

Research article

Strengthening community interaction and sustainable tourism through digital marketing

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of digital marketing engagement (DME) in advancing sustainable tourism outcomes in Indonesian tourist villages, focusing on its influence on perceived usefulness (PU), community interaction (CI), experience quality (EQ), and sustainable value creation (SVC). Drawing upon theories of digital engagement, smart tourism, and value co-creation, a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was applied to data collected from 585 valid respondents. The findings reveal that DME significantly enhances PU and CI, both of which serve as key mediators in improving EQ and driving SVC. Notably, CI plays a dual role as both an outcome of digital engagement and a contributor to experiential and sustainability outcomes, highlighting its centrality in digitally mediated rural tourism. The study advances theoretical perspectives by reframing digital marketing as an enabler of participatory governance and co-created value, rather than a mere promotional tool. For practitioners and policymakers, the research provides evidence-based guidance on designing inclusive digital strategies that strengthen destination competitiveness while preserving cultural integrity and empowering local communities. The results emphasize the potential of community-centered digital transformation to bridge technological innovation with authentic, resilient, and sustainable rural tourism development.

KEYWORDS

Digital marketing engagement; community interaction; tourist villages; sustainable tourism; smart tourism

Introduction

Tourism in rural contexts, particularly in tourist villages, has undergone a significant transformation driven by digital technologies. Digital marketing, once primarily a tool for destination promotion, has evolved into a multidimensional mechanism for engagement, enabling storytelling, participatory branding, and real-time interaction between tourists and host communities (Cheng et al., 2023; Goeltom et al., 2023; Santarsiero et al., 2024). When integrated with local cultural heritage, participatory governance, and community capacity-building, digital marketing can enhance destination image, improve experiential quality, and support inclusive and sustainable rural development (Dita, 2025; Maulana et al., 2025; Rosalia et al., 2024; Yanti et al., 2023). However, the realisation of these outcomes remains contingent on critical enabling conditions, such as digital infrastructure, digital literacy, and institutional support—especially in resource-constrained settings where community participation is often limited (Geohansa et al., 2025; Ginanjar, 2024; Kusumastuti et al., 2024). Empirical evidence from Indonesian tourist villages underscores the transformative potential of community-based digital marketing initiatives, which, when designed with inclusive intent and local agency, can foster authentic engagement and generate sustainable tourism value (Indainanto et al., 2024; Mahbub et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024). However, many tourist villages struggle to move beyond superficial engagement, failing to translate digital visibility into genuine dialogue, co-creation, and long-term benefit for local communities. While digital tools such as e-commerce platforms, social media, and AI-enabled

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personalisation offer avenues for co-creative processes and transparent governance (Costa et al., 2025; Kumari & Thakur, 2023; Susanto et al., 2025; Tarasiuk, 2025), their potential is often underutilised due to misalignment with local contexts and a lack of strategic design. Effective platforms must foster personalization, transparency, and real-time responsiveness to empower local communities and build trust (Adityaji et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2025).

A growing body of literature identifies experiential quality and perceived usefulness as key mediators linking digital marketing to sustainable tourism outcomes (Chou et al., 2025; Goeltom & Hurriyati, 2024; Simangunsong et al., 2025). When embedded within community branding and governance strategies, digital marketing not only drives visitation but also enhances loyalty, encourages authentic storytelling, and supports repeat engagement. As such, digital strategies must move beyond transactional metrics to emphasize community-driven content creation, skill development, and governance models that reinforce cultural identity and ecological stewardship (Khusaini et al., 2024; Kusumastuti et al., 2024; Maulana et al., 2025; Pamungkas et al., 2023; Santoso et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach to examine the interrelationships among digital marketing engagement, perceived usefulness, community interaction, experience quality, and sustainable value creation in the context of Indonesian tourist villages. Anchored in theories of digital engagement, smart tourism, and value co-creation, the proposed model seeks to capture the interplay between technological and social dynamics in rural tourism development. By focusing on destinations where resources are constrained but cultural assets are abundant, the study offers empirical insights into how digital strategies can be localized, humanized, and designed to enable inclusive and sustainable tourism futures. Ultimately, the research contributes to ongoing efforts to reposition digital marketing as a governance-oriented platform, one that supports community empowerment, participatory co-creation, and long-term sustainability. The findings are expected to inform tourism stakeholders, local governments, and rural communities on how to design and implement digital strategies that align with local values, engage visitors meaningfully, and deliver durable benefits for host destinations.

