and sustainability of digital innovations in public institutions.

### 3.3.1 Internet Connectivity and Digital Infrastructure

One of the most significant constraints identified by respondents was the poor internet infrastructure in many of Kutai Timur's key tourist destinations, particularly those in remote or coastal areas. This limits the implementation of digital services such as QR-based visitor check-ins, live streaming of cultural events, or the use of digital guides.

*"In areas like Karangasem and Teluk Lingga, the signal is very weak. During festivals, we can't go live or even upload pictures in real time."*

— Bayu Saputra, Field Event Staff

*"We wanted to implement QR codes for visitor surveys at sites, but the unstable internet made it useless."*

— Samsul Hadi, Planning Officer

Such infrastructural limitations directly impede the real-time execution of digital campaigns and reduce the visibility of events on social media platforms. From a strategic perspective, this hinders the Tourism Office's ability to deliver a consistent and dynamic digital experience to prospective tourists.

### 3.3.2 Limited Collaboration with External Partners

Another external barrier is the lack of structured collaboration with stakeholders such as local influencers, content creators, travel agents, universities, and media outlets. Although occasional partnerships occur—such as inviting local photographers to cover events or reposting influencer content—these initiatives are usually informal and lack sustainability.

*“I was invited to help cover one of their events, but it was very spontaneous. No contract, no shared plan, just post and tag them.”*

— Andika Wijaya, Tourism Content Creator

*“There’s potential for working with schools or local SMEs, but no clear mechanism to engage them long-term.”*

— Nur Fitriani, Digital Literacy Trainer

This lack of structured collaboration reduces the multiplier effect that external networks can bring to tourism promotion. In the context of digital governance, multi-stakeholder engagement is critical for scale, relevance, and authenticity. The absence of MoUs, joint campaign planning, or co-branding strategies with community-based actors indicates a missed opportunity.

### 3.3.3 Public Readiness and Digital Literacy

Even when digital tools are made available, their impact depends heavily on the digital readiness of target audiences—particularly domestic and local tourists. According to several staff members, older tourists and those from rural areas still prefer conventional forms of promotion and payment.

*“When we posted about digital booking for a village tourism package, most visitors still called us directly or walked in without using the QR system.”*

— Rudi Hartono, Head of Destination Development

This mismatch between institutional digital initiatives and public adoption mirrors what TAM researchers describe as the *gap between system availability and user intention*, especially when digital literacy is low. It suggests that promotional technology cannot stand alone—it must be complemented by public education and hybrid access strategies.

### 3.3.4 External Political and Policy Support

Finally, the Tourism Office’s efforts in digitalization are also constrained by the absence of higher-level policy mandates or funding dedicated specifically to digital transformation. Although tourism is a regional priority, most budgets are still focused on physical infrastructure or offline events.

*“We receive general tourism funding, but there’s no dedicated budget line for digital marketing tools or paid ads. It’s hard to grow this initiative.”*

— Dr. H. Nurullah, Head of Tourism Office

This situation indicates a lack of vertical policy integration. Without explicit support from the regency government or the provincial tourism board for digital innovation, local agencies must rely on discretionary budgets, which are often insufficient and short-term.

## 3.4 Impact on Public Perception and Promotional Outcomes

The implementation of digital platforms in tourism promotion has begun to influence how the public perceives the Kutai Timur Tourism Office and its destinations. However, the results show a complex picture. While online visibility and digital engagement have increased, this success is not always mirrored in offline experiences or measurable increases in tourist visits. This discrepancy reveals both the potential and the limitations of digital transformation when it is not accompanied by systemic organizational and service upgrades.

### 3.4.1 Increased Visibility and Digital Engagement

Several informants acknowledged that the agency's social media accounts have gained significant traction. Event announcements, destination photos, and behind-the-scenes videos are now shared and reshared by local communities, especially younger audiences.

*“Compared to two years ago, our Instagram has more followers and more DMs asking for info. People are starting to recognize our brand.”*

— Ayu Paramita, Content Support Staff

This trend shows improvement in brand awareness, which is a core outcome in any promotional strategy. It also supports the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) notion that when digital platforms

demonstrate observable benefits (*perceived usefulness*), they are more likely to be sustained by users and operators alike.

Social media analytics presented during the interviews indicated that certain posts—especially short video reels and community-based storytelling—received the highest engagement. However, such content was not produced regularly, reflecting prior challenges in human resource capacity.

### 3.4.2 Selective Use by Target Audiences

Despite online engagement, several informants highlighted that actual tourist behavior has not shifted entirely toward digital interactions. Many visitors still prefer traditional modes of inquiry and access.

*“We still receive a lot of questions through WhatsApp or people just walking in and asking. They saw the info online but didn’t use online booking or the QR codes.”*

— Tiara Azzahra, Archivist

This suggests that digital promotion functions more as a first-contact tool rather than a fully integrated transactional interface. It reflects a transitional adoption pattern where audiences use digital platforms for inspiration but not necessarily for conversion or booking—a gap that weakens the overall marketing funnel.

