

## DIGITAL BRANDING STRATEGY OF @puncakstelingsamarinda IN PROMOTING PUNCAK STELING TOURISM

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### Abstract

*This study is motivated by the increasing use of social media for tourism promotion in the digital era. Puncak Steling Tourism in Samarinda uses Instagram as a digital branding platform to introduce the destination to a wider public. This study employs a qualitative approach based on Chris Heuer's 4C Social Media Theory. The results show that digital branding strategies are implemented through four dimensions: context, communication, collaboration, and connection. Among these dimensions, context emerges as the most dominant aspect in shaping the image of the tourism destination. This study concludes that Instagram effectively supports promotional activities and expands the dissemination of information about Puncak Steling Tourism in Samarinda.*

**Keywords:** Digital Branding, Tourism Promotion, Puncak Steling.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini didasarkan pada meningkatnya penggunaan media sosial untuk promosi pariwisata di era digital. Pariwisata Puncak Steling Samarinda, memanfaatkan Instagram sebagai platform digital branding untuk memperkenalkan destinasi wisata tersebut kepada masyarakat luas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan teori 4C Media Social Chris Heuer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi branding digital diterapkan melalui dimensi *context*, *communication*, *collaboration*, dan *connection*. Di antara keempat dimensi tersebut, *context* muncul sebagai aspek yang paling dominan dalam membangun citra destinasi wisata. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa Instagram secara efektif mendukung kegiatan promosi dan memperluas penyebaran informasi tentang wisata Puncak Steling Samarinda.

**Kata Kunci:** Branding Digital, Promosi Wisata, Puncak Steling



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## A. INTRODUCTION

Various sectors, including tourism, have undergone significant changes as a result of advances in information and communication technology. Social media, as a new communication platform, has transformed the way destination managers promote tourism potential to a wider audience. Studies have shown that digital branding strategies through social media can increase public interest in visiting tourist destinations. This phenomenon has encouraged destination managers, both in the public and private sectors, to actively utilize online platforms as strategic channels for tourism promotion.<sup>1</sup>

Marketing communication in the tourism sector has been significantly transformed by the rapid development of digital technology. Social media has become a strategic platform for constructing destination identity and strengthening brand image in the digital era. Therefore, digital branding has become increasingly relevant as an effort by destination managers to enhance positive perceptions, build trust, and encourage visitor interest through social media.<sup>2</sup>

Conceptually, destination branding is defined as a strategic process of developing a unique identity and personality that distinguishes a destination from its competitors while promising tourists a memorable travel experience.<sup>3</sup> This process is strategic because it is closely related to destination image and requires the active participation of all stakeholders involved in shaping tourists' perceptions of a place. Instagram has generated what is known as the Instagram effect, which refers to tourists' tendency to choose attractions based on the quality of photos uploaded on social media, driven by the need for social recognition through likes and comments from their followers.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon indicates that managing visual content on Instagram is not merely a conventional marketing strategy, but part of a destination branding approach that can shape destination image and significantly increase tourist interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Nurjayanti and Irfan Arifin, "Implementasi Strategi Digital Branding Melalui Media Sosial Di Indonesia," *MITZAL (Demokrasi, Komunikasi dan Budaya) : Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan dan Ilmu Komunikasi* 10, no. 1 (2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.35329/mitzal.v10i1.6104>.

<sup>2</sup> Nurdin Hidayah et al., "Enhancing Tourism Destination Promotion through Strategic Instagram Engagement: A Case Study of @visitkarangsambung," *Jurnal Kepariwisata: Destinasi, Hospitalitas dan Perjalanan* 9, no. 2 (2025): 289, <https://doi.org/10.34013/jk.v9i2.2171>.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Cooper and C. Michael Hall, "Marketing and Branding the Contemporary Destination," dalam *Contemporary Tourism: An Internasional Approach* (Oxford: Goodfellow Publisher, 2018): 241-242.

<sup>4</sup> Ilke Basarangel, "5 The Instagram Effect on the Transformation of Tourist Behavior to Overtourism," dalam *Digital Marketing and Social Media Strategies for Tourism & Hospitality Organizations* (Oxford: Goodfellow Publisher, 2022): 91-93.

Additionally, current trends in the travel industry indicate that tourists increasingly rely on social media to search for information, evaluate destinations, and share their travel experiences. Social media no longer functions merely as a promotional medium, but also serves as a space for constructing destination image, which can influence tourists' decisions to visit.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, tourist destination managers need to develop digital branding strategies that effectively utilize Instagram as a marketing tool.

