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EXPLORING DIGITAL TOURIST BEHAVIOR AMONG YOUNG VISITORS AT INDONESIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE DESTINATIONS: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The study examines how digital content influences the perception and satisfaction of tourists visiting Indonesian cultural heritage sites. As social media has become pervasive, young travelers now go to historic sites guided by four main sources of online interaction, namely user-generated content (UGC), firm-generated content (FGC), word-of-mouth (WOM), and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-method approach, beginning with qualitative interviews to explore tourists' digital experiences, followed by a quantitative survey of 160 respondents who had previously visited heritage destinations in Indonesia. Findings indicate that UGC has the greatest impact on destination image, followed by WOM, FGC, and eWOM. Destination image, in turn, mediates the relationship between digital content and tourist satisfaction. Both findings combined support the importance of digital narratives and social validation in managing expectations and enhancing the tourist experience. The paper offers practical implications for destination marketers and tourism managers to develop content strategies aligned with contemporary online tourist behavior. Overall, a nuanced understanding of the interplay between digital content and visitor perception is essential for creating more experience-driven and sustainable approaches to heritage tourism in the digital era.

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Keywords: user-generated content, firm-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth, destination image, tourist satisfaction, digital tourist behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The fast evolution of digital technologies has transformed the manner in which tourists organize, implement, and share their traveling experiences radically. Previously, one could find the information either in printed brochures or through the mediation of travel agencies; now, most of this data can be found online and on social media. In Indonesia, the popularity of the internet and the widespread use of mobile devices have given rise to the appearance of so-called digital tourists, who rely on digital ecosystems at all points of their travels (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024; Statista, 2024). According to a recent survey, 72 percent of Gen Z Indonesians find travel inspiration on social media (YouGov, 2023), which is also a global trend in which 92 percent of young travelers cite social-media inspired motivation as the reason behind their last trip (Lappin & Mishra, 2023). Given that there are over 100 million users of TikTok in Indonesia (TriCruise, 2023), it has become a crucial part of promotion and consumption in the tourism industry. This digital migration has changed the ways in which heritage sites can be accessed with more visitor encounters being mediated through digitally created narratives.

Online reviews and social media (electronic word-of-mouth/eWOM) have now become a significant determinant of modern-day travel choices. Travelers often use TripAdvisor and Google Reviews to assess a place, where they trust real peer-to-peer content more than official promotional information (Perez-Aranda et al., 2024). Empirical research has shown that eWOM dispersion significantly shapes tourists' expectations and behavioral intentions, influencing how they form and act upon destination images (Sun et al., 2025). More than 80 percent of tourists worldwide read the reviews before making a reservation, which highlights the increasing relevance of digital reputations (Mara Solutions, 2023). The content shared by viral videos, including short TikTok videos featuring cultural attractions, can quickly incite tourist interest and even result in the emergence of the visitation spikes inspired by curiosity. On the other hand, tourists are also major players in the digital tourism ecosystem since they share content when they are on the move. All these conversations, suggestions, reviews form a living, crowdsourced guidebook, written by the online masses (Sobarna, 2023).

Tourist experiences thus are no longer bound to the physical visits but are now also enframed by the digital stories that precede them. The travelers come with preconceived notions about the heritage sites because of reading stories, viewing photos and videos on the internet. Social media content, such as TikTok commentaries on heritage attractions, demonstrates how eWOM on visual platforms can shape public perception and visit intentions (Silaban et al., 2023). As a result, the imagined experiences are compared to the actual experiences. In the case of consonance, satisfaction is likely to rise; a mismatch may trigger disappointment. Destination managers, in turn, need to respond to online

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anticipation by means of contextual storytelling and interpretive tools on-site. These processes place tourism experiences as a jointly constructed process between travelers and destinations, mediated by information experienced at digital touchpoints.