Literature review

Digital marketing engagement and perceived usefulness

Digital marketing engagement (DME) in tourism is no longer limited to passive exposure to advertisements; it now encompasses interactive processes in which tourists actively seek, share, and respond to destination-related content. In the context of tourist villages, DME often involves engaging with storytelling-based social media campaigns, local influencer content, digital brochures, or community-generated narratives through various platforms (Satya et al., 2023; Sulistiani & Syarifuddin, 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). These interactions provide tourists with early impressions of a destination's character, authenticity, and uniqueness, often before any physical contact. Research in digital tourism suggests that such engagements can reduce uncertainty, shape expectations, and improve planning efficacy, particularly in rural destinations with limited offline exposure (Abdurokhim & Guterres, 2023; Cheng et al., 2023; Pamungkas et al., 2023). However, not all forms of digital engagement translate into perceived usefulness. The quality, credibility, and relevance of content, especially in under-resourced tourist villages remain critical mediating factors. If digital materials are overly generic, lack cultural depth, or fail to address user needs, engagement may remain superficial and fail to deliver meaningful value. Several studies have shown that perceived usefulness increases when digital content is hyper-localized, culturally embedded, and emotionally resonant (Kumari & Thakur, 2023; Maulana et al., 2025). Therefore, the relationship between digital marketing engagement and perceived usefulness is not automatic but contingent upon the degree to which engagement leads to cognitive and affective relevance for tourists. Establishing this link is essential for destinations seeking to convert digital reach into behavioral intention and experiential impact.

H1: Digital Marketing Engagement positively influences Perceived Usefulness

Digital marketing engagement and community interaction

In tourist villages, community interaction is central to delivering authentic, immersive, and socially meaningful tourism experiences. Traditionally, such interaction was fostered through in-person contact guided tours, cultural performances, or informal exchanges. However, digital marketing has expanded the space for these interactions to occur before physical arrival, allowing tourists to connect with local stories, cultural products, and community voices via online platforms. Through storytelling videos, social media posts by local actors, and virtual community events, digital marketing enables tourists to develop parasocial relationships with the host community an important precursor to real-world engagement (Isnaeni & Yucha, 2025; Susanto, 2023). As digital engagement increases, so do opportunities for dialogic communication,

curiosity about local life, and emotional investment in the destination's social fabric (Prawira et al., 2025; Rosalia et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the extent to which digital engagement fosters genuine community interaction depends on the design logic and narrative structure of the digital content. Passive or top-down promotional content that centres solely on facilities or scenic attractions may fail to reflect community life or cultural context, thereby limiting its relational value. In contrast, co-created content that includes community voices, local dialects, and everyday realities tends to foster stronger social connections and greater interest in community interaction. Studies have shown that tourists are more likely to seek interaction with locals when the content they engage with online reflects the lived experiences and identities of real community members (Kumari & Thakur, 2023; Satya et al., 2023). Thus, effective digital marketing engagement can serve as a relational bridge—connecting digital exposure with social interaction on the ground.

H2: Digital Marketing Engagement positively influences Community Interaction

Perceived usefulness and community interaction

Perceived usefulness plays a pivotal role in shaping how tourists engage with destinations, particularly in rural and village-based tourism, where information asymmetry and uncertainty are often high. When tourists perceive digital marketing content as useful because it provides accurate information, cultural insights, and relevant guidance they develop stronger cognitive readiness to interact with the local community upon arrival. Useful digital content does more than facilitate planning; it shapes tourists' expectations, enhances their familiarity with local norms, and reduces social barriers that typically inhibit visitor–resident interaction (Goeltom & Hurriyati, 2024; Setiawan et al., 2025). In this way, perceived usefulness operates as a psychological enabler, converting digital impressions into socially grounded intentions, positioning community interaction not as a spontaneous occurrence but as a cognitively prepared behaviour. However, the relationship between perceived usefulness and community interaction is neither automatic nor uniform. The critical determinant lies in the type of usefulness perceived. Information that is merely functional—such as maps or schedules may facilitate logistical decisions but does not inherently motivate cultural or social engagement. Conversely, content that conveys deeper cultural meaning, local stories, ethical practices, or social norms provides interpretive frameworks that encourage tourists to interact respectfully and meaningfully with community members (Adityaji et al., 2025; Herawati & Suhendra, 2025). This distinction suggests that perceived usefulness becomes socially consequential only when the content supports cultural understanding and enhances visitors' confidence to interact with residents. Hence, perceived usefulness can catalyze community interaction when embedded in culturally rich, community-centred digital narratives.