Instagram is one of the most widely used social media platforms in online tourism marketing. As a visual-based platform, Instagram is particularly relevant for tourist destination managers because it enables them to communicate the beauty, uniqueness, and attractiveness of their destinations. Mandagi et al. (2024), in their systematic review of 55 Scopus-indexed articles, found that social media platforms function as online spaces where destinations can present their identities, cultural richness, and diverse offerings, thereby creating positive perceptions and strong associations in tourists' minds. Furthermore, the study identified four main themes regarding the role of social media marketing (SMM) in destination marketing: enhancing value co-creation in destination branding, influencing customer-based brand equity, developing destination brand identity, and fostering customer engagement and brand loyalty.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, social media has evolved into an important tool for constructing destination image.<sup>7</sup> Tourists, local communities, and influencers actively create and share content on Instagram, which influences public perceptions of a destination. The differences in content produced by each group affect how visitors perceive and evaluate the attractiveness of a tourist destination. As a result, destination managers must consider various sources of digital content as part of a comprehensive branding strategy.

Social media has evolved into an essential component of tourism marketing strategies in the modern era, enabling destination managers to transcend geographical boundaries and interact directly with potential visitors in real time.<sup>8</sup> It has transformed tourism promotion from a static publication tool

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<sup>5</sup> Sofia Blanco-Moreno et al., "Understanding Engagement with Instagram Posts about Tourism Destinations," *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 34 (Desember 2024): 7-8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100948>.

<sup>6</sup> Deske Wenske Mandagi et al., "Navigating digital horizons: A systematic review of social media's role in destination branding," *Journal of Enterprise and Development* 6, no. 2 (2024): 373-375, <https://doi.org/10.20414/jed.v6i2.10075>.

<sup>7</sup> Seung Chul Yoo and Seung Mi Kang, "Visual Narratives and Digital Engagement: Decoding Seoul and Tokyo's Tourism Identity Through Instagram Analytics," *Tourism and Hospitality* 6, no. 3 (2025): 152-154, <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp6030149>.

<sup>8</sup> Marcello M. Mariani et al., "Facebook as a Destination Marketing Tool: Evidence from Italian Regional Destination Management Organizations," *Tourism Management* 54 (Juni 2016): 322-323, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.12.008>.

into an interactive space where visitors and destination managers collaboratively shape the visual identity of a destination. Among the various digital platforms available, Instagram has become one of the most strategic tools for online tourism promotion due to its strong emphasis on visual content. By prioritizing the quality of images and videos, Instagram can attract users' attention, stimulate emotional engagement, and influence their decision to visit a destination.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Instagram is highly relevant for digital branding campaigns, as it can help shape destination image while increasing audience engagement through published visual content. Developing a promotional strategy through Instagram involves several important stages, including content creation, platform selection, program planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Overall, the effective use of Instagram can increase public awareness of a destination's natural beauty and cultural diversity.

The success of a digital branding strategy on Instagram depends on a strong understanding of the types of content that can enhance audience engagement. In their study published in the *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, Blanco-Moreno, Gonzalez-Fernandez, Munoz-Gallego, and Casalo (2024) found that photos featuring tourist attractions or points of interest generated twice as much engagement as content related to hospitality services. In addition, photos featuring people and uploaded by tourists received greater audience responses. These findings indicate that content strategies emphasizing authentic visual experiences and real traveler-generated content have greater potential to strengthen digital branding engagement than strategies that rely solely on promotional content.

To build the identity of tourist destinations in the digital sphere, digital branding serves as an important foundation. A tourist destination with a strong brand can develop a unique identity, differentiate itself from competitors, and establish distinctive characteristics that attract tourists.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, for tourist destinations that seek to survive and grow in an increasingly competitive environment, the organized and consistent management of social media accounts is essential. With the growing use of social media influencers in tourism marketing, many tourism businesses allocate substantial resources to collaborate with influencers. However, relatively few fully understand how influencers affect travelers' decision-making processes and how external influences shape visitors at each stage of the customer journey, from awareness and information

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<sup>9</sup> Nada Eman and Noha Refaie, "The Effect of Instagram Posts on Tourists' Destination Perception and Visiting Intention," *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 31, no. 2 (2025): 450-452, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667231209514>.

<sup>10</sup> Dave Chaffey and Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, *Digital Marketing*, Eighth edition (Pearson, 2022): 215-220.

search to alternative evaluation and the decision to visit. Studies indicate that Instagram influencer content plays an important role in shaping travelers' perceptions of destinations and increasing their intention to visit.<sup>11</sup>

In line with the increasing influence of Instagram on visitor behavior, many social media users are exposed to posts about tourist destinations that feature appealing travel experiences and iconic landmarks. Research has shown that the source of the content, whether influencers or regular users, and the type of destination presented can influence users' emotions, such as fear of missing out (FOMO) and benign envy, which ultimately contribute to their intention to visit a tourist destination.<sup>12</sup> Studies indicate that influencer posts featuring iconic landmarks have a stronger influence on tourists' intention to visit than posts uploaded by regular users.

