

## **Digital Transformation and Destination Branding as Drivers of Destination Brand Experience: Evidence from Medan City, Indonesia**

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### **Abstrak**

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed the tourism industry, requiring tourism destinations to strengthen their digital capabilities and branding strategies to create memorable visitor experiences. Despite the growing attention given to Digital Transformation and Destination Branding, empirical evidence examining their combined effects on Destination Brand Experience remains limited, particularly within the context of urban tourism destinations in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of Digital Transformation and Destination Branding on Destination Brand Experience among tourists visiting tourism destinations in Medan City, Indonesia. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed using a cross-sectional survey. Data were collected from 150 tourists through purposive sampling using a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests, classical assumption tests, and multiple linear regression analysis with IBM SPSS Statistics. The findings indicate that both Digital Transformation and Destination Branding have positive and significant effects on Destination Brand Experience. Digital Transformation positively influences tourists' experiences by enhancing digital communication, service accessibility, tourist interaction, and personalized tourism services. Likewise, Destination Branding strengthens destination identity, emotional attachment, perceived uniqueness, and effective communication, thereby improving tourists' overall destination experiences. The regression model demonstrates satisfactory explanatory power, indicating that both independent variables jointly contribute to explaining Destination Brand Experience. This study contributes to tourism marketing literature by integrating Digital Transformation and

Destination Branding within a unified conceptual framework and provides practical implications for tourism destination managers and policymakers in developing digitally integrated and experience-oriented urban tourism destinations.

**Kata Kunci** *Digital Transformation; Destination Branding; Destination Brand Experience; Tourism Marketing; Medan City.*

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the tourism industry by changing how tourists search for information, evaluate destinations, make travel decisions, and share their travel experiences. Digital transformation is no longer limited to the adoption of technology but has become a strategic capability that enables tourism destinations to improve competitiveness, strengthen service innovation, and enhance tourist engagement (Kraus et al., 2021; Verhoef et al., 2021). In the tourism context, digital platforms, social media, mobile applications, online travel agents, and data-driven communication have become important instruments for creating more interactive and memorable tourist experiences (Maulidina, 2024; Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

Indonesia has positioned tourism as one of the strategic sectors supporting national and regional economic development. Within this context, North Sumatra is recognized as one of Indonesia's leading tourism provinces due to its rich natural attractions, cultural diversity, historical heritage, and culinary tourism. As the economic and administrative center of the province, Medan City functions not only as the primary gateway for tourists but also as an important urban tourism destination that integrates cultural heritage, culinary tourism, historical attractions, and digital tourism services. As the provincial capital and the main gateway to North Sumatra, Medan City plays a strategic role in facilitating tourism activities by offering various urban tourism attractions, including cultural heritage sites, historical landmarks, religious tourism, culinary tourism, and creative urban experiences. In recent years, tourism destinations in Medan have increasingly adopted digital technologies and destination branding strategies to enhance destination competitiveness, improve visitor engagement, and strengthen memorable tourism experiences. Therefore, Medan City provides an appropriate context for examining how digital transformation and destination branding contribute to destination brand experience (Buhalis, 2022; Geng et al., 2024).

Destination branding is an important strategy in tourism marketing because it helps create a unique identity that differentiates one destination from others. A strong destination brand communicates authenticity, culture, values, emotional appeal, and memorable experiences. In the digital era, destination branding is increasingly influenced by social media, user-generated content, online reviews, and digital storytelling, which shape tourists' perceptions before and after visiting a destination (Calderón-Fajardo et al., 2024; Kainde & Mandagi, 2025). Accordingly, destination branding should be viewed not only as a promotional tool but also as a long-term strategic capability for strengthening destination competitiveness and enriching tourists' overall destination experiences. Destination Brand Experience has emerged as one of the central constructs in tourism marketing because it reflects tourists' holistic evaluations resulting from their interactions with tourism destinations. Unlike destination image or tourist satisfaction, Destination Brand Experience encompasses tourists' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational responses before, during, and after their visits (Abbasi et al., 2024; Maulidina & Siregar, 2024).

Positive destination brand experiences are expected to strengthen tourists' evaluations of destinations and contribute to long-term destination competitiveness. In the digital tourism era, tourists increasingly interact with destinations through digital platforms, social media, official tourism websites, and online travel services, making destination experiences inseparable from digital transformation and destination branding initiatives. Although previous studies have examined digital transformation and destination branding separately, empirical evidence explaining their simultaneous influence on destination brand experience remains limited. Existing studies predominantly focus on technology adoption, destination image, tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, or destination competitiveness (Mandagi et al., 2024; Rather, 2021; Wang et al., 2023), while relatively few investigate destination brand experience as the primary outcome variable.