The behaviour caused by social media in Indonesia is under-researched, especially in heritage tourism. The current literature on the topic is mainly on the global hotspots or general digital-marketing principles that fail to capture the role of digital transformation in shaping the domestic travel patterns in historical sites. However, Indonesia offers a unique setting: the huge numbers of social-media users, rich cultural traditions, and iconic locations (the National Monument and Borobudur) can serve as a perfect place to enhance knowledge of digital tourist perceptions. Even though the national initiatives currently promote smart tourism and digital-based destination marketing (Dávid et al., 2024), visitor behavioural evidence is lacking.

The current study utilizes exploratory mixed-methodology approach to fill this gap. The qualitative stage provides deep accounts of the digital-tourist behaviour and the quantitative stage statistically tests the emergent patterns of behaviour. The research will be based on the study of heritage tourism in Indonesia with a view of analyzing the impact that digital contents have on perception and satisfaction of young travelers. It is expected that findings will inform destination managers, tourism marketers and policymakers to develop experience-focused, culturally responsive digital-era strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study was based on the mixed-method, exploratory sequential design. The study started by a qualitative research that sought to explain emergent themes, which were in relation to the experiences of tourists in the heritage sites and then a quantitative analysis that evaluated the relationships between the identified constructs. This sequencing has been chosen because there is little conceptualization of digital tourist behavior in Indonesian heritage contexts. The qualitative stage allowed exploring and contextualizing the user perceptions in depth, and the quantitative stage made it possible to empirically confirm the behavioral patterns. This kind of method is especially beneficial in expanding or building conceptual models in fields considered as understudied (Creswell, 2018). The study achieved depth and breadth in understanding the effect of digital content on destination image and tourist satisfaction by combining the qualitative understanding with statistical generalization.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data collection was based on two sequentially implemented steps. The qualitative phase was conducted in April 2025 through face-to-face interviews with domestic tourists who had visited heritage destinations in Indonesia, such as

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Borobudur Temple (Magelang, Central Java), Prambanan Temple and Taman Sari Water Castle (Yogyakarta), and Kota Tua (Jakarta). In total, three participants were interviewed, consisting of one from Yogyakarta, one from Magelang (Central Java), and one from Jakarta. Ethical clearance for this stage was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Gadjah Mada, and informed consent was received from all participants prior to the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore their perceptions of digital information sources, authenticity, and online engagement with heritage destinations. The second, quantitative phase was conducted between April and May 2025 using an online survey tool (Google Forms) to reach a broader sample of Indonesian young travelers.

In the qualitative stage, it was purposely chosen to include participants who meet the following criteria: aged 18-30; active users of social media; visited at least one historical destination in the last year. Three informants were interviewed, which provided the rich information on digital engagement and heritage experiences. To conduct quantitative phase, 160 respondents were selected by the use of purposive sampling. They were Generations Z, Millennials and X, where the latter was the largest (Generation Z, 18-27 years old). The respondents had all been to Indonesian historical sites before and responded that they used digital contents including social media and online reviews during their travel planning and during their in-situ experience.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data which were audio-taped (with informed consent), transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. The qualitative results were used to develop the survey instrument that was applied in the quantitative stage. A structured questionnaire with 6 constructs: User-Generated Content (UGC), Firm-Generated Content (FGC), Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), Destination Image (DI) and Tourist Satisfaction (TS) was designed in order to collect quantitative data. Operationalization of each construct was done by using 2-3 items based on existing scales that had been validated to make them contextually relevant. A 5-point likert scale was used to rate all items with responses varying on the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The mapping of the variables, item codes, statements, roles in the model, and literature sources are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Survey Instrument Items and Variable Mapping

Variable	Item Code	Statement	Role in the Model	Source
User-Generated Content (UGC)	UGC1	I trust content shared by other travellers about historical destinations I visited.	Independent Variable (X1)	Wijaya et al. (2025)
	UGC2	Content from other travellers about historical sites has proven to be reliable based on my own experience.		