Previous studies have examined the role of social media, particularly Instagram, in branding strategies and the promotion of tourism destinations. Nurjayanti and Arifin (2025) found that the application of digital branding through social media in Indonesia can significantly expand promotional reach and strengthen the brand identity of tourist destinations. Furthermore, Hidayah et al. (2025), in a case study of the @visitkarangsambung account, showed that planned and consistent Instagram engagement proved effective in attracting the attention of a wider audience to tourism destination promotion. In addition, Salsabila and Prathisara (2025) demonstrated that the use of Instagram as a promotional platform for rural tourism destinations successfully increased public awareness of previously less-known local tourism potential.

From the perspective of destination branding, Mandagi et al. (2024), through a systematic review of 55 Scopus-indexed articles, identified four main roles of social media marketing in destination branding: enhancing brand value co-creation, influencing brand equity, shaping destination brand identity, and fostering customer engagement and loyalty. Meanwhile, Kurniawan and Prawiro (2024) reinforced these findings by showing that active and collaborative Instagram account management in community-based tourist destinations can increase promotional effectiveness while expanding audience reach.

Although a number of studies have examined tourist destinations in Java and Bali, scholarly studies that specifically discuss Instagram-based digital branding strategies in community-based local tourist destinations in East

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<sup>11</sup> Naser Pourazad et al., "Influencers and the Choice of a Travel Destination: A Customer Journey and Information Processing Perspective," *Information Technology & Tourism* 27, no. 4 (2025): 1188-1189, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-025-00330-6>.

<sup>12</sup> Min Jung Kim and Dae-Young Kim, "Understanding Envy and Fear of Missing out in Travel Posts: The Effects of Instagram Sources and Landmark Types," *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 34 (Desember 2024): 7-9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100959>.

Kalimantan remain limited. Existing studies have not sufficiently addressed the context of emerging tourist destinations that have recently gained national recognition, such as Puncak Steling Samarinda. This research gap highlights the urgency of the present study, which aims to analyze how digital branding strategies are implemented through the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account in promoting Puncak Steling as a leading tourist destination in Samarinda.

One local tourist destination that is relevant to this context is Puncak Steling, also known as Bukit Steling, a newly developed tourist attraction in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. Bukit Steling, located in Sungai Dama Village, Samarinda Ilir District, has been selected as one of the top ten nominees for the 2026 Anugerah Pesona Indonesia (API) Awards. This nomination, which involved approximately 180 destinations from 38 provinces in Indonesia, represents an important momentum for promoting Samarinda's tourism at the national level. From its 117-meter-high peak, visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of the natural landscape, including the Mahakam River that divides the city and the lights of Samarinda at night. These visual and experiential attractions create strong potential for online marketing, particularly through digital promotion strategies such as the use of the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account, which has contributed to bringing Puncak Steling to wider public attention.

The achievement of being nominated for the 2026 API Awards demonstrates that community-based tourism can compete at the national level when it is properly managed and supported by strong digital promotion.<sup>13</sup> However, comprehensive scholarly research on the digital branding strategies used by Instagram account managers, particularly in local tourist destinations in East Kalimantan, remains limited. Given the behavior of modern tourists who rely heavily on online platforms before deciding to visit a destination, the need for effective online promotion has become increasingly evident. Rachmawati and Ismayanti found that tourists' use of Instagram influenced their decision to visit tourist attractions in East Kalimantan. This finding indicates that Instagram functions not only as a medium for disseminating information, but also as a strategic tool that directly influences tourists' interest in visiting these destinations.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Gisela Kurniawan and Johann Prawiro, "Analisis Pengelolaan Media Sosial Instagram Sebagai Media Promosi Kawasan Wisata Bendungan Karian Di Desa Pasir Tanjung, Rangkasbitung," *Jurnal Pariwisata dan Perhotelan* 2, no. 1 (2024): 17, <https://doi.org/10.47134/pjpp.v2i1.3309>.

<sup>14</sup> Safira Rachmawati and Ismayanti, "Pengaruh Media Sosial Instagram Terhadap Keputusan Berkunjung Ke Anjungan Kalimantan Timur (Survei Pada Followers Akun Instagram

On the other hand, Widodo and Aznam found that community-based tourist destinations that have not implemented targeted digital promotion strategies face significant challenges in attracting tourists. Therefore, digital capacity building for community-based destination managers has become an urgent need.<sup>15</sup> Salsabila and Amali also showed that tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis) that implement integrated digital marketing communication strategies can create a positive image of the destination.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, research on digital branding strategies through the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account has academic value and practical benefits for community-based tourism destination managers in East Kalimantan and Indonesia more broadly. Based on this background, the purpose of this study is to analyze and explain the digital branding strategy used to promote Puncak Steling Tourism through the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account.

