

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN BUILDING DESTINATION IMAGE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INSTAGRAM NAMU HEJO RIVERSIDE GLAMPING

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ABSTRACT

This study explores digital communication strategies in shaping the destination image of Namu Hejo Riverside Glamping through a qualitative content analysis of its official Instagram account. A total of 37 posts, combining internal content and curated user-generated content (UGC), were examined to identify visual and narrative dimensions of representation. Findings show that UGC dominates the construction of destination identity, highlighting nature, comfort, recreational activities, aesthetic appeal, and audience inclusivity. By reposting visitors' experiences, the management strategically employs UGC as social proof, strengthening credibility while engaging in a co-creation process that positions tourists as active value creators. However, this strategy also presents a paradox. The emphasis on curated, aesthetically pleasing, and positive narratives produces a homogenized image that risks overlooking critical or negative experiences. Such selective representation illustrates the ambivalence of UGC, which can simultaneously reinforce or weaken destination legitimacy. Academically, this study contributes to tourism communication literature by framing UGC not only as authentic expression but also as a managed social practice embedded in digital strategies. Practically, it demonstrates how medium-scale glamping destinations can optimize social media with minimal internal production, while emphasizing the need for more layered narratives to sustain long-term image relevance.

Keywords: User-Generated Content, Destination Image, Glamping, Co-Creation, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology over the past decade has fundamentally transformed how tourists seek information, compare alternatives, and select destinations (Bilan et al., 2024; Roziqin et al., 2023; Sustacha et al., 2023). Social media, particularly Instagram, has assumed a central role in this

transformation because of its emphasis on visual power and experiential narratives (Casaló et al., 2020; Delamontano et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2025). Destination representation through photos and short videos not only shapes tourists' expectations before travel but also influences their decisions through mechanisms of repeated exposure (Du & Cheong, 2025; Guerreiro et al., 2024; Mirzamurodova Kizi et al., 2025). This shift illustrates a transition in tourism communication from one-way promotion toward interactive models that are more responsive to changing tourist behaviors (Peruchi et al., 2022; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2025; Zlatanov & Đuričanin, 2023).

Within this context, the concept of destination image has become increasingly relevant. Destination image is understood as both a cognitive and affective construct shaped by exposure to information as well as by direct or indirect experiences (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Jebbouri et al., 2022; Lopes, 2011). Previous research has demonstrated that destination image significantly affects visit intention, satisfaction, and loyalty (Chen et al., 2023; Luvsandavaajav et al., 2022; Marques et al., 2021; Wayan et al., 2024). Thus, the development of destination image should not be seen merely as a promotional activity but as a core strategy in maintaining competitiveness and sustainability (Abdillah et al., 2022; Eitzenberger & Thimm, 2024; Foroudi et al., 2018; Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011). In this regard, social media functions as a strategic channel that strengthens destination image through mass and easily accessible visual exposure (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Cherifi et al., 2014; Su & Li, 2024; Zuo et al., 2023).

Moreover, the rise of user-generated content (UGC) has added a new dimension to the dynamics of destination communication. Tourists are no longer passive recipients of messages; instead, they also act as active producers of destination narratives through photos, videos, and reviews (Aboalghanam et al., 2025; Guerreiro et al., 2024; Suryatini et al., 2025). Such content is often perceived as more authentic and credible than formal promotional materials, thereby exerting a strong influence on image construction (Benevento et al., 2025; Niu, 2025; Ntousi et al., 2025). This situation fosters a process of co-creation in which destination image emerges collectively through social negotiation rather than being exclusively controlled by destination managers (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2024; Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019). As a result, Instagram operates both as a visual showcase and as an arena of interaction where the legitimacy of destination image is shaped (Belén Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2024; Casaló et al., 2020; Naeem et al., 2025).

The interplay between social media, UGC, and destination image is particularly salient in the context of glamorous camping, or glamping. Glamping offers nature-based experiences combined with modern comforts, positioning itself as an attractive alternative to mass tourism (Mustofa, 2022; Puspa & Setyo, 2024; Rikzan et al., 2023). In Indonesia, especially in the Bandung area, glamping has expanded rapidly due to the region's natural assets such as mountains, forests, and rivers (Budiasa et al., 2019; Laksmi et al., 2024). The proliferation of similar

ventures in this region has created a pressing need for clear image differentiation to strengthen destination identity (Istighfarany et al., 2025; Lopes, 2011; Ngurah et al., 2024; Tiago et al., 2021). This raises a critical question: to what extent is the image of glamping destinations shaped by managerial communication strategies, and to what extent is it driven by UGC produced by tourists?