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Variable	Item Code	Statement	Role in the Model	Source
Firm-Generated Content (FGC)	FGC1	I trust content from official government or tourism organization accounts such as Borobudur Park or Pesona Indonesia.	Independent Variable (X2)	Wijaya et al. (2025)
	FGC2	Content from official sources is generally consistent with the actual conditions I experienced.		
Word-of-Mouth (WOM)	WOM1	Before visiting a historical site, I seek advice or recommendations from people close to me.	Independent Variable (X3)	Jalilvand (2017)
	WOM2	I feel more confident about visiting a heritage site after receiving opinions from someone I know.		
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)	EWO1	I often read online reviews about historical tourism destinations before visiting them.	Independent Variable (X4)	Jalilvand (2017)
	EWO2	To ensure I make the right choice, I read reviews from other tourists before visiting a historical site.		
Destination Image (DI)	DES1	The historical tourism site I visited had strong visual appeal and aesthetic value.	Mediating Variable (M)	Wijaya et al. (2025)
	DES2	Supporting facilities (e.g., access, signage, public amenities) at the site were adequate.		
	DES3	The site possessed deep cultural and historical significance.		
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	TOU1	My visit to the historical site met my expectations.	Dependent Variable (Y)	Zhao et al. (2024)
	TOU2	I was satisfied with my overall experience at the heritage site.		
	TOU3	Compared to similar sites I have visited, I felt more satisfied with this particular visit.		

Source: Adapted from Wijaya et al. (2025), Jalilvand (2017), Reza Jalilvand et al. (2012), and Zhao et al. (2024)

Data Analysis Techniques

In the current study, an exploratory sequential mixed-method design was used following the guidelines of Creswell (2018). At the first step, the qualitative analysis produced rich thematic information through the thematic analysis based on the open coding, axial coding, and selective coding approaches, according to the methodological design presented by Braun & Clarke (2006). The themes were used to design and revise the measurement items in the quantitative phase. The second stage involved quantitative procedures using the IBM SPSS. To summarise respondent characteristics, descriptive statistics were used. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis and Varimax rotation to measure construct validity based on the factor loading of 0.70 or higher as the minimum requirement (Watkins, 2018), whereas reliability was measured by using Cronbachs Alpha with 0.70 being the acceptable level of internal consistency

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(Neuman, 2014). The diagnostics of the Multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) were used to make sure that there were no highly correlated predictor variables (O'brien, 2007).

The impact of four kinds of digital contents, such as User-Generated Content (UGC), Firm-Generated Content (FGC), Word-of-Mouth (WOM), and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) on destination image and visitor satisfaction was analysed through multiple linear regression analysis. Moreover, a two-way ANOVA was used to analyze the possible effects of interaction and differences between genders, including Gen Z and Millennial respondents. The study contributes to the literature on digital content by fully describing and triangulating the effect of digital content on perception and satisfaction of tourists visiting heritage destinations in Indonesia through a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Qualitative Findings

This section addresses the qualitative research question: "How do digital contents such as user-generated and firm-generated materials influence tourists' perceptions and satisfaction when visiting Indonesian heritage destinations?" The qualitative findings were derived from thematic analysis of interviews with domestic tourists who had visited Borobudur Temple, Prambanan Temple, Taman Sari Water Castle, and Kota Tua Jakarta. These insights provide a deeper understanding of how young travelers engage with online narratives, assess credibility, and form destination images before and during their visits.

The qualitative phase was meant to identify the cognitive and emotional reaction to digital tourists on online content pertaining to heritage destinations. This step was aimed to determine the key patterns forming the basis of perception, decision-making and satisfaction among digital travellers and was conducted through semi-structured interviewing of three digital-native interviewees (aged 18-30). The three-step thematic coding process consisting of open coding, selective coding, and axial coding were used in the analysis of data. It is through this inductive process that three central themes emerged and that then directly influenced construct formation within the follow-up quantitative instrument. The qualitative results have been summarized in Table 2. The findings became the foundation of the following construction of six core constructs during the quantitative phase (User-Generated Content (UGC), Firm-Generated Content (FGC), Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), Destination Image (DI), and Tourist Satisfaction (TS)). Additional of these themes in the survey tool contributes to the contextual validity of the model as it makes it more reflective of tourists as a real element that behaves in the digital tourism ecosystem.