H3: Perceived Usefulness has a positive influence on Community Interaction

Perceived usefulness, community interaction, and experience quality

Tourist experience quality is shaped not only by service delivery but by the visitor's psychological engagement, emotional resonance, and social connectedness during their journey. In this context, perceived usefulness functions as a cognitive foundation that enables tourists to navigate and interpret the destination more effectively. When digital content is perceived as useful whether by providing cultural knowledge, ethical guidance, or tailored recommendations it elevates the visitor's sense of preparedness and relevance, which, in turn, enhances satisfaction and reduces uncertainty (Chou et al., 2025; Simangunsong et al., 2025). Particularly in tourist villages, where unfamiliarity with local customs and environments can create hesitation, high perceived usefulness empowers tourists to feel more confident, informed, and aligned with the destination, directly improving the subjective quality of their experience. However, cognitive preparedness alone is insufficient. Authentic interaction with local communities adds the emotional and relational layers that make an experience truly meaningful. Community interaction introduces unplanned, personalized, and socially embedded encounters whether through conversations, participatory activities, or spontaneous hospitality which deepen tourists' emotional engagement and cultural understanding (Khusaini et al., 2024; Kusumastuti et al., 2024). Such interactions humanize the destination, create memorable moments, and often redefine tourists' perceptions beyond initial expectations shaped by digital media. Therefore, while perceived usefulness primes the experience cognitively, community interaction enriches it affectively and socially. These dual pathways suggest that both variables independently and complementarily contribute to experience quality in village-based tourism.

H4: Perceived Usefulness has a positive influence on Experience Quality

H5: Community Interaction positively influences Experience Quality

Community interaction, experience quality, and sustainable value creation

Sustainable value creation in tourism, particularly in rural settings, is increasingly understood as the result of mutually beneficial exchanges between tourists and host communities. Community interaction plays a foundational role in this process by fostering shared understanding, cultural respect, and social capital. When tourists interact meaningfully with residents through conversation, collaboration, or participation they are more likely to appreciate the community's values, support local livelihoods, and become advocates for the destination (Khusaini et al., 2024; Kusumastuti et al., 2024). These interactions can generate trust, mutual learning, and inclusive development, which are essential for building tourism models that go beyond economic gain to encompass cultural preservation and social cohesion (Maulana et al., 2025; Santoso et al., 2025). Experience quality further amplifies the sustainability potential of rural tourism. Tourists who enjoy authentic, emotionally resonant, and personalized experiences tend to develop a deeper attachment to the place, which often translates into behaviors that support long-term sustainability such as repeat visitation, positive word of mouth, ethical consumption, and support for conservation efforts (Chou et al., 2025; Nugraha et al., 2025). High-quality experiences create not only satisfaction but also a sense of responsibility toward the destination, especially when rooted in cultural authenticity and community engagement. Therefore, sustainable value creation is not merely a policy objective it is an emergent outcome of socially connected, experientially rich tourism practices facilitated by community interaction and experiential quality.

H6: Community Interaction positively influences Sustainable Value Creation

H7: Experience Quality has a positive influence on Sustainable Value Creation

Conceptual framework

This study proposes a structural model that explains how digital marketing engagement (DME) in tourist villages influences sustainable value creation (SVC) through mediating constructs: perceived usefulness (PU), community interaction (CI), and experience quality (EQ). As shown in Figure 1, the model integrates cognitive, social, and experiential dimensions to explain how digital engagement translates into sustainable tourism outcomes.

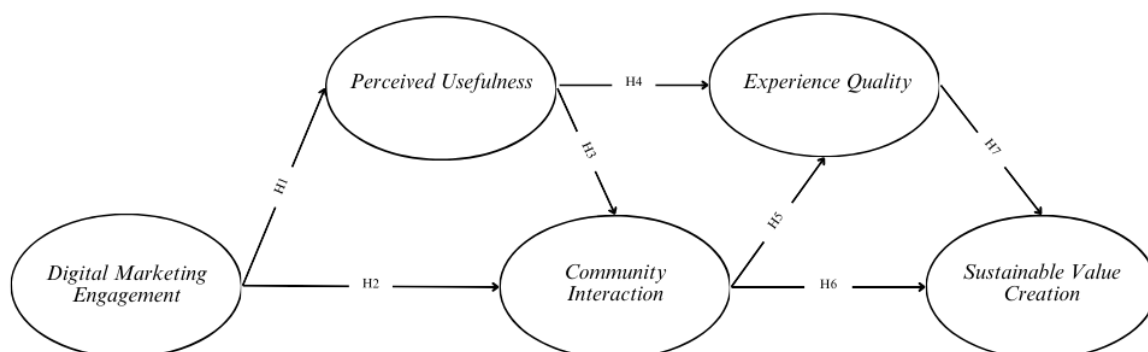


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Source: Research data (2025)

Digital marketing engagement is hypothesized to influence perceived usefulness (H1) and community interaction (H2), as active engagement with digital content enhances tourists' confidence and familiarity with the destination. Perceived usefulness, in turn, strengthens both community interaction (H3) and experience quality (H4), as tourists find the information relevant and applicable to their on-site experience. Community interaction also plays a key role in enhancing experience quality (H5), as social and cultural encounters add emotional depth and authenticity to the visit. Finally, both community interaction (H6) and experience quality (H7) are expected to contribute significantly to sustainable value creation by reinforcing local engagement, encouraging responsible behavior, and supporting long-term destination competitiveness. This multidimensional model offers a framework to understand how digital strategies can foster not only visitor satisfaction but also inclusive and sustainable development in rural tourism contexts.