Despite the growing literature on social media in tourism, most studies remain focused on official promotional content from large-scale destinations with extensive exposure. In contrast, research on the role of UGC in constructing the image of medium-scale, nature-based destinations such as glamping remains limited. Yet, organic tourist-generated content often carries greater credibility and persuasive power than formal marketing materials (Aboalghanam et al., 2025; Niu, 2025; Suryatini et al., 2025). This gap underscores the importance of examining how UGC can serve as a digital communication strategy that differentiates glamping from mainstream destination promotion.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on Namu Hejo Riverside Glamping in Pangalengan, Bandung Regency, whose Instagram exposure is largely shaped by UGC. The research seeks to analyze how UGC is utilized to articulate value propositions, construct visual narratives, and reinforce destination image. Academically, this study contributes to the growing discourse on the interrelationship between social media, UGC, and destination image in the context of nature-based tourism. Practically, the findings are expected to provide valuable insights for destination managers in designing more effective and sustainable digital communication strategies. In this way, the study affirms Instagram's role not only as a promotional channel but also as a strategic instrument for destination image management in the digital tourism era.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design with a focus on visual and narrative content analysis to investigate how destination image is constructed through social media representations (Fazeli et al., 2023; Mannay, 2015; Naeem et al., 2025; Naghizadeh, 2021). This approach enables the interpretation of relationships among visual symbols, textual narratives, and curatorial practices that articulate destination identity. The design is grounded in the perspective that social media functions as a discursive arena where meanings of tourism are constantly negotiated by multiple actors (Bilan et al., 2024; Jokom et al., 2025; Verhoef et al., 2021). It also aligns with the research question, which addresses the interplay between managerial strategies and user-generated content (UGC) in shaping the image of a glamping destination.

The unit of analysis was the official Instagram account @namuhejo, selected because it represents the primary platform for the destination's digital communication. The observation period covered 1 January to 1 August 2025, yielding a total of 37 posts (photos and videos). All posts were included in the

dataset through total sampling, as the corpus was limited and manageable. Posts were classified into two categories: (1) internal content produced directly by the destination management, and (2) UGC created by visitors and subsequently reposted by management. This classification provided the analytical basis for examining managerial contributions alongside participatory narratives in image construction.

Data were analyzed following established qualitative content-analysis procedures: data reduction, categorization, and thematic interpretation (Delamontano et al., 2025; Fazeli et al., 2023; Naeem et al., 2025). Coding focused on three dimensions: (a) visual elements that depict landscapes, recreational activities, and facilities; (b) narrative captions that frame experiences and meanings; and (c) curatorial practices used by management when selecting and reposting UGC. Emergent themes were then interpreted in relation to conceptual frameworks of destination image, particularly natural attractions, recreational experiences, accommodation comfort, and audience inclusivity.

To enhance research quality, theoretical triangulation was applied by situating findings within broader literature on destination image, UGC, and digital communication. Credibility was ensured through iterative readings of the dataset and careful auditing of coding decisions to minimize interpretive bias. These procedures provide a rigorous foundation for understanding how managerial strategies and tourist-produced narratives interact to shape the image of a glamping destination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Natural Beauty as a Core Identity

The analysis of all uploads indicates that representations of nature constitute the most prominent theme on the official @namuhejo account. Internal content produced by the management frequently highlights the clarity of the river, the pine forests, and the cool atmosphere characteristic of Pangalengan. These visuals are typically accompanied by normative narratives, such as calls to protect the environment or messages emphasizing the importance of maintaining harmony with nature. While these representations reinforce nature as the primary attraction, their formal tone often makes them appear standardized and repetitive.

In contrast, user-generated content (UGC) reproduces the same landscapes through more individualized perspectives, for instance by depicting visitors relaxing along the riverbank or strolling across the wooden bridge within the cool mountain setting. Video narration or captions often include repeated expressions such as “healing place,” “comfortable staycation,” or “escape from the city’s hustle,” which emphasize the emotional function of the natural setting. In this way, nature is not merely depicted as a visual backdrop but is reinterpreted as a symbol of relaxation and inner calm. The integration of internal content and UGC, therefore, positions Namu Hejo as a nature-based destination, although the

symbolic and emotional weight is more strongly carried by the personalized interpretations provided in UGC.

