

# THE UTILIZATION OF DIGITAL INFLUENCERS AS A PROMOTION STRATEGY FOR THE KAYUTANGAN HERITAGE AREA OF MALANG CITY

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## ABSTRACT:

Kayutangan Heritage in Malang City is one of the historical tourist destinations that has great potential to attract tourists, especially millennials and Gen Z who are active on social media. This paper aims to provide a strategy scheme for the manager of Kayutangan Heritage tourist area, to be more active in utilizing the role of digital influencers as part of the strategy to attract tourists, based on the content they share on social media. The purpose of this study is to analyze strategies in establishing relationships with digital influencers in the Kayutangan Heritage area. Using a qualitative approach, this research involved in-depth interviews with influencers, area managers, and tourism industry experts. The results showed that collaboration with digital influencers can increase visibility and build a positive image of the area through creative content that is authentic and relevant to the target audience. The research also revealed that an effective relationship with influencers requires open communication, a deep understanding of each party's values and characteristics, and a clear agreement on goals and expectations. By establishing strong and sustainable relationships, Kayutangan Heritage area can strengthen its appeal and achieve broader promotional goals in today's digital era.

**Keywords:** *Digital Influencers, Kayutangan Heritage, Digital Marketing Strategy*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kayutangan Heritage is a historical tourist area in Malang City, East Java, which is famous for its Dutch colonial-style buildings and has become a leading tourist destination after a revitalization that began in 2019. Along with the development of digital tourism and the increasing use of social media, Kayutangan Heritage has become one of the destinations that attracts the attention of visitors, especially the younger generation who are active on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. This phenomenon has occurred in recent years, especially since 2020, when social media became one of the main means of tourism promotion in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the marketing strategy of tourist destinations has undergone significant changes with a greater focus on digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Digital influencers play an important role in promoting Kayutangan Heritage through creative content that showcases visual appeal and the visiting experience, thereby increasing the visibility and appeal of the area. Engaged influencers generally have followers in the range of tens of thousands to millions, the majority of millennials and Gen Z, with an engagement rate higher than the industry average, which is between 3-7%.

The Kayutangan Heritage area of Malang City, as a historical tourist area with iconic colonial architecture. The region leverages partnerships with digital influencers as a promotional strategy to increase its visibility and appeal. Influencers, who have a significant following base, are often invited or collaborated with area managers to create creative content, such as photos, videos, and short stories that highlight the uniqueness and historical

value of Kayutangan Heritage. Through social media, influencers promote tourist experiences, activities, and interesting photo spots in the area.

There is an urgent need to increase the number of tourist visits after the pandemic while strengthening the image of the region through digital marketing strategies. Area managers recognize the great potential of collaboration with influencers as a way to reach a wider and relevant audience, especially those who have an interest in historical tourism and authentic local experiences. However, the challenges that arise include selecting the right influencers, setting clear expectations, and trying to build mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships.

Data from the Malang City Tourism Office shows that after several collaborative campaigns with influencers in 2021, there was an increase in visits by 15%, and around 60% of visitors learned about the area through social media. Area managers also report that collaborations with influencers contribute around 20-30% to total traffic on social media. However, the challenges faced include maintaining the authenticity of the content created by influencers to keep in line with the region's heritage values, as well as managing expectations between influencers and related managers.

Great opportunities can be seen through the use of influencers, long-term collaborations, and content diversification to expand audience reach. This strategy has not only succeeded in raising public awareness of Kayutangan Heritage as a cultural and historical tourism destination, but also encouraged an increase in economic activity in the area, such as in cafes, souvenir shops, and local traders. In addition, another positive impact is the increase in ratings and reviews of this destination on various tourism platforms, from an average of 4.0 to higher.

The use of digital influencers as a third party in tourism promotion strategies makes them an important element in the communication process. As a communicator, the manager of the Kayutangan Heritage area plays a role in conveying a message about the attractiveness and uniqueness of the area to the community. The message conveyed includes information about historical value, interesting activities, and the experience of visiting Kayutangan Heritage, which is then packaged by digital influencers in the form of creative content to reach a wider audience.

The media used are social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which are very popular among millennials and Gen Z. In this context, digital influencers function as intermediaries or linkages between area managers and target audiences, namely influencer followers on social media. The communicators in this communication process are social media users who are exposed to Kayutangan Heritage promotional content. The expected effect of this communication is an increase in awareness and interest in Kayutangan Heritage as a tourist destination, which is measured through increased direct visits, interaction on social media, and economic impact on the Kayutangan Heritage area. In addition, the expected long-term effect is the formation of a positive image and increased branding of the heritage area as a cultural tourism destination in Malang City.