## B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to comprehensively understand the digital branding strategy implemented by the managers of the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account in promoting Puncak Steling Samarinda Tourism. A qualitative approach was chosen because it emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural context.<sup>17</sup> The research data are presented in a descriptive-narrative manner, prioritizing the interpretation and understanding of the context under study. The descriptive approach is used to describe the actual conditions of the digital branding strategy implemented without manipulating the phenomenon, so that the findings represent the reality as it occurs in the field.<sup>18</sup>

This analysis is supported by Chris Heuer's 4C Social Media Theory, which consists of context, communication, collaboration, and connection. This theory is used to understand the digital branding strategy implemented through Instagram in supporting the promotion of Puncak Steling Samarinda Tourism. It was selected because it is relevant for analyzing communication and branding

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@anjungankaltim)," *Seminar Nasional Pariwisata dan Kewirausahaan (SNPK)* 2 (Mei 2023): 149, <https://doi.org/10.36441/snpk.vol2.2023.111>.

<sup>15</sup> Wahyu Indro Widodo and Azis Fitri Profita Aznam, *Inovasi Paket Wisata dan Strategi Promosi Digital Berbasis Komunitas di Desa Wisata Donokerto, Sleman*, 4, no. 3 (2025): 191.

<sup>16</sup> Chairunisyah Zulfa Salsabila and Muhammad Thoyib Amali, "Strategi Komunikasi Pemasaran Digital Kelompok Sadar Wisata dalam Membranding Pantai Pangasan sebagai Destinasi Wisata Populer," *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education* 6, no. 2 (2025): 857, <https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v6i2.3864>.

<sup>17</sup> Marinu Waruwu, "Pendekatan Penelitian Kualitatif: Konsep, Prosedur, Kelebihan dan Peran di Bidang Pendidikan," *Afeksi: Jurnal Penelitian dan Evaluasi Pendidikan* 5, no. 2 (2024): 200, <https://doi.org/10.59698/afeksi.v5i2.236>.

<sup>18</sup> Marinu Waruwu, "Pendekatan Penelitian Kualitatif," 198.

strategies on social media platforms, particularly in examining how Instagram account managers construct and promote the identity of tourist destinations to the public. The research data consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to explore information in depth while giving informants the opportunity to explain their experiences and the branding strategies used in a flexible yet focused manner.<sup>19</sup> The informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement and knowledge of digital promotion activities related to Puncak Steling Samarinda Tourism.

Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from books, academic journals, official documents, and previous studies related to digital branding strategies.<sup>20</sup> Interviews were conducted with key informants who were selected based on their direct involvement in the digital branding strategy of the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account. The informants included the tourism manager of Puncak Steling Samarinda, the Instagram account manager, and visitors who obtained tourism-related information from Instagram. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of Instagram-based digital branding strategies in promoting Puncak Steling Samarinda Tourism, the collected data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.<sup>21</sup> This model was chosen because it enables the researcher to analyze complex qualitative data systematically and flexibly, thereby producing findings that are credible and scientifically accountable.

### C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings from the tourism manager of Puncak Steling Samarinda indicate that digital promotion of the destination is carried out through various social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. The use of multiple platforms aims to reach different visitor demographics with diverse social media preferences. The social media accounts of Puncak Steling Samarinda, which are mainly managed by local residents, have accumulated more than a thousand followers across various platforms. Members of the destination management team under the Tourism Awareness Group

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<sup>19</sup> Auralia Intan Shalsagiani and Ida Ayu Suryasih, *Analisi Peran Media Sosial Dalam Promosi Pariwisata (Studi pada Akun Instagram @balibirdparkofficial)*, 11, no. 2 (2023): 212-213.

<sup>20</sup> Abdul Muhit, et al., "Strategi Promosi Pariwisata Provinsi Banten melalui Instagram: Analisis Berdasarkan Teori AISAS," *Jurnal Teknologi dan Sains Modern* 1, no. 2 (2024): 55-62, <https://doi.org/10.69930/jtms.v1i2.163>.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew B. Miles, et al., *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (Sage Publications, 2014): 10.

(Pokdarwis) are assigned specific responsibilities in managing these social media accounts. In addition, visitors to Puncak Steling Samarinda actively use social media to disseminate information about the destination. Indirectly, visitors contribute to promotional activities by sharing photos and experiences, including images featuring the city lights of Samarinda, which helps expand promotional reach and increase public awareness of the destination.

Based on the research findings, digital branding through the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account plays an important role in increasing public awareness of Puncak Steling Samarinda as a tourist destination. Instagram functions not only as a medium for disseminating information, but also as a platform for building destination image, interacting with audiences, expanding promotional reach, and maintaining relationships with visitors. The analysis in this study is based on Chris Heuer's 4C Social Media Theory, which consists of context, communication, collaboration, and connection. These four dimensions are used to examine how digital branding strategies are implemented through Instagram to support the promotion of Puncak Steling Samarinda Tourism.