Methods

This study adopts a quantitative, explanatory research design using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the causal relationships among digital marketing engagement (DME), perceived usefulness (PU), community interaction (CI), experience quality (EQ), and sustainable value creation (SVC). The SEM

approach is chosen for its capacity to simultaneously assess multiple latent constructs and test both direct and indirect effects, aligning with the complexity of the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1). The target population comprises tourists who have visited Indonesian tourist villages within the past 12 months and have interacted with digital marketing content before or during their trip. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure the representativeness of the respondents, focusing on individuals who engaged with destination-related digital platforms (e.g., social media, travel websites, mobile apps). To meet SEM adequacy criteria and ensure statistical power, a minimum sample size of 200 was targeted, based on 10 times the number of indicators in the most complex construct (Hair et al., 2021). The final dataset consisted of 585 valid responses after screening and cleaning for missing values and response bias.

All constructs in this study were operationalized using multi-item reflective indicators adapted from validated instruments in prior literature and contextualized for the rural tourism and digital marketing settings in Indonesia. Responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Digital Marketing Engagement (DME) indicators were adapted from interactive destination marketing and digital engagement studies (Pamungkas et al., 2023; Satya et al., 2023; Sulistian & Syarifuddin, 2024). This construct measures the extent to which tourists engage with digital content related to tourist villages. Perceived Usefulness (PU) was based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and digital behavior research in tourism (Davis, 1989; Goeltom & Hurriyati, 2024; Setiawan et al., 2025). It captures tourists' perception of the relevance and utility of digital content in enhancing their travel planning and decision-making. Community Interaction (CI) refers to tourists' engagement with residents, grounded in community-based tourism and co-creation frameworks (Herawati & Suhendra, 2025; Kusumastuti et al., 2024; Maulana et al., 2025). Experience Quality (EQ) was measured using the affective, cognitive, and relational dimensions of tourism experience (Chou et al., 2025; Nugraha et al., 2025; Simangunsong et al., 2025), focusing on meaningfulness, memorability, and emotional satisfaction. Sustainable Value Creation (SVC) indicators were adapted from literature on sustainability, community benefit, and inclusive development in rural tourism (Jumadi, 2025; Khusaini et al., 2024; Pamungkas et al., 2023; Santoso et al., 2025). The construct captures how visitors perceive their role in contributing to long-term social, cultural, and economic sustainability.

All measurement items were pre-tested with experts in tourism and digital marketing for content validity and linguistic clarity. A pilot test with 30 respondents was also conducted to refine wording and ensure internal consistency. To ensure data quality and relevance, respondents were screened using the following criteria: 1) Have you visited a tourist village in Indonesia within the past 12 months?; 2) Did you engage with any digital content about the village (e.g., Instagram, website, online reviews)?; 3) Did you interact with local communities during your visit (e.g., guides, artisans, homestay owners)? Only respondents who answered "Yes" to the first two questions proceeded to the full questionnaire. Data were collected via an online self-administered survey over 4 weeks in 2025. The survey link was disseminated through travel forums, social media tourism groups, and partner networks of community-based tourism organizations. The survey was available in both Bahasa Indonesia and English to accommodate a broader respondent base. Before proceeding, respondents were presented with an informed consent form, and anonymity was ensured. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided.

The collected data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), implemented via SmartPLS 4.0 software. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for exploring complex models involving both direct and mediating relationships among latent variables, particularly in exploratory research settings and with moderate sample sizes. The analysis followed a two-stage approach comprising the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). In the first stage, the measurement model was assessed to ensure the reliability and validity of all latent constructs. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), with a threshold of 0.70 indicating acceptable reliability. Convergent validity was confirmed by examining the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where values above 0.50 were considered adequate. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) to ensure that constructs were empirically distinct. The second stage focused on evaluating the structural model to test the hypothesised relationships among constructs. This involved estimating path coefficients (β) and determining their statistical significance using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. The model's explanatory power was examined through the coefficient of determination (R^2) for each endogenous construct. In addition, effect sizes (f^2) were calculated to evaluate the impact of individual predictors, while predictive relevance (Q^2) was assessed using blindfolding procedures. A mediation analysis was also conducted to examine the indirect effects of digital marketing engagement on sustainable value creation through perceived usefulness, community interaction, and experience quality. All hypothesis tests were conducted at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$), providing robust statistical validation of the proposed conceptual framework.