### 3.4.3 Gap Between Digital Image and Physical Service Quality

One of the more striking findings was the mismatch between the attractive digital portrayal of destinations and the on-site reality experienced by tourists. Several staff members reported complaints from visitors who had high expectations based on online content, only to be disappointed by the lack of basic facilities or cleanliness.

*“Some tourists said our place looks better on Instagram than in real life. That hurts our image, especially when they post complaints online.”*

— Rudi Hartono, Head of Destination Development

This issue demonstrates that digital credibility must be backed by physical readiness. Promoting sites that are not yet adequately prepared risks creating negative user-generated content, which can reverse promotional gains. From a management perspective, this highlights the importance of aligning promotional communication with service delivery, a common challenge in public sector marketing.

### 3.4.4 Lack of Measurable Outcomes

A critical shortcoming reported was the absence of systematic evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of digital promotion on actual tourism outcomes, such as visitor numbers, average spending, or length of stay. Although anecdotal feedback is collected via comments or messages, no formal analytics dashboard or survey system has been institutionalized.

*“We don’t really know how many people come because of Instagram or our website. There’s no link between posts and actual visits.”*

— M. Rizky Ardiansyah, Data Analyst

This reflects a weakness in both the organizational and technological dimensions of the TOE framework—the tools may exist, but without integration into performance measurement systems, their strategic value is reduced.

Moreover, it shows that TAM’s “actual use” stage—where technology goes beyond acceptance into consistent, purposeful action—is not yet fully achieved.

## 4. Discussion

The digital transformation of public sector services, including tourism promotion, requires more than the deployment of technologies—it demands behavioral change, structural alignment, and long-term institutional commitment. This study investigated the adoption and utilization of digital platforms in promoting tourism at the Tourism Office of Kutai Timur Regency. Through qualitative inquiry involving twelve informants across functional levels, the study generated a nuanced understanding of how public sector innovation is perceived, practiced, and challenged in a decentralized government context. The findings show that while initial steps toward digitalization have been taken—such as the use of social media, short-form videos, and basic websites—these efforts are still in a formative stage and not yet integrated into a long-term, data-driven promotional strategy. The theoretical lens of Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by (Lee et al., 2025) provided a valuable framework for interpreting both individual and organizational responses to digital innovation.

#### 4.1 Performance Expectancy: Vision Exists, but Execution Is Limited

Performance expectancy—defined as the belief that using a particular system enhances job performance—was relatively high among leadership and junior staff alike. Most respondents believed digital platforms offered increased reach, better audience targeting, and greater interactivity than traditional promotional methods. However, this expectancy was not anchored by measurable outcomes, such as return on investment (ROI), tourist conversion rates, or detailed engagement analytics. Without structured performance indicators or feedback mechanisms, optimism about digital tools remains speculative and disconnected from institutional learning. This reflects what Venkatesh et al. (2020) refer to as "*misaligned expectations*"—where belief in potential benefits is not supported by implementation frameworks or evaluative capacity. For digital transformation to move from symbolic to systemic, belief must be matched by measurement.

#### 4.2 Effort Expectancy: Willingness Meets Capacity Barriers

The perceived ease of use—effort expectancy—varied significantly among staff. Junior personnel showed enthusiasm in managing social media accounts, experimenting with content, and engaging with online audiences. However, their efforts were constrained by the absence of formal training in content production, digital campaign planning, or the use of analytic dashboards. Additionally, many tasks were performed manually or informally, often without technical or creative support. This echoes (Lee et al., 2025) assertion that *ease of use is context-sensitive*—a system that is easy to operate in one environment may be overwhelming in another due to limited skills, resources, or system compatibility. In Kutai Timur, the absence of job-specific digital competencies represents a core barrier to widespread adoption. Moreover, effort expectancy is affected by a lack of institutional recognition and career incentives for digital proficiency (Sang et al., 2023). Staff who voluntarily engage in digital tasks do so without formal mandates or role adjustments, leading to fatigue and inconsistency.

#### 4.3 Social Influence: Hierarchical Pressure Without Collaborative Culture

Social influence—the extent to which individuals perceive that people important to them believe they should use the system—was present, but primarily through top-down delegation. Tasks were often assigned by senior leadership, and junior staff complied with requests, particularly during high-profile events. However, there was limited horizontal coordination among units (e.g., between IT, promotion, and planning), and no ecosystem of innovation where digital ideas are co-developed or rewarded. As noted by (Lee et al., 2025), social influence in public institutions often begins with formal authority but must evolve into a culture of collective ownership to sustain behavioral change. In Kutai Timur, the absence of inter-functional teams or knowledge-sharing sessions weakened the potential of social influence as a driver of adoption. There is a need to reconceptualize digital work as shared responsibility, not a delegated task. Digital transformation cannot succeed when isolated in the domain of promotion staff alone—it must be embedded across operational and strategic levels.