<b>4C Dimension</b>	<b>Practical Implementation</b>
Context	Visual content in the form of video reels, drone videos, city lights, sunsets, and natural panoramas
Communication	Interaction through comments, likes, story views, and the delivery of tourism information
Collaboration	Cooperation with local communities, celebrities, tourism ambassadors, and drone operators
Connection	Visitors re-share their travel experiences through personal social media

Table 1: 4C Dimension Implementation

### **Visual Content as Visitor Attraction**

The research findings indicate that most visitors to Puncak Steling Samarinda became aware of the destination through Instagram. Informants' experiences show that visual content is the main element that attracts visitors. According to Nabila, the initial interest in visiting emerged after viewing Reels and panoramic videos that showcased the city lights of Samarinda at night.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Nabila, *interview*, (May 06, 2026)

Riska and Fajar reported similar experiences, stating that they became interested in visiting the destination after seeing drone videos, sunset scenery, and hillside views uploaded on the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Dinda stated that the visual content presented on Instagram provided a direct impression of the tourism atmosphere, increased curiosity, and encouraged visitors to come in person. These findings suggest that attractive visual content plays an important role in promoting tourist destinations on social media.<sup>24</sup>

Visual content in tourism promotion not only serves to disseminate information, but also helps construct tourist attraction through the presentation of appealing images and videos. The consistent display of natural panoramic beauty has become an important factor in attracting tourists to visit Puncak Steling Samarinda.

### **Instagram-Based Digital Communication Management**

Instagram is used as a promotional and communication medium between the manager and visitors of Puncak Steling Samarinda. Kalamullah, as the manager of the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account, implements three main stages in digital communication management: planning, content design, and communication maintenance. At the planning stage, Kalamullah develops a content plan by considering which types of content are most effective in attracting audience attention. Due to Instagram's ability to disseminate visual content, Kalamullah selected Instagram as the primary platform for promotion. Meanwhile, Facebook, Deesta, and TikTok, which are still in the development stage, are used as supporting platforms.<sup>25</sup> Kalamullah conducts content planning independently as a personal initiative to help promote the destination, particularly because the previous manager was less active on social media.

At the content design stage, Kalamullah produces content in the form of photos, videos, and flyers in a relatively simple format due to limited design skills. To improve promotional content, Kalamullah collaborates with the community, content creators, Samarinda tourism ambassadors, and drone teams that assist in producing and disseminating promotional materials. The main type of content prioritized is Reels videos, which are then reshared through the Story feature. The admin also consistently uploads content every day to keep the account active and maintain audience engagement. At the communication maintenance stage, Kalamullah actively responds to incoming messages and

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<sup>23</sup> Riska and Fajar, *interview*, (May 06, 2026)

<sup>24</sup> Dinda, *interview*, (May 04, 2026)

<sup>25</sup> Lariam, *interview*, (May 02, 2026)

comments to increase engagement and foster visitor trust.<sup>26</sup> This effort is in line with the research of Hidayah et al., which showed that active and responsive Instagram engagement is effective in fostering audience trust in promoted tourist destinations. The communication established is not merely one-way, but interactive, allowing visitors to obtain information quickly while building a closer relationship between destination managers and potential visitors.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 2. Digital Communication Management

### Digital Branding Collaboration

The managers of the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account face various challenges in managing digital content, particularly in terms of video editing, graphic design, and the availability of supporting production equipment.<sup>28</sup> To address these challenges, Kalamullah, as the manager of the Puncak Steling Samarinda Instagram account, collaborates with various parties as part of the implemented digital branding strategy.<sup>29</sup> This collaboration consists of three main forms: collaboration with content creators, collaboration with Samarinda Tourism Ambassadors, and collaboration with the drone community.

First, collaboration with content creators is carried out to expand promotional reach. To help disseminate content about Puncak Steling Samarinda, Kalamullah collaborates with content creators who have large social

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Kalamullah, *interview*, (May 14, 2026)

<sup>27</sup> Hidayah, et al., "Enhancing Tourism Destination Promotion through Strategic Instagram Engagement,": 295.

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Kalamullah, *interview*, (May 14, 2026)

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Kalamullah, *interview*, (May 14, 2026)

media followings. This collaboration is conducted by inviting content creators to visit and document their experiences at Puncak Steling, which are then shared on Instagram and viewed by their respective followers. According to Salsabila and Amali, collaboration with parties who have networks and influence on social media plays an important role in expanding the promotional reach of community-based tourist destinations.<sup>30</sup>

Second, collaboration with the Samarinda Tourism Ambassadors is carried out to strengthen the legitimacy and image of Puncak Steling Samarinda as a tourist destination at the city level. The Samarinda Tourism Ambassadors are involved in promotional activities through content uploads on the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account, which helps increase public trust in the destination. Their involvement has a positive impact on visitors' perceptions by reinforcing the image of Puncak Steling as a credible and officially recognized tourist destination in Samarinda.

Third, collaboration with the drone community is carried out to improve the quality of visual content uploaded on the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account. The drone community assists in producing aerial videos that showcase the panoramic beauty of Puncak Steling Samarinda, including views of the Mahakam River, sunsets, and the city lights of Samarinda. The resulting drone content has become one of the main attractions of the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account and has proved effective in encouraging visitors to come directly to the destination.