Results

Respondent profiles

Out of the 736 total responses collected, 585 valid responses were retained for analysis. The demographic profile represents a digitally active, demographically diverse group of domestic tourists who have visited Indonesian tourist villages. Gender-wise, the sample comprised 57.4% female and 42.6% male respondents. In terms of age, the majority fell into the 18–24 age group (75.7%), followed by the 25–34 age group (13.5%), indicating a predominantly young, digitally literate segment. Regarding education, most participants held either a diploma (39%) or an undergraduate degree (27.7%), with 24.3% having completed senior high school, suggesting a fairly educated population capable of engaging meaningfully with digital content. In terms of occupation, 66.7% were students, followed by civil servants (9.6%) and private sector employees (8.4%), reflecting varying levels of digital engagement and income. Travel frequency shows that 42.2% of respondents travel 2–3 times annually, while 18.3% reported travelling more than five times a year, indicating relatively high tourism activity. Monthly income revealed that 61.7% earned less than IDR 2,000,000, consistent with the student-dominated demographic. However, this group remains actively engaged in digital platforms for travel information and planning. In terms of tourism preferences, 52.3% favoured nature-based tourism, followed by culinary (20.6%) and relaxation tourism (13.4%), aligning well with the offerings of many Indonesian tourist villages. Regarding regional distribution, the majority of respondents originated from Java Island (58.5%), followed by Sulawesi and Maluku (15.3%), Sumatra (13.8%), and Bali and Nusa Tenggara (approx. 5%), with smaller percentages from Kalimantan and Papua. This geographic spread illustrates wide national representation and affirms the relevance of studying digitally mediated rural tourism across Indonesia's diverse island groups.

Measurement model evaluation

The measurement model was assessed to ensure that the indicators used to measure each latent construct were valid and reliable. Following the PLS-SEM procedure (Hair et al., 2021), this evaluation included indicator reliability (outer loadings), internal consistency, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and collinearity diagnostics. Indicator reliability was assessed by examining the item loadings. A threshold of 0.70 was used to determine acceptable reliability. Four items—DME2, DME4, EQ1, and PU1—were removed due to low loadings (< 0.70), as their inclusion could compromise the model's reliability. Table 1 presents the retained items, their standardised loadings, and the survey statements used to measure each construct.

Table 1. Outer loadings and survey items

Code	Survey Item (Translated)	Loading
Digital Marketing Engagement (DME)		
DME1	I regularly interact with digital marketing content from tourist villages.	0.796
DME3	Digital campaigns help me understand local tourism offerings.	0.823
DME5	I find it easy to access information about tourist villages via digital channels.	0.837
Community Interaction (CI)		
CI38	I interact with local communities during my visits to tourist villages.	0.821
CI40	I participate in community-based tourism activities.	0.872
CI41	I feel welcomed and engaged by the village community.	0.858
Perceived Usefulness (PU)		
PU2	Digital platforms help me plan my trip more efficiently.	0.773
PU3	I find digital marketing content useful for making travel decisions.	0.839
PU4	Digital platforms improve my understanding of the destination.	0.824
Experience Quality (EQ)		
EQ2	The experience I had in the village was emotionally satisfying.	0.714
EQ3	The village offered unique and memorable experiences.	0.746
EQ4	I felt connected to the culture and environment during my visit.	0.792
EQ5	My expectations of the destination were met.	0.793
EQ6	The overall experience was of high quality.	0.775
Sustainable Value Creation (SVC)		
SVC25	My visit contributed to the local economy.	0.762
SVC28	I believe my visit supported local culture and traditions.	0.773
SVC29	I would recommend the village to others based on its sustainability practices.	0.786
SVC30	The village promotes environmentally friendly tourism.	0.769
SVC42	I perceive that tourism in this village creates value for local communities.	0.769

Source: Research data (2025)

All retained items showed strong loadings above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators reliably measure their respective constructs. Table 2 summarises the results for internal consistency reliability. All constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeding 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. All constructs had Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, confirming that the indicators converge well in measuring their respective latent variables.

Table 2. Internal consistency and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Experience Quality	0.822	0.827	0.875	0.584
Community Interaction	0.810	0.812	0.887	0.724
Digital Marketing Engagement	0.756	0.763	0.859	0.671
Perceived Usefulness	0.743	0.748	0.853	0.660
Sustainable Value Creation	0.831	0.831	0.881	0.596

Source: Research data (2025)

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, the square root of each construct's AVE was greater than its correlation with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker criterion

Construct	EQ	CI	DME	PU	SVC
Experience Quality (EQ)	0.765				
Community Interaction (CI)	0.650	0.851			
Digital Marketing Engagement (DME)	0.777	0.624	0.819		
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	0.804	0.664	0.780	0.812	
Sustainable Value Creation (SVC)	0.736	0.717	0.696	0.717	0.772

Source: Research data (2025)

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all indicators ranged from 1.419 to 1.950, below the threshold of 3.3, indicating no multicollinearity issues. This suggests that the indicators provide unique contributions to their respective constructs.