Comfort as the Core Value of Glamping

Comfort emerges as the most prominent feature in both internal content and UGC reposted on the official account. The management consistently highlights modern facilities such as spacious tents with warm lighting, neatly arranged soft beds, and bathrooms equipped with hot water as markers of service quality. These representations are not presented merely as background visuals but are deliberately constructed as central attractions that distinguish glamping from conventional camping. This narrative is further reinforced by UGC in the form of personal visual testimonials, including video clips of visitors resting inside the tents or captions emphasizing the ability to sleep comfortably even in an outdoor environment. Together, internal content and UGC consistently position comfort as the defining element of the Namu Hejo experience.

This representation of comfort also reflects a broader paradigm shift in nature-based tourism. Whereas conventional camping is often associated with inconvenience and the need for physical readiness, glamping at Namu Hejo is framed as a more practical, modern, and inclusive form of leisure. It is particularly appealing to urban tourists who desire contact with nature without compromising comfort standards. Comfort should therefore be regarded not as a supplementary feature but as a core communication strategy that reduces psychological barriers and expands the destination's appeal to middle- and upper-class segments. In this sense, the identity of Namu Hejo is constructed through the integration of natural landscapes with modern amenities, positioning comfort as its primary selling point.



Figure 1. Visualizing Comfort through Communal Dining in Glamping Contexts

(Source: Instagram @namuhejo)

Visual Experience and the Culture of Instagramability

Aesthetic appeal and the production of short-form visual content, particularly video, emerge as dominant elements in the representation of the destination. Internal content generated by the management typically emphasizes selected visual spots such as the river stream, wooden bridges, and riverside tents, which are presented through carefully structured video framing. These portrayals function as formal promotional material designed to highlight the destination's readiness and aesthetic order, although they remain largely normative and lack expressive variation.

UGC, on the other hand, enriches the same visual settings with more diverse and creative approaches, ranging from casual video clips of friends relaxing by the river to dynamic edits that use popular filters and transitions. At the narrative level, captions frequently include hashtags such as #instagramable, #staycation, #healing, and #glampingbandung. These collectively frame Namu Hejo not only as a recreational space but also as a platform for digital content production. In this sense, the culture of "Instagramability" is largely shaped by the creativity of visitors, while internal content primarily provides the basic stage for such practices. This dynamic reinforces the image of the destination as both a site of leisure and an arena for self-expression within social media ecosystems.

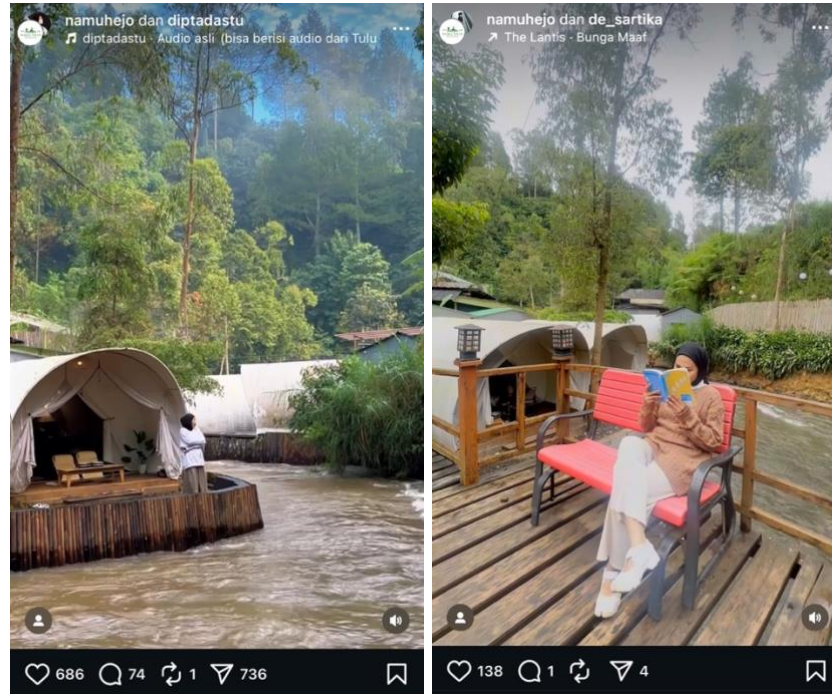


Figure 2. Visual Practices of Instagramability: Expressive Poses by the Riverside Tent and Relaxed Reading on the Bridge
(Source: Instagram @namuhejo)