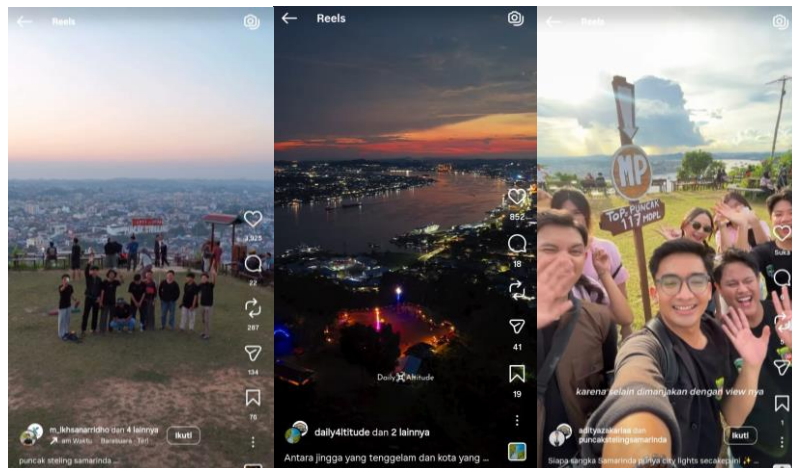


Figure 3. Collaborative Content

<sup>30</sup> Salsabila and Amali, "Strategi Komunikasi Pemasaran Digital Kelompok Sadar Wisata dalam Membranding Pantai Pangasan sebagai Destinasi Wisata Populer," : 858-859.

## Building Visitor Connections and Engagement

Visitors not only receive information, but also engage in the process of tourism promotion. After visiting Puncak Steling Samarinda, many visitors shared photos and videos of their experiences through Instagram stories and other social media by tagging @puncakstelingsamarinda accounts. They do this activity voluntarily as a way to show gratitude for the positive experiences they have had while at the tourist site.<sup>31</sup> By tagging @puncakstelingsamarinda account in a visitor's upload, it indirectly introduces the official account to each visitor's network of followers. This creates an organic connection between the manager and visitors, because every upload that marks the official account introduces Puncak Steling Samarinda to a new audience who did not know the destination before. This phenomenon shows that the relationship between managers and visitors is not only established directly at tourist sites but also continues on the internet through interactions on social media, so that the reach of promotion continues to expand organically.

Overall, the results of the study show that the digital branding strategy on Instagram @puncakstelingsamarinda uses the four dimensions of Chris Heuer's 4C theory, which include *context*, *communication*, *collaboration*, and *connection*. Of the four dimensions, the *context* aspect is the most dominant because the visual quality of the content displayed greatly affects the success of tourism promotion. Meanwhile, the *communication*, *collaboration*, and *connection* dimensions strengthen interactions, expand the reach of promotions, and build sustainable relationships between managers and visitors so as to support the effectiveness of Puncak Steling Samarinda tourism promotion through social media.

## Digital Branding in 4C Dimension of Social Media Theory

**Context.** According to Chris Heuer, the context dimension refers to how messages are delivered and packaged to attract audience attention. In social media, context is determined by content selection, visual design, delivery style, and the ability to create an engaging user experience. The findings of this study indicate that the main strength of the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account lies in its ability to consistently present the visual identity of the destination through content such as drone videos, panoramic views of city lights, sunset scenes, and natural landscapes. These findings support the study of Salsabila and Prathisara (2025), which emphasized that destination managers'

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<sup>31</sup> Jaini Rahman, *interview*, (May 26, 2026)

ability to develop appealing visual content that aligns with audience preferences plays a significant role in tourism promotion through Instagram.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, Ghani and Fadlillah (2024) found that the use of Instagram, when supported by informative and engaging visual content, can increase visitors' interest in tourist destinations.<sup>33</sup> This finding is further reinforced by the systematic review conducted by Zahra et al. (2026), which examined 27 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2015 and 2025 and concluded that photos, videos, and user-generated content are key factors in shaping destination image and influencing tourists' cognitive and affective responses before deciding to visit.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Kalamullah's consistency in uploading visual content every day can be understood as a strategy to build audience expectations and increase their interest in visiting Puncak Steling Samarinda.

Instagram not only serves as a medium for conveying information, but the visual content uploaded by users also helps establish the identity of tourist destinations in the minds of the audience. Puncak Steling Samarinda has a distinctive visual identity that is constructed through photos and videos displaying natural scenery, city lights, and various tourism activities. This indicates that visual content is useful not only for attracting the attention of social media users, but also for creating impressions and memories of the promoted destination. Roostika and Yumma stated that high destination awareness contributes to the formation of a positive destination image and can increase tourists' interest in visiting.<sup>35</sup>

**Communication.** In Chris Heuer's 4C Social Media Theory, communication refers to the process of message delivery and interaction that enables managers to share information with the audience. Effective communication can increase users' trust in the information provided while strengthening the relationship between destination managers and potential

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<sup>32</sup> Zalfa Hana Hayyun Salsabila and Gibbran Prathisara, "Strategi Pemanfaatan Media Sosial Instagram Sebagai Sarana Promosi Destinasi Wisata Desa Pandanrejo," *JKOMDIS : Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Media Sosial* 5, no. 1 (2025): 164, <https://doi.org/10.47233/jkomdis.v5i1.2671>.