Table 4. Variance inflation factor

Items	VIF	Items	VIF
CI38	1.632	EQ6	1.695
CI40	1.950	PU2	1.419
CI41	1.811	PU3	1.621
DME1	1.502	PU4	1.461
DME3	1.580	SVC25	1.617
DME5	1.490	SVC28	1.700
EQ2	1.668	SVC29	1.763
EQ3	1.728	SVC30	1.652
EQ4	1.742	SVC42	1.605
EQ5	1.809		

Source: Research data (2025)

The results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and no multicollinearity, meeting all PLS-SEM quality standards. This provides a solid foundation to proceed with the structural model evaluation.

Structural model evaluation

The structural model evaluation assessed the strength and significance of the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The evaluation followed the recommended procedures by (Hair et al., 2021), including tests for path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, coefficient of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The direct relationships between constructs were assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. All seven hypothesized paths were found to be positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the theoretical assumptions underlying the model. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, the strongest direct effect was observed from Digital Marketing Engagement (DME) to Perceived Usefulness (PU) ($\beta = 0.780$, $t = 38.63$), indicating that respondents who were more engaged with digital content from tourist villages also found such digital features more useful. Likewise, Perceived Usefulness (PU) exerted a strong influence on both Community Interaction (CI) ($\beta = 0.454$) and Experience Quality (EQ) ($\beta = 0.667$), supporting the view that tourists' functional perceptions are key to shaping emotional and interactive outcomes. The effect of Community Interaction (CI) was significant on both Experience Quality (EQ) ($\beta = 0.207$) and Sustainable Value Creation (SVC) ($\beta = 0.414$), suggesting that deeper engagement with local communities fosters higher-quality experiences and sustainable tourism impact. Finally, Experience Quality (EQ) had a significant and moderately strong influence on Sustainable Value Creation (SVC) ($\beta = 0.467$, $t = 12.02$), confirming the mediating role of emotional and experiential factors in sustainable tourism behavior.

Table 5. Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	DME \rightarrow PU	0.780	38.627	0.000	Supported
H2	DME \rightarrow CI	0.270	4.784	0.000	Supported
H3	PU \rightarrow CI	0.454	8.247	0.000	Supported
H4	PU \rightarrow EQ	0.667	20.673	0.000	Supported
H5	CI \rightarrow EQ	0.207	6.127	0.000	Supported
H6	CI \rightarrow SVC	0.414	11.199	0.000	Supported
H7	EQ \rightarrow SVC	0.467	12.022	0.000	Supported

Source: Research data (2025)

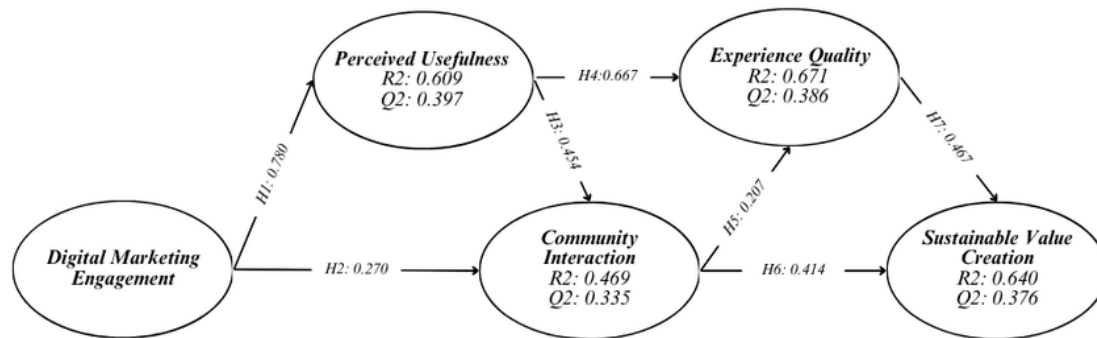


Figure 2. Evaluated structural model

Source: Research data (2025)

The R^2 and Q^2 values demonstrate that the model explains a substantial portion of the variance in the key endogenous constructs:

Table 6. R^2 , Adjusted R^2 , and Q^2 values of endogenous constructs

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2	Predictive Strength
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	0.609	0.608	0.397	Substantial
Community Interaction (CI)	0.469	0.468	0.335	Moderate
Experience Quality (EQ)	0.671	0.670	0.386	Substantial
Sustainable Value Creation (SVC)	0.640	0.639	0.376	Substantial

Source: Research data (2025)

Together, these results confirm that the structural model holds both statistical rigor and practical relevance in predicting key aspects of digital and sustainable tourism development in rural village contexts.