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Tabel 2. Summary of Thematic Findings from the Qualitative Phase

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quote
Perceived Authenticity of UGC	User-generated content is seen as more credible and relatable than official sources.	"TikTok reviews feel more real than ads—they show the place as it is."
Social Validation through WOM/eWOM	Tourists rely on peer recommendations (offline and online) for assurance before visiting.	"I always read Google reviews or ask friends first."
Image-Driven Expectations	Digital narratives and visuals shape expectations, often framing the experience before the visit begins.	"Before I went to Borobudur, I imagined it like the spiritual stories I saw on YouTube."

Source: Researcher, (2025)

Conceptual Framework Development

The results of the qualitative stage show that digital content has a decisive impact on the cognitive and emotional reaction of the tourists to the heritage destinations. The participants made emphasis on the authenticity that comes with user-generated content (UGC), information-rich nature of firm-generated content (FGC), reliability inherent in interpersonal recommendations (WOM), and evaluative nature of online reviews (eWOM). Taken together, these observations indicate that there is a multilayered correlation between digital contents and the development of destination image and tourist satisfaction in general.

Based on these thematic findings, a conceptual framework was developed to delimit the following quantitative study. The model has it that UGC, WOM, FGC, and eWOM positively influence Destination Image, which in turn influences Tourist Satisfaction. Moreover, it is postulated that all forms of digital communication have a direct impact on Tourist Satisfaction. The theoretical constructs of Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) by Mehrabian & Russell (1974) and expectancy-disconfirmation theory by Oliver (1980) are also incorporated into the model and destination image is placed as the mediating cognitive-affective mechanism between digital stimuli and behavioural responses. In this study, the conceptual framework is as shown in Figure 1.

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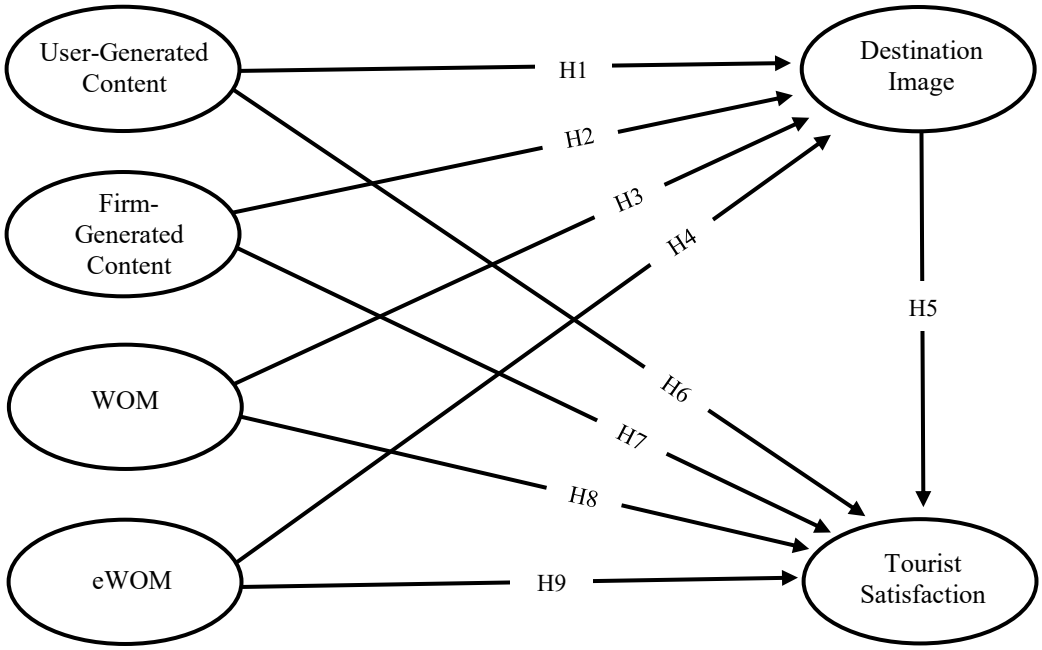

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Integrating UGC, FGC, WOM, and eWOM in Shaping Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction

Source: Researcher, (2025)

Descriptive Statistics and Respondent Profile

A quantitative part of the present study obtained the answers of 160 Indonesian participants who had visited at least one heritage site during the past twelve months personally and then experienced digital content based on this trip. The demographic focus was directed on two important dimensions namely generational cohort and gender. These factors have been selected considering the obvious correlation with the digital-content consumption patterns in tourism situations. The age distribution indicated that the majority of participants belonged to Generation Z (aged 18–27 years), as the group of digital natives and often active on various platforms, including Tik Tok and Instagram, when looking and sharing information about travelling. The Millennials and Generation X respondents were smaller proportions. The gender distribution was relatively balanced and women comprised about 53 percent of the sample. These demographic attributes are essential in comprehending the difference in the interactions of the different tourist groups with the digital content, how they develop their perceptions of the destinations, and expectations of satisfaction on visiting heritage sites.

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Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 160)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Generation	Generation Z (18–27 years)	129	80.6
	Millennials	23	14.4
	Generation X	8	5.0
Gender	Male	68	42.5
	Female	92	57.5

Source: Researcher, (2025)

Validity and Reliability Testing

The convergent validity was assessed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) within principal component analysis (PCA) model and Varimax rotation. The analysis was meant to confirm that the observed variables fitted into their latent constructs as expected by the theory. A value of EFA factor loading of 0.70 or more was used as the criterion of acceptable convergent validity (Neuman, 2014). According to the results of Table 4, the measurement items loaded highly on one main factor and with low cross-loadings, which shows that each construct was fully and clearly measured. The six factors obtained were matched with the planned constructs of this research: user-generated content (UGC), firm-generated content (FGC), word-of-mouth (WOM), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), destination image (DI), and tourist satisfaction (TS). These findings indicate that the indicators were showing good evidence of measuring the construct to which they were referring to thus validating the convergent validity of the measurement instrument.

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix (PCA – Varimax Rotation)

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6
TOU3	**0.865**	0.332	0.123	0.115	0.188	0.059
TOU1	**0.863**	0.307	0.115	0.104	0.166	0.118
TOU2	**0.860**	0.322	0.048	0.135	0.200	0.075
DES2	0.434	**0.807**	0.196	0.079	0.195	0.150
DES3	0.412	**0.794**	0.220	0.131	0.165	0.168
DES1	0.456	**0.774**	0.165	0.128	0.148	0.158
UGC2	0.088	0.138	**0.935**	-0.009	-0.047	-0.042
UGC1	0.118	0.176	**0.927**	-0.019	-0.018	-0.024
EWO1	0.130	0.074	-0.008	**0.936**	0.026	0.024
EWO2	0.109	0.111	-0.018	**0.933**	-0.022	-0.070
WOM1	0.212	0.122	0.010	0.001	**0.906**	-0.066
WOM2	0.177	0.167	-0.080	0.002	**0.904**	0.026
FGC2	0.018	0.140	-0.028	0.046	-0.027	**0.931**
FGC1	0.171	0.115	-0.036	-0.096	-0.008	**0.912**

Source: Researcher, (2025)

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Reliability testing methods were embraced to evaluate the internal consistency of every construct incorporated in the research instrument. The statistic used to do so was Cronbach Alpha (alpha), in which constructs were considered reliable when the coefficient was over 0.70 (Neuman, 2014). The analysis of data was performed in SPSS and the results proved to be exemplary in terms of reliability. In particular, Cronbach's Alpha score of every construct exceeded 0.85 (see Table 5), thus lying within the range of the most reliable constructs (very high). Taken together, these findings show that the items that made up the scales were reliable in measuring the same construct-level dimension and that the scales that were obtained were statistically precise and dependable.