<sup>33</sup> Yosef Abdul Ghani and Denaldy Mughni Fadlillah, "Strategi Pengembangan Pemasaran Media Instagram Sebagai Upaya Meningkatkan Kunjungan Wisatawan (Studi Pada Wisata Edukasi Kampung Bamboo)," *Jurnal Pariwisata* 11, no. 2 (2024): 150, <https://doi.org/10.31294/par.v11i2.19983>.

<sup>34</sup> Izzatun Zahra, et al., "Penggunaan Konten Visual Media Sosial dan Keputusan Kunjungan Wisatawan: Tinjauan Sistematis Review," *Jurnal PIKMA : Publikasi Ilmu Komunikasi Media Dan Cinema* 8, no. 2 (2026): 512-513, <https://doi.org/10.24076/pikma.2026v8i2.2511>.

<sup>35</sup> Ratna Roostika and Tasya Putri Yumna, "The influence of destination awareness, destination image, and perceived quality on Indonesian TikTok users' visiting intention," *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy (2687-2293)* 5, no. 1 (2023): 50, <https://doi.org/10.36096/ijbes.v5i1.393>.

visitors. The findings of this study show that the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account functions as a communication tool that helps managers connect with potential tourists through various interactive features. These findings support the study by Kurniawan and Prawiro, which highlights that active social media management can enhance audience engagement and strengthen tourism promotion efforts.<sup>36</sup>

In this study, Kalamullah's quick responses to messages and comments demonstrate the manager's openness toward the audience. Similar findings were reported by Hidayah et al. (2021), who found that destination awareness and audience engagement increase when a well-designed social media strategy is supported by insights and analytics.<sup>37</sup> However, some Instagram accounts of tourist destinations have not successfully optimized this two-way communication. Susanti, Hardi, and Muhardi (2026) found that the Instagram account of Bulu Tanah Pinus Forest had low digital interaction, as reflected in the limited responses to comments and messages. This indicates that two-way communication between managers and audiences has not been optimally implemented, resulting in less effective tourism promotion.<sup>38</sup> Based on this comparison, it can be concluded that the digital communication approach applied through the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account is relatively more effective, as Kalamullah actively and consistently responds to comments and messages, unlike other community-based tourist destinations that have not managed digital interactions optimally.

**Collaboration.** In Chris Heuer's 4C Social Media Theory, collaboration refers to the process of working with various parties to expand the reach of a message. In this study, collaboration is implemented through partnerships with local communities, content creators, drone operators, and other stakeholders who assist in producing and disseminating promotional content. Salsabila and Amali (2025) stated that the success of tourist destination branding is influenced by collaboration with various parties.<sup>39</sup> In addition, Kurniawan and Prawiro

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<sup>36</sup> Kurniawan and Prawiro, "Analisis Pengelolaan Media Sosial Instagram Sebagai Media Promosi Kawasan Wisata Bendungan Karian Di Desa Pasir Tanjung, Rangkasbitung," : 16.

<sup>37</sup> Nurdin Hidayah, et al., "Strategi Pemasaran Media Sosial Destinasi Pariwisata Menggunakan Pendekatan SOSTAC: Studi Kasus Pada Akun Media Sosial Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kab. Lebak, Banten," *Jurnal Kepariwisataaan: Destinasi, Hospitalitas dan Perjalanan* 5, no. 2 (2021): 58, <https://doi.org/10.34013/jk.v5i2.408>.

<sup>38</sup> Nuni Susanti et al., "Peran Media Sosial Instagram Dalam Meningkatkan Kunjungan Wisata Hutan Pinus Bulu Tanah," *JED : Journal Entrepreneurship Digital* 3, no. 1 (2026): 63-64, <https://doi.org/10.36774/jed.v3i1.2375>.

<sup>39</sup> Salsabila and Amali, "Strategi Komunikasi Pemasaran Digital Kelompok Sadar Wisata dalam Membranding Pantai Pangasan sebagai Destinasi Wisata Populer," : 847.

(2024) found that collaboration can improve content quality and expand the reach of tourism promotion.<sup>40</sup>

This finding is further supported by the study of Batubara et al. (2026) on the @janspark.official Instagram account, which applied the same theoretical framework as the present study. Based on the results of multiple linear regression analysis, the collaboration dimension was found to have the strongest influence on visitor interest compared to the dimensions of context, communication, and connection.<sup>41</sup> This can be explained through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which suggests that audiences tend to be more responsive to credible third-party recommendations, such as those from drone communities, tourism ambassadors, and content creators, than to promotional messages delivered directly by account managers.