Discussion

This study set out to explore how digital marketing engagement contributes to sustainable tourism outcomes in Indonesian tourist villages. By examining a multidimensional structural model, the findings provide both empirical support and theoretical nuance to the ongoing discourse on digital transformation and community-centered tourism development. First, the analysis confirmed that digital marketing engagement (DME) plays a pivotal role in shaping perceived usefulness (PU) and community interaction (CI). The exceptionally strong relationship between DME and PU suggests that well-designed digital marketing strategies such as interactive content, personalized recommendations, and authentic storytelling are not only informative but also perceived as functionally valuable by tourists. This reinforces prior work (e.g., (Maulana et al., 2025; Tarasiuk, 2025)) asserting that digital touchpoints do more than communicate value they shape expectations, ease decision-making, and elevate destination image. The significant influence of DME on CI further supports the notion that participatory digital platforms serve as enablers of engagement with local communities, promoting dialogue and co-creation beyond traditional promotional logic. Second, perceived usefulness (PU) emerged as a strong antecedent to both experience quality (EQ) and community interaction (CI). The robust path between PU and EQ aligns with experiential marketing theory, indicating that tourists' perception of digital tools as helpful directly enhances their in-destination experience. Similarly, the positive relationship between PU and CI indicates that digital features such as heritage content, e-guides, and cultural narratives can facilitate meaningful exchanges between visitors and locals. These findings support arguments in the literature that digital transformation, when aligned with local assets, can act as a mechanism for human-centered, inclusive tourism (Chou et al., 2025; Costa et al., 2025). Third, the role of community interaction (CI) as a central mediating construct is empirically validated. CI significantly influences both experience quality (EQ) and sustainable value creation (SVC), affirming its position as a core driver of tourism impact. Tourists who interact with local communities tend to have richer, more authentic experiences and align more strongly with sustainability values echoing the ethos of community-based tourism. These results reinforce the idea that social embeddedness, enabled and amplified by digital interfaces, is foundational to value co-creation in rural tourism settings (Khusaini et al., 2024; Kusumastuti et al., 2024). Finally, the finding that experience quality (EQ) significantly affects sustainable value creation (SVC) highlights the downstream effect of emotional, cultural, and sensory fulfillment on long-term tourism outcomes. This connection supports the premise that high-quality, authentic experiences not only lead to repeat visits and positive word of mouth but also foster environmental awareness and social responsibility among travelers (Nugraha et al., 2025; Simangunsong et al., 2025). Sustainable value, in this model, is not treated as an abstract ideal but as an outcome rooted in perceived usefulness, local interaction, and high-

quality experience components all influenced by effective digital marketing strategies. Together, these findings advance the understanding of how digital marketing can function not merely as a promotional tool but as a strategic platform for governance, co-creation, and sustainability. By integrating technical (digital engagement) and social (community interaction) dimensions, the model underscores the importance of designing village-level digital initiatives that reflect local values, empower community voices, and support long-term visitor engagement. From a policy perspective, the results highlight the need for investments in digital infrastructure, skills training, and participatory branding initiatives that prioritize authenticity and inclusivity.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions by integrating digital marketing engagement, perceived usefulness, community interaction, experience quality, and sustainable value creation into a unified structural model tailored to the context of tourist villages. First, the study advances digital engagement theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998) by demonstrating that digital marketing engagement extends far beyond promotional utility. Consistent with (Wang & Wang, 2024), the findings reveal that digital engagement shapes core cognitive evaluations particularly perceived usefulness which subsequently influence interactional and experiential dimensions of tourism behavior. By empirically validating the strong DME → PU relationship, the study reinforces the notion that digital platforms serve as cognitive enablers in tourism decision-making. Second, the research extends theories of smart tourism and co-creation. Prior work (Liburd & Becken, 2017) emphasizes that digital technologies form the infrastructural backbone of collaborative value creation in tourism ecosystems. Our findings strengthen this argument by positioning community interaction (CI) as a central mediating construct linking digital engagement, perceived usefulness, and downstream tourism outcomes. This explicit linkage integrates smart tourism theory with community-based tourism (CBT) perspectives, demonstrating that digitally mediated interactions foster deeper social embeddedness and participatory co-creation dimensions often missing in purely technology-oriented models. Third, the study makes a substantive contribution to experiential quality theory by showing that both perceived usefulness and community interaction shape tourists' emotional, cultural, and sensory experiences. Unlike traditional models that focus on service quality or satisfaction, this study confirms that digital and social antecedents jointly influence experiential outcomes. This extends experiential marketing literature by embedding technological and community constructs into the experiential formation process, aligning with recent findings that emphasize the interplay between digital touchpoints and the generation of authentic experience. Finally, the study enriches the theoretical discourse on sustainable value creation in tourism, demonstrating that sustainability outcomes emerge through layered pathways involving usefulness, interaction, and experience. This aligns with emerging perspectives calling for integration of digital innovation with local empowerment and ecological stewardship. By empirically linking experience quality and community interaction to sustainable value creation, the research reframes sustainability not merely as an institutional or policy-driven goal, but as a co-created outcome shaped by tourists' digital engagement, relational encounters, and experiential fulfillment. This contributes a theoretically grounded and empirically tested model applicable to rural, resource-constrained destinations globally.