The discussion on building relationships with digital influencers in the Kayutangan Heritage area reflects the new dynamics in marketing and communication strategies of tourism in the digital era. In this context, digital influencers are not just promotional intermediaries, but also agents of change who are able to shape public perception and influence travelers' decisions through the content they create. The study offers insights into how communication between destination managers and influencers can have a significant effect in building the image and increasing the attractiveness of a tourist area.

Effective communication between destination managers and influencers allows for a more targeted and structured message to the audience. In this collaboration, destination managers can provide in-depth information about the value, uniqueness, and attractiveness of tourist areas, which are then translated by influencers into relevant and interesting creative content for followers on social media. Good communication between destination managers and influencers is not only about conveying information, but also about creating mutually supportive collaborations to build a positive and attractive destination image. By leveraging influencers' trust and reach, as well as integrating effective communication strategies, tourism area managers can significantly increase the attractiveness of their destinations in the eyes of tourists, especially in the increasingly competitive digital era.

Interestingly, collaboration with digital influencers encompasses various aspects of communication, such as the selection of relevant messages, the use of appropriate media, and strategies for reaching appropriate audiences. This analysis also provides an opportunity to explore the concept of persuasive communication and the role of social media in shaping public opinion. In addition, this study can explore how communication elements, such as the credibility of the source (influencer), message appeal, and interactivity on social media, affect the success of marketing promotions in tourist destinations. By observing the real impact of this

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collaboration on the increase in the number of visits and the image of the region, further research can strengthen the theory of marketing communication while providing practical guidance for tourist destination managers in designing more effective and sustainable communication strategies in the digital era.

The phenomenon that occurs is that influencers are present and create content without a manager's request, or influencers are free to create content without being given a specific theme, so the results of published content are less than optimal. The lack of good use of influencers makes the Kayutangan Heritage Area only known in a few corners, so other areas in Kayutangan Heritage are not widely known to visitors. This research has relevance in the development of communication theories and concepts, especially those related to the role of social media and influencers in shaping promotional strategies.

Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this study aims to find out how to use digital influencers in the promotion strategy of the Kayutangan Heritage Area. By analyzing and identifying effective promotion strategies in developing heritage tourism areas. One of the communication theories related to this phenomenon is persuasive communication theory, which is the foundation for understanding how messages are conveyed effectively through influencers. Persuasive Communication Theory explains how messages are designed and delivered to influence audience attitudes, beliefs, and actions. In this context, digital influencers function as communicators who use credibility, attractiveness, and emotional connection with the audience to influence the perception and interest in the Kayutangan Heritage tourist area. This analysis can explore how factors such as influencer credibility, message appeal, and social media selection become effective promotional strategies.

Several relevant researches related to the phenomenon of using digital influencers in marketing tourist destinations show the importance of the role of influencers in influencing tourist travel decisions. The first research is entitled "*The Role of Social Media Influencers in Travel Decision-Making: The Perspectives of Millennial Tourists*" by Nurhayati and Rahmawati (2021) found that digital influencers have a significant influence on the travel decisions of millennial tourists. Influencers are considered able to build trust through relevant content and recommendations that are more trusted than conventional advertising because they are considered more trustworthy. Social media such as Instagram and YouTube have become the main platforms where influencers convey a message. This research was published in the Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management.

The second research is titled "*Influencer Marketing in Tourism: Impact of Social Media Influencers on Destination Perception and Intentions to Visit*" by Smith and Gonzales (2020) examines how digital influencers influence travelers' perceptions and intentions to visit through content on social media. on social media. The study found that the quality of content presented by influencers, including visual aesthetics and narrative of the experience, significantly influenced destination perceptions. The importance of collaboration with influencers as part of a destination's marketing communications strategy Tourism. Engagement rates and active interactions between influencers and their followers were also found to increase the intention to visit a tourist destination. Findings from this research were published in the Journal of Marketing Research in Tourism.

Meanwhile, this research focuses on the use of influencers for the digital promotion of Kayutangan Heritage in Malang City, a historical tourist destination that stands out with the uniqueness of colonial architecture and the latest revitalization results. The study explores how digital influencers can be leveraged to promote the region, highlighting collaboration strategies and the use of social media as a specific promotional platform. In addition, this study also discusses the role of influencers in creating relevant content messages and the use of social media so that it is more segmented. It is hoped that this research can provide recommendations for destination managers in designing marketing strategies based on social media.