Dual Recreational Narratives: Tranquility and Adventure

In addition to the dimensions of nature and aesthetics, recreational activities also appear consistently on the @namuhejo account. Internal content generated by the management is generally simple and normative, focusing primarily on depictions of light activities within the glamping facilities, including moments of children playing in designated areas. These representations function mainly to reinforce an image of safety and family-friendliness, positioning internal content as promotional material that emphasizes the formal and structured character of the destination. By contrast, user-generated content (UGC) provides a more dynamic portrayal, featuring activities such as rafting along the river, relaxing in front of riverside tents, and engaging in group interactions within the natural environment.

The contrast between these representations illustrates how the image of Namu Hejo is constructed through two complementary narrative pathways. The management emphasizes a conservative, safe, and orderly identity, while visitors enrich the imagery by highlighting spontaneity, adventure, and intimate social interactions. This combination creates a dual perception of Namu Hejo: on one hand, a tranquil and family-friendly destination, and on the other, a site capable of delivering adventurous recreational experiences. Such differentiation strategically broadens the destination's market reach, appealing to families seeking comfort as well as younger visitors who prioritize social interaction and outdoor excitement.

Audience Diversity and Holistic Destination Image

The analysis indicates that internal content produced by the management serves a foundational role in shaping the destination's visibility, primarily through normative and functional promotional material. These posts often highlight the existence of the destination and its facilities in a consistent and orderly manner, thereby reinforcing an image of safety, accessibility, and formal presentation. While such representations may appear uniform, they provide an essential framework that situates the destination within recognizable and reliable promotional standards. In this sense, management-driven content ensures the continuity and stability of the destination's core image.



Figure 3. Playful Moments of Children in the Garden Area
Reflecting Inclusive Recreation
(Source: Instagram @namuhejo)

In contrast, user-generated content (UGC) contributes more dynamically by articulating audience diversity through authentic, varied, and expressive portrayals. Visitors present themselves in multiple social configurations, including groups of friends underscoring sociability, young couples emphasizing romantic atmospheres, and women and children highlighting inclusivity and family-friendliness. These diverse representations broaden the interpretive scope of the destination, framing it as flexible and adaptable rather than confined to a single market segment. The holistic image of Namu Hejo therefore emerges from the interplay between the structured baseline provided by internal content and the authenticity and variety introduced through UGC. This complementarity underscores how managerial strategies and visitor participation collectively sustain the destination's legitimacy as an open social space, relevant and responsive to diverse audiences.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the visual and narrative representations generated through user-generated content (UGC) are not merely documentary traces of visitor experience but constitute an integral component of the destination's digital communication strategy. By selecting and reposting UGC that highlights natural scenery, glamping comfort, recreational activities, short-form video aesthetics, and audience inclusivity, management leverages the credibility of personal testimony to reinforce the destination image (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Niu, 2025; Suryatini et al., 2025). Within this process, UGC performs a dual role as both authentic

expression and a strategic instrument that consolidates destination identity. This pattern aligns with scholarship on social proof that demonstrates how the voices of tourists often possess greater persuasive capacity than formal promotional message (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Guerreiro et al., 2024; Usman & Wijaya, 2025). What appears organic can therefore be interpreted as the strategic capitalization of personal narratives.

In this context, the Namu Hejo case illustrates how co-creation unfolds in practice (Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Tourists act as narrative producers who provide emotionally resonant depictions of healing, comfort, and outdoor activities. At the same time, management performs a curatorial function that ensures alignment between these narratives and the destination's intended positioning. The interaction transforms social media into a discursive arena in which destination image is negotiated rather than unilaterally imposed (Dobber & Hameleers, 2025; Matthes et al., 2025). The overall pattern reflects a broader shift in destination communication from top-down communication models toward participatory frameworks that recognize tourists as value creators.

Reliance on UGC also produces a clear paradox. Curatorial preferences tend to prioritize aesthetically pleasing and positive content while marginalizing critical or negative experiences. Such selectivity may homogenize representation and generate an overly idealized construct that fails to reflect the diversity of visitor realities (Putra A.G.I et al., 2025). This outcome is consistent with prior research on the ambivalence of UGC, which may enhance destination image but can also weaken it when unfavorable narratives dominate circulation (Marine-Roig, 2021; Marine-Roig & Ferrer-Rosell, 2018). In the present case, successful curation sustains a predominantly positive image, although it narrows the range of representation and may reduce perceptions of authenticity.