In addition, Kurniawan and Prawiro (2024) found that collaboration improves content quality and expands the reach of tourism promotion.<sup>42</sup> In this case, collaboration with the drone community directly enhances the quality of visual content, while collaboration with Samarinda Tourism Ambassadors and content creators serves as a source of external credibility that strengthens audience trust in Puncak Steling Samarinda as a tourist destination. Thus, the dominance of collaboration, as found by Batubara et al. (2026), is in line with Kalamullah's strategy. Collaboration with external parties does not merely function as a complementary element, but also serves as an important component that encourages audiences to process promotional messages more positively through the peripheral route, based on the credibility and attractiveness of the source rather than solely on the content itself.

**Connection.** According to Chris Heuer, connection refers to efforts to build sustained relationships with the audience in order to encourage engagement and loyalty. A good relationship between destination managers and visitors enables organic promotion through social media activities in which visitors share their travel experiences. Ghani & Fadillah found that positive experiences shared by tourists on Instagram can attract others to visit a destination.<sup>43</sup> The findings of this study show that visitors to Puncak Steling

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<sup>40</sup> Kurniawan and Prawiro, "Analisis Pengelolaan Media Sosial Instagram Sebagai Media Promosi Kawasan Wisata Bendungan Karian Di Desa Pasir Tanjung, Rangkasbitung," : 19.

<sup>41</sup> Alfindy Selma Serafina Batubara, et al., Pengaruh Konten Media Sosial Instagram @Janspark.Official Terhadap Minat Berkunjung Wisatawan, *Comdent: Communication Student Journal*, 3, no. 2 (2026): 325.

<sup>42</sup> Kurniawan and Prawiro, "Analisis Pengelolaan Media Sosial Instagram Sebagai Media Promosi Kawasan Wisata Bendungan Karian Di Desa Pasir Tanjung, Rangkasbitung," : 19.

<sup>43</sup> Ghani and Fadillah, "Strategi Pengembangan Pemasaran Media Instagram Sebagai Upaya Meningkatkan Kunjungan Wisatawan (Studi Pada Wisata Edukasi Kampung Bamboo)," : 150.

Samarinda voluntarily share their activities and experiences through Instagram Stories and other social media platforms.

The involvement of visitors in sharing their experiences at tourist destinations through social media indicates that tourism promotion is not only carried out by destination managers, but also occurs organically through visitors' participation. These promotional activities take the form of sharing photos and videos of travel experiences through Instagram Stories and other social media platforms. Information provided by other users, such as reviews and recommendations, can significantly influence tourists' confidence and their travel decision-making process.<sup>44</sup> In this study, visitors who voluntarily shared their experiences contributed to the dissemination of information about Puncak Steling Samarinda Tourism to a wider audience.

This phenomenon also shows that the relationship between destination managers and visitors continues through interactions in the digital space, rather than ending at the time of the visit. Kartajaya and Setiawan argue that in the era of digital marketing, audiences are no longer positioned as passive receivers of messages, but as active participants in shaping image and disseminating information about a brand or destination.<sup>45</sup> In this study, visitors to Puncak Steling Samarinda also contributed through various social media activities. This engagement demonstrates an ongoing relationship between managers and users that supports Instagram-based digital branding strategies.

The success of building relationships with visitors is also one of the factors that supports the sustainability of tourist destination promotion on social media. Kartajaya and Setiawan stated that emotional attachment formed through positive experiences can encourage audience loyalty to a brand. In this study, the positive experiences gained by visitors during their visit to Puncak Steling Samarinda encouraged them to share these experiences with other users. This condition indicates that the relationship established between managers and visitors not only generates interaction, but also creates sustainable promotional support for the tourist destination.

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<sup>44</sup> Umberto Martini and Federica Buffa, *Marketing for Sustainable Tourism* (MDPI - Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2020): 121-122.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Kotler, Hermawan Kartajaya, and Iwan Setiawan, *Marketing 4.0: Bergerak dari Tradisional ke Digital* (PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2019): 26-30.

#### D. CONCLUSION

The digital branding strategy implemented through the @puncakstelingsamarinda Instagram account in promoting Puncak Steling Samarinda reflects Chris Heuer's 4C Social Media Theory, which consists of context, communication, collaboration, and connection. Context is realized through visual content such as drone videos and natural panoramas; communication is reflected in the stages of planning, designing, and maintaining interactions by the manager; collaboration is implemented through partnerships with content creators, Samarinda Tourism Ambassadors, and the drone community; and connection is demonstrated through visitors' activities in tagging the official account in their uploads. The findings show that the context dimension emerged as the dominant dimension. This indicates that Instagram can be used effectively by destination managers to build destination image and disseminate information to the public.

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