## 2. METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation methods that are the basis for measuring the use of digital influencers on the success of promotions and tourist visit intentions to Kayutangan Heritage. This approach allows analysis of the collected data to identify patterns and influences on content exposure. In this study, primary data was obtained from the research objects, including informants who included heritage wood managers, counter guards, business owners, tourists, and influencers.

According to Nana Syaodih Sukmadinata (2017), descriptive research is a type of research used to describe or explain something, such as activities, characteristics, a change, relationship patterns, similarities, and differences between natural or human-made things. Qualitative descriptive methods are research and understanding processes based on methodology to investigate a social phenomenon and human problems. In this approach, researchers can create a complex picture, examine words, detailed reports from respondents' views and conduct studies on natural situations (Cresweel, 2008). Descriptive qualitative research is used as one

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of the approaches in qualitative research that aims to provide an in-depth and detailed picture of a particular phenomenon, without manipulating or changing the variables being studied. This approach focuses on describing, understanding, and explaining phenomena based on data obtained from the natural environment. In this study, the researcher plays the role of the main instrument in collecting data, using methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis.

In collecting the necessary data, the author uses several methods, namely: observation, interviews, and documentation. The observations made in this observation were made on the digital promotion strategy of the Kayutangan Heritage Area. In-depth interviews are conducted to complete the data and efforts to obtain accurate power and the right data sources. In this study, the author has several informants. As the source of the interview in this study are the Chairman of the Kayutangan Heritage Pokdarwis Mrs. Milawati, Mrs. Sulik as the keeper of the Kayutangan Heritage Village, Mr. Adit as one of the owners of the café in the Kayutangan Tourism Village, Didit Pramono as an Influencer, and Mrs. Diana and Mr. Kevin as visitors. Documentation in this study is needed to sharpen research analysis related to the use of communication media in the development of Kayutangan heritage tourism.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The area that is included in Kauman Village, Klojen District is an old village in Malang City, this village has existed since the 13th century The potential wealth of Kampoeng Heritage Kajoetangan began to be realized by the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) which then tried to develop Kampoeng Kayutangan, which is considered to be able to attract tourists. The efforts made, Pokdarwis finally yielded results, as evidenced by the designation of Kampoeng Heritage Kajoetangan by the Malang City Government as a cultural heritage area on April 22, 2018 with many of its relics with nuances of the past.

Marketing through mass media has been driven since the Kayutangan Heritage tourist area was inaugurated by the government. However, the news did not show significant results. Managers then began to look at the use of influencers in 2021, considering that Indonesian people like to use social media as a source of information. The concept of tourism development by collaborating with dozens of influencers is expected to be a trigger to further develop the potentials of tourist locations.

Table 1 Data on Social Media Users in Indonesia

No	Year	Number of Users in Billions
1	2022	4,53
2	2023	4,76
3	2024	5,31

Source : Statistika Kata Data.co.id

#### 3.1 Digital Marketing Effectiveness

Increasing the visibility and attractiveness of Kayutangan Heritage through collaboration with digital influencers is one of the prominent strategies. Compared to traditional marketing methods through brochures or mass media reports, the content created by influencers tends to be more personal and authentic, making it more relevant to audiences, especially millennials and Gen Z. Influencers can convey direct experiences, such as travel stories in the form of short videos or photos, which highlight the beauty, uniqueness, and uniqueness of the region. The chairperson of the Kayutangan Heritage pokdarwis, Mila Dewanti, said that strengthening the understanding of influencers about the mapping of the five potentials in the Kayutangan Heritage Area is something that should be celebrated. She said,

*"influencers must really know about the division of five areas in the heritage area, namely tourism of old and historical buildings, tourism of religious sites, then culinary and trade areas, the four areas along the river, and the five event or activity posts, so that each part can be explored properly, according to our mission."* (Mila Dewanti, informant)

In the results of the interview, it was found that the effectiveness of marketing through digital influencers is highly dependent on several important factors. First, the quality of the content produced by influencers. Content that is creative, interesting, and relevant to the audience will be more effective in building a positive image of the tourist area. Second, the level of interaction between influencers and their followers. Influencers who actively interact with their audience, such as replying to comments or answering questions, tend to have stronger relationships with their followers, which can ultimately increase trust in the message being conveyed.