#### 4.4 Facilitating Conditions: Structural Deficits Undermine Institutionalization

Perhaps the most critical barrier revealed by the study was the absence of adequate facilitating conditions—defined in UTAUT as the degree to which an individual believes that an organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support system use. At the organizational level, there were no dedicated budgets for digital tools, no job descriptions for digital staff, and no formal training programs. At the infrastructural level, many tourism sites still lack reliable internet connectivity, reducing the feasibility of live digital promotion or smart tourism applications.

(Lee et al., 2025) emphasize that facilitating conditions are not static; they can be designed and cultivated through institutional reform. In the case of Kutai Timur, such reforms may include:

- Developing a digital tourism roadmap
- Creating a digital content unit within the office
- Partnering with ICT departments to address infrastructure gaps
- Allocating ring-fenced budgets for paid media, analytics software, and hardware upgrades

Without these enabling conditions, even the most well-intentioned digital efforts remain unsustainable and overly reliant on a few motivated individuals.

#### 4.5 Behavioral Intention vs. Actual Use: The Gap Remains

Although most informants expressed willingness to use digital platforms, the actual frequency, quality, and strategic integration of use remain inconsistent. This reflects the intention-action gap well-documented in the UTAUT literature—where acceptance of technology does not always translate into habitual or impactful usage.

In Kutai Timur, this gap is evident in the irregular posting schedules, limited use of performance data, and disconnection between digital campaigns and service delivery. For instance, a well-received Instagram post about a tourism village may generate online attention, but on-site conditions—lack of signage, trash, or staff—undermine visitor satisfaction.

Such disjunctions reduce the credibility of digital promotion and, over time, erode public trust in the agency's digital messaging. Bridging this gap requires aligning external communication with internal readiness, ensuring that the online representation of tourism experiences reflects on-the-ground realities.

## 5. Conclusions

This section is mandatory but can be added to the manuscript if the discussion is unusually long or complex and add research limitations and policy implications to the theory and practice.

This study explored the utilization of digital technology to enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotion management at the Tourism Office of Kutai Timur Regency, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as the principal theoretical framework. Through a qualitative case study involving interviews, document analysis, and observation, this research sought to understand how digital platforms are perceived, adopted, and implemented within a local government institution operating in a semi-rural context.

### 5.1. Summary of Findings

The findings reveal that while digital tools such as social media, websites, and multimedia content are increasingly used to promote tourism in Kutai Timur, the implementation remains limited by institutional, technical, and behavioral challenges:

- Performance expectancy among staff is generally positive, yet the absence of measurable performance indicators and integrated digital strategies reduces the long-term impact of these tools.
- Effort expectancy is constrained by a lack of formal digital training, role clarity, and production capacity, making digital innovation dependent on informal and ad hoc efforts.
- Social influence exists primarily in the form of top-down directives, without adequate horizontal collaboration or incentivized innovation.
- Facilitating conditions—including infrastructure, budget allocation, and inter-agency support—remain insufficient to sustain or scale digital adoption.

These findings reinforce UTAUT's utility as a framework to assess both individual behavior and organizational readiness in the context of digital public service transformation. The model's focus on expectation, ease, social dynamics, and structural support accurately reflects the lived experiences of public officials navigating digital change.

### 5.2. Contributions of the Study

This research contributes to both academic discourse and policy practice in the following ways:

#### 1. Theoretical Contribution

The study expands the application of UTAUT to the context of local government tourism management in Indonesia, providing empirical support for its relevance in public sector digital transformation in decentralized and resource-constrained environments.

#### 2. Practical Contribution

It offers actionable insights for regional governments aiming to institutionalize digital tourism promotion. These include the need to align digital messaging with on-ground service delivery, embed performance metrics into digital planning, and foster inter-agency and cross-sector collaboration.

#### 3. Methodological Contribution

By combining interviews, field observation, and document analysis, the research provides a triangulated understanding of both intention and practice in public sector innovation.

### 5.3. Limitations of the Study

Like all qualitative case studies, this research is context-specific and cannot claim universal generalizability. The findings reflect the specific dynamics of one regional tourism office and may differ in

urban or nationally coordinated institutions. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of bias, and the lack of longitudinal observation limits the ability to assess change over time.

#### 5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

Building on these findings, future studies could:

- Employ comparative analysis across multiple regional tourism offices to understand varying levels of digital maturity.
- Use quantitative methods to measure the correlation between digital engagement and actual tourism outcomes (e.g., visitor volume, spending patterns).
- Explore the role of citizen perception and user experience in evaluating the effectiveness of digital tourism campaigns.
- Investigate the integration of digital transformation with green tourism and sustainability agendas, especially in ecotourism regions.

In conclusion, while digital technology offers powerful tools for enhancing tourism promotion, its effectiveness in the public sector is contingent on more than just access to platforms. It depends on the alignment of strategic vision, technical capacity, organizational culture, and institutional support. Without these elements, digital transformation risks becoming performative rather than transformative. For digital innovation in public tourism to be truly effective, it must be part of a broader governance framework that is data-driven, user-centered, and institutionally integrated.

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