Table 5. Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Category
User-Generated Content (UGC)	2	0.894	Very High
Firm-Generated Content (FGC)	2	0.859	Very High
Word-of-Mouth (WOM)	2	0.864	Very High
Electronic Word-of-Mouth	2	0.885	Very High
Destination Image (DI)	3	0.956	Very High
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	3	0.951	Very High

Source: Researcher, (2025)

Hypothesis Testing and Model Interpretation

The outcome of the hypothesis test shows that the proposed relationships were all statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) in all the regression paths. Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.769$) were the most connected variables, thus attesting the main mediating position of cognitive-affective destination perceptions on post-visit evaluation. The digital content variables were ranked in terms of the direct effect on satisfaction with Word-of-Mouth (WOM) having the highest value ($\beta = 0.412$) followed by User-Generated Content ($\beta = 0.256$) and eWOM ($\beta = 0.250$). Destination Image was also most influenced by UGC ($\beta = 0.388$), but just narrowly ahead of WOM ($\beta = 0.377$) and FGC ($\beta = 0.325$). These results highlight the comparative significance of the socially built content, especially peer stories and interpersonal advice, on the way tourists view a place, as well as the satisfaction levels experienced by visitors. Institutional content (FGC) also had a significant effect but with effect sizes that are relatively smaller. Collectively, the model provides empirical evidence in support of the role of digital information environments in shaping the results of heritage tourism. Table 6 gives a complete summary of the hypothesis testing.

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Table 6. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis Code	Hypothesis Statement	β Coefficient	Sig. (p-value)	Decision
H1	UGC has a positive effect on Destination Image	0.388	0.000	Supported
H2	FGC has a positive effect on Destination Image	0.325	0.000	Supported
H3	WOM has a positive effect on Destination Image	0.377	0.000	Supported
H4	eWOM has a positive effect on Destination Image	0.238	0.002	Supported
H5	Destination Image has a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction	0.769	0.000	Supported
H6	UGC has a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction	0.256	0.000	Supported
H7	FGC has a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction	0.226	0.001	Supported
H8	WOM has a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction	0.412	0.000	Supported
H9	eWOM has a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction	0.250	0.000	Supported

Source: Researcher, (2025)

Group Comparisons (Two-Way ANOVA)

To examine the possible existence of significant differences between tourist satisfaction levels in various demographic groups, it was decided to perform a two-way ANOVA using gender and generational cohort (Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X) as fixed factors. This was aimed at testing the main effects of gender and generation and their interaction with the dependent variable Tourist Satisfaction. Before the actual analysis, Levene test of heterogeneity of variances was applied and the result was 0.180 ($p > 0.05$), meaning that the variances were equal and this made the data fit to be tested with ANOVA. The descriptive findings (as shown in Table 7) show that none of the studied variables had a statistically significant effect on tourist satisfaction. There were no significant gender ($F = 0.135$, $p = 0.714$), or generation ($F = 0.754$, $p = 0.476$) differences or the interaction between gender and generation ($F = 0.245$, $p = 0.783$). The p-values were all above the 0.05 mark indicating a high degree of satisfaction across demographic classes.

Since digital content is the determinant of visitor experiences, either through UGC, FGC, WOM, and eWOM, it can be concluded that this content elicits fairly homogeneous satisfaction reactions regardless of the gender or age group of the respondents. In turn, destination image and the quality of digital content can become a more effective way to increase tourist satisfaction than the promotion campaigns based on a demographic approach.

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Table 7. Two-Way ANOVA Results: Tourist Satisfaction by Gender and Generation

Source of Variation	F Statistic	Sig. (p-value)
Gender	0.135	0.714
Generation	0.754	0.476
Gender × Generation	0.245	0.783
Levene's Test (Homogeneity)	—	0.180

Source: Researcher, (2025)