Table 2 Visitor Data of Kayoetangan Heritage Village

No	Year	Number of Visitors
1	2022	48.270
2	2023	52.654
3	2024	151.194

Source: Pokdarwis Archives, 2024

Based on the table above, according to Mila, the figure is based on visits in the village, not those in the Kayutangan corridor or heritage sidewalks. Because in this case, the Heritage Village Pokdarwis only manages visits that are in the village. "We only manage those who enter the village. And the number of visitors is in accordance with the tickets at the entrance", she said. Digital influencers play an important role in shaping the perception and intention of tourists to visit tourist destinations through content shared on social media. As one of the influencers of Malang City, Didit Pramono said, "The content produced by influencers, such as attractive visual aesthetics and narratives of personal experiences, is of interest to netizen. I think followers are happier if the video has a dubbed narration, than just music."

The use of influencers with authentic and non-marketable content results is considered more effective in building relationships with audiences. The characteristics of the millennial and gen Z genes who prefer to see and hear, in accordance with Instagram and TikTok social media content that highlight audio-visual results. The content will look real if delivered with a slick narrative by influencers, ultimately influencing tourists' decisions to visit and promoting the Kayutangan Heritage tourist area to be more optimal.

### 3.2 Collaboration Strategy

Collaboration with digital influencers is an important part of the marketing communication strategy of a tourist area. Seeing the location of Kampung Kayutangan which is in the middle of Malang City which has three or more entrances including Jalan Basuki Rahmad, Jalan Semeru and Talun, it will give rise to economic activity in it. There are three collaboration strategies as a means of promotion to support these activities. Collaboration strategies that have been carried out by the Kayutangan Heritage manager with influencers include:

#### 1. Influencer selection

Collaborating with an influencer cannot be done carelessly, it requires selectivity by the manager of the Kayutangan Heritage tourist area in choosing influencers to work with. The selection of influencers should be based on credibility, relevance to heritage tourism themes, interaction with audiences, and suitability of target audience characteristics. Additionally, it is important to design a clear and measurable marketing pattern, by agreeing on goals and expectations between the destination manager and the influencer.

Features on social media that allow collaboration between accounts are also something that should be taken into account in attracting audiences. The use of collaboration with credible influencers can produce an optimal impact, both in increasing the number of tourist visits and in building a positive image of heritage tourist destinations that continue to be developed.

#### 2. Directed and Structured Communication

The communication that is built is carried out even before the influencer is present at the location to be promoted. Understanding what the manager will for what influencers must do, is the first step that must be taken. The SOW (Statement of Work) must be prepared and explained by the tourist area manager first. SOW serves as a guide that explains just about anything must be done, as well as ensuring that each party involved has the same expectations and goals.

Some of the things that must be in SOW include: the type of content that must be created, the posting schedule, the way influencers share their direct experiences such as visiting certain locations or tasting local cuisine, the hashtags used, the captions that must be present, and various other things that are needed to create a positive image of the destination and motivate followers to visit the place.

#### 3. Sustainable Relationships

The success of marketing strategies involving digital influencers also requires periodic evaluation. Tourist destination managers can monitor the results of digital promotions such as social media engagement, the number of tourist visits, and feedback from the audience. The sustainable relationship between pokdarwis as the manager of the Kayutangan Heritage tourist area, is the third strategy in the use of this influencer.

Discussing with each other to face emerging challenges, exchanging information about changes in trends or audience needs, to providing input related to audience responses, is carried out by managers and influencers. By building strong and sustainable relationships with influencers, Kayutangan Heritage can continue to increase its appeal as a leading tourist destination and achieve broader promotional goals in the digital era.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the importance of the role of digital influencers in marketing tourist destinations, especially the Kayutangan Heritage area. The results of the study show that the content produced by digital influencers has a significant impact on the perception and intention of tourists to visit. Influencers who have a level of credibility and authentic content are highly attractive, thereby increasing the interest of tourists to visit heritage tourist areas. In addition, this study also revealed that the effectiveness of digital influencers is influenced by several factors, one of which is the level of interaction between influencers and their followers. Therefore, tourist destination managers need to be selective in choosing influencers and designing marketing content that suits the characteristics of the target audience. However, to implement it properly, thorough planning, management, and evaluation are needed so that each influencer can make maximum contribution to the goals of digital marketing promotion.

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