The findings of this study yield several important practical implications for destination managers, tourism planners, and local stakeholders seeking to harness digital marketing as a lever for sustainable development in tourist villages. First, the strong influence of digital marketing engagement (DME) on perceived usefulness (PU) and community interaction (CI) highlights the need for destination marketing strategies to go beyond one-way promotion. Tourist villages should design interactive digital experiences—such as localized storytelling, live engagement features, and participatory content—that invite tourists to co-create meaning with local communities. This entails training local actors (e.g., MSMEs, homestay operators, youth groups) in digital content creation, social media engagement, and customer interaction to increase both visibility and perceived value.

Second, the study emphasizes the mediating role of perceived usefulness in generating positive tourist experiences. This suggests that digital platforms must not only be attractive but also functionally helpful offering accurate, relevant, and context-sensitive information. To this end, developing village-level digital infrastructure, such as mobile apps, real-time navigation, and integrated booking systems, can significantly improve tourists' planning and satisfaction while reinforcing the destination's smart image. Third, the finding that community interaction contributes directly to both experience quality (EQ) and sustainable value creation (SVC) indicates that community engagement is not optional it is strategic. Destination stakeholders should embed community touchpoints throughout the digital customer journey, for example, by featuring local hosts in online campaigns, enabling dialogue through reviews and feedback, and involving locals in curating tourist itineraries. This approach strengthens tourists' emotional connection with

the destination and fosters inclusive growth. Fourth, digital marketing strategies should be embedded within multi-stakeholder governance structures, where community members, local government, tourism managers, and academic partners co-develop digital initiatives aligned with cultural values and sustainability goals. Local digital champions or tourism ambassadors can play a critical role in ensuring that promotional narratives reflect authentic community identities while avoiding commodification or cultural distortion. Lastly, sustainable value creation in tourist villages requires long-term capacity building. Investments in digital literacy, platform management, and content analytics can equip local actors to adapt to evolving trends and manage digital tourism ecosystems effectively. This not only enhances destination competitiveness but also ensures that digital tourism supports local livelihoods, ecological protection, and cultural preservation over time.

Conclusion

This study explored the role of digital marketing engagement (DME) in shaping sustainable tourism outcomes in Indonesian tourist villages by examining its impact on perceived usefulness (PU), community interaction (CI), experience quality (EQ), and sustainable value creation (SVC). Using structural equation modeling (SEM), the findings confirmed that digital engagement significantly enhances tourists' perceptions of usefulness, which in turn fosters meaningful interaction with local communities and improves the overall quality of the tourism experience. These experiential and relational pathways ultimately contribute to the co-creation of sustainable value. The results underscore the importance of moving beyond conventional digital promotion toward a participatory, community-centered digital strategy that embeds local voices, supports cultural storytelling, and facilitates mutual benefit for tourists and hosts. By integrating theories of smart tourism, digital engagement, and value co-creation, the study offers a holistic model that captures both the technological and social dimensions of digital transformation in rural tourism. In contexts where resources are limited but cultural capital is rich, such as tourist villages, this study demonstrates that digital marketing when designed inclusively can serve as a powerful catalyst for community empowerment and sustainability. For tourism planners, policymakers, and local stakeholders, the findings offer a blueprint for aligning digital innovation with long-term development goals grounded in authenticity, equity, and resilience. While this study provides valuable insights into the role of digital marketing engagement in shaping sustainable tourism outcomes in tourist villages, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study uses a cross-sectional design and data from tourist villages in Indonesia. Although the sample is sizable and diverse, the findings may not be generalizable to other rural tourism contexts with different cultural, technological, or governance structures.

Future studies could adopt longitudinal or comparative cross-country approaches to examine how digital engagement and community interaction evolve over time or across different sociocultural settings. Second, although the structural model captures key relationships between digital marketing, perceived usefulness, community interaction, experience quality, and sustainable value creation, it does not account for other potentially influential variables such as tourist motivations, digital literacy levels, platform types, or external policy interventions. Integrating these factors could enhance the model's explanatory power and provide a more nuanced understanding of the digital–social interface in tourism development. Third, this research relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to common-method bias or social desirability bias. While rigorous measurement validation procedures were followed, future research may benefit from incorporating multi-method designs, such as observational data, experimental simulations, or digital trace analytics, to triangulate findings and validate behavioral responses. Fourth, while the study focused on tourist perceptions, the perspectives of local community members as co-creators and beneficiaries of digital tourism were not directly assessed. Future research should include multi-stakeholder perspectives (e.g., residents, tourism operators, government) to fully understand how digital marketing affects community wellbeing and sustainability outcomes from the supply side. Lastly, advancements in digital technology, such as AI personalization, blockchain-based transparency, and immersive XR tools, are rapidly reshaping the tourism landscape. Future research could explore how emerging technologies mediate co-creation and sustainability within rural tourism, and how digital innovation ecosystems can be scaled responsibly in low-resource village contexts.

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