DISCUSSION

The proposed conceptual framework between digital content and destination image and tourist satisfaction in Indonesian heritage tourism is supported by this investigation. The empirical findings show that user-generated content (UGC), firm-generated content (FGC), word-of-mouth (WOM), and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) are also positively correlated to the two variables and are significant predictors in each of their regression equations. UGC emerged as the strongest predictor of destination image, which is consistent with the authentic experience theory formulated by Wang (1999), which states that online posts on websites like TikTok and Instagram improve views on authenticity. The higher ability of UGC compared to sponsored content to create credible and emotionally intense representations of heritage sites is also demonstrated in previous studies (Li et al., 2024; Mariani et al., 2022). This dual nature of UGC influence reflects a cognitive–affective mechanism similar to Zahrudy & Rany (2025), who found that symbolic cues in consumer contexts trigger both rational interpretation and emotional engagement. Likewise, digital heritage content combines informational clarity and emotional resonance, shaping tourists' cognitive image and affective satisfaction simultaneously. However, not all aspects of UGC are positive, and the question of manipulated content prompts the construction of critical digital skills in tourists, which has been confirmed by the qualitative data gathered in the current study (Burgess et al., 2009; Kitsios et al., 2022).

The less dominating FGC has a strong impact on destination image and tourist satisfaction as well. Being a source of factual and logistical information (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), FGC can influence both cognitive and affective reactions when presented in terms of culturally relevant visual narratives (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2020). The growing presence of artistic official accounts like Pesona Indonesia shows the success of institution-driven narratives, especially when they are in line with actual realities on the ground.

WOM proved to be the best predictor of tourist satisfaction, which supports the long-term relevance of interpersonal communication in the travel decision-making process, particularly in collectivist settings, such as in Indonesia (Jalilvand, 2017; Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). The discovery supports the elaboration

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likelihood model that was presented by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) according to which personally trusted sources have an increased persuasive power. Although the impact of eWOM on satisfaction is relatively low yet significant, it serves the evaluative purpose of providing tourists with a convenient aggregated review supply, thus helping them make informed decisions (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Guo & Pesonen, 2022). In that way, WOM and eWOM are complementary social validators that increase the informational and experiential value of online content.

Destination image also turns out to be a powerful cognitive-affective mediator of the relationship between digital content and tourist satisfaction, a trend that can be attributed to expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) that states that satisfaction is achieved when experiential outcomes match or exceed the prior expectations. The perception of visitors on their visit is shaped by the image created through the digital channels, be it UGC, FGC, WOM, or eWOM (Chi & Qu, 2008; Stylos et al., 2016). Destination managers, therefore, need to ensure that there is a match between virtual representations and on-site experiences. There were no notable variations in terms of satisfaction levels between genders and generations cohorts, indicating that digital tourism appeals to different demographic categories in an equal measure. The evidence of scholarship demonstrates that emotionally charged and culturally relevant visuals cross the demographic lines (Hosany et al., 2015), regardless of the high digital involvement of Gen Z (Wu & Lai, 2021). So, in their online marketing, heritage destination managers ought to focus on being authentic, emotionally appealing, and storytelling rather than demographic segmentation.

Finally, the results demonstrate the need to have an integrated communication strategy that combines UGC authenticity, FGC professionalism and social validation of WOM/eWOM to enhance destination image as well as tourist satisfaction. Destination image plays a central role and should be invested in strategies that yield interesting, realistic and emotionally effective depictions of historical places.

CONCLUSION

This study under consideration investigates the empirical effects of digital content (user-generated content (UGC), firm-generated content (FGC), word-of-mouth (WOM), and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)) on destination image creation and tourist satisfaction improvement in Indonesian heritage tourism. Findings show that UGC and WOM have the most significant predictive effects, which implies that the genuine peer stories and interpersonal trust are the most prominent aspects of the tourism experience. Destination image has been established as a mediating construct that plays a key role and thus its cognitive and emotional roles in balancing expectations with perceived realities is reaffirmed. Moreover, gender and generational differences in tourist satisfaction were not found to have any statistically significant influence, which means that digital tourism

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experiences have an equal effect on tourists across demographic groups. The research therefore advises that a unified narrative-based marketing should be adopted instead of the single ended demographic-based measures. The results highlight how a balanced approach to digital communication, which is an integrated approach to digital communication, can enhance the perception and satisfaction of tourists due to its authenticity, credibility, and its ability to appeal to the emotions. In that regard, heritage destination managers are invited to use co-created content, improve the quality and credibility of institutional messaging, and introduce participatory storytelling ecosystems as ways of supporting sustainable tourism development in the digital age.

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