This study contributes to destination communication scholarship in two primary ways. First, it reconceptualizes UGC as a form of personal narrative that is simultaneously shaped by curatorial and promotional logics, which foregrounds the paradox of authenticity within digital tourism. Second, by focusing on a mid-scale glamping destination, the study extends discussions of co-creation and digital communication into a context that has received limited scholarly attention outside large-scale or urban destinations. These contributions advance theoretical understandings of UGC as a socially negotiated practice and offer practical insights for managers seeking to optimize social media strategies without substantial internal production capacity.

From an academic standpoint, the findings reinforce the need to view UGC as a social practice that is produced, curated, and circulated within platform-specific ecosystems, rather than as a neutral reflection of tourist experience. From a practical standpoint, the study demonstrates that mid-scale destinations can employ UGC effectively to enhance credibility and relevance, provided that visual curation is balanced with more layered and substantive narratives that capture experiential

variety. To address the paradox of homogenization, managers can adopt several strategies. These include introducing thematic features that showcase different types of experiences such as family trips, adventure activities, or operational behind-the-scenes content, integrating positive UGC with informative narratives related to environmental education or visitor guidelines, and selecting tourist stories that foreground depth of experience rather than purely visual appeal. These approaches preserve positive image reinforcement while maintaining representational diversity that supports long-term authenticity.

This study has an important limitation that requires emphasis. The analysis focuses exclusively on UGC that has been curated and selected by management within the official Instagram account @namuhejo. This constraint means that all findings are derived from representations filtered through institutional screening, which excludes critical, ambiguous, or negative perspectives. The limitation not only narrows the range of experiences captured in the dataset but also provides a direct foundation for future research. Since the present study examines only the curated side of UGC, subsequent research should incorporate non-curated UGC from open platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, or review-based sites in order to observe how narratives that are not controlled by management contribute to the construction of destination image. Future studies may also employ digital ethnography, trace ethnography, and interviews with UGC producers to explore selection processes, motivations behind content creation, and the tensions between amplified and omitted narratives. This direction allows the current limitation to serve as a clear starting point for more comprehensive investigations into how destination image is negotiated beyond official curatorial spaces.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that digital communication strategies play a central role in shaping destination image, with Instagram @namuhejo functioning as the primary arena of interaction between visitors and management. The analysis identifies five dominant dimensions of representation, namely natural beauty, Instagramable aesthetics, recreational activities, glamping comfort, and audience inclusivity. These elements consistently appear in user-generated content (UGC) curated and reposted by management. The representations not only depict the physical qualities of the destination but also communicate affective meanings such as tranquility, enjoyment, and contemporary comfort. As a result, UGC fulfills a dual role as both an expression of individual tourist experience and a strategic tool for sustaining the destination's collective identity.

The findings also show that Namu Hejo's management applies a deliberate and systematic digital communication approach that leverages UGC as credible social proof to reinforce the destination's positioning. This curatorial process generates a co-creative dynamic in which tourists operate as value creators while management assumes responsibility for aligning narratives with brand identity. The

strategy succeeds in producing a positive and culturally resonant destination image that is attuned to prevailing digital trends. At the same time, the dominance of aesthetically homogeneous narratives introduces a clear paradox, since the exclusion of critical or diverse perspectives may generate an overly idealized representation of visitor experience. The implications of this paradox highlight the need for balanced curation that incorporates more layered and substantive narratives to maintain long-term authenticity and relevance.

The implications of this study are twofold. Academically, the research advances discussions on digital communication in tourism by illustrating that UGC should be understood not as neutral representational material but as a social practice shaped by platform-specific logics and curatorial decisions. Practically, the findings demonstrate that mid-scale destinations can enhance credibility and visibility through strategic utilization of UGC without requiring extensive internal content production. However, the long-term sustainability of destination image depends on the capacity of management to complement visual aesthetics with informative, varied, and experientially rich narratives. Overall, the study underscores that the construction of Namu Hejo Riverside Glamping's destination image is an ongoing negotiation between visitors and management, with UGC-based digital communication strategies serving as the central mechanism for maintaining resonance, appeal, and adaptive relevance within the evolving digital landscape.

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