The novelty of this study lies in three main aspects. First, unlike previous studies that generally examine digital transformation and destination branding independently, this research integrates both constructs within a unified conceptual framework to explain destination brand experience as the primary dependent variable. Second, this study extends tourism marketing literature by positioning destination brand experience as a comprehensive outcome reflecting tourists' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational evaluations rather than focusing solely on destination image, satisfaction, or revisit intention. Third, this research provides empirical evidence from Medan City, Indonesia, representing an urban tourism destination in a developing country where studies investigating the combined role of digital transformation and destination branding remain limited. Accordingly, this study contributes theoretically by enriching the understanding of experience-based destination marketing and contributes empirically by validating the integrated model within the Indonesian urban tourism context.

## METHOD

### Digital Transformation

Digital transformation has become one of the most influential strategic concepts in organizational management and service industries over the past decade. Rather than merely referring to the adoption of digital technologies, digital transformation represents a comprehensive organizational change that integrates digital technologies into business processes, customer engagement, organizational culture, and value creation. Verhoef et al. (2021) define digital transformation as a multidimensional organizational transformation involving technological innovation, strategic management, organizational capability, and customer interaction. Similarly, Kraus et al. (2021) emphasize that digital transformation is not limited to technological adoption but also encompasses organizational innovation, strategic adaptation, and the development of digital capabilities that enable organizations to create sustainable competitive advantages.

Within the tourism sector, digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped how destinations interact with tourists. Travelers increasingly rely on digital platforms to search for tourism information, compare destinations, make reservations, share travel experiences, and publish online reviews. Consequently, tourism destinations are expected to strengthen their digital capabilities to improve accessibility, responsiveness, communication, and service quality while creating seamless tourism experiences (Buhalis, 2022; Gutierrez et al., 2025; Maulidina, 2024). The concept of smart tourism further highlights the strategic importance of digital transformation in enhancing destination competitiveness. Smart tourism integrates advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data

analytics, cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), and mobile applications to optimize tourism management and enrich visitor experiences.

These technologies enable destination managers to monitor tourist behavior, personalize tourism services, facilitate real-time communication, and support evidence-based decision-making (Buhalis, 2022, 2023). Recent studies consistently demonstrate that digital transformation positively influences service innovation, tourist engagement, destination competitiveness, and overall tourism performance (Geng et al., 2024; Gutierrez et al., 2025). Furthermore, digital transformation has expanded beyond conventional information systems toward interactive digital communication through social media and short-form video platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. These platforms facilitate destination storytelling, strengthen destination branding, enhance tourist engagement, and significantly influence tourists' travel planning and destination choice. Consequently, short-form video has emerged as one of the most influential digital marketing tools in contemporary destination marketing (Yuan et al., 2026).

In Indonesia, digital transformation has become one of the government's strategic priorities for tourism development. Various digital tourism initiatives have been introduced to strengthen destination competitiveness, improve tourism service quality, increase tourist satisfaction, and support sustainable tourism development (OECD, 2022; UN Tourism, 2024). As tourism destinations increasingly integrate digital technologies into marketing communication and service delivery, digital transformation is recognized as a strategic capability for creating more personalized, interactive, and memorable tourism experiences.

### **Destination Branding**

Destination branding is a strategic approach that enables tourism destinations to establish a distinctive identity, strengthen competitiveness, and create meaningful emotional connections with tourists by reflecting their values, authenticity, cultural heritage, and unique characteristics (Kainde & Mandagi, 2025; Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Previous studies have shown that destination branding positively influences destination image, awareness, tourist trust, emotional attachment, and destination competitiveness, making it a long-term strategic capability rather than merely a promotional activity (Kainde & Mandagi, 2025; Mandagi et al., 2024; Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

The advancement of digital communication has transformed destination branding through social media, digital storytelling, user-generated content, influencer marketing, online reviews, and short-form video platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, which enhance destination visibility and tourist engagement (Mandagi et al., 2024; Yuan et al., 2026). In Medan City, destination branding supports the promotion of cultural heritage, historical landmarks, culinary tourism, and urban tourism through integrated digital communication strategies, thereby strengthening destination identity and enhancing memorable tourism experiences (Maulidina, 2024; UN Tourism, 2024). Therefore, effective destination branding is expected to positively influence destination brand experience by improving tourists' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational experiences.

### **Destination Brand Experience**

Destination brand experience has emerged as one of the most important constructs in contemporary tourism marketing because it reflects tourists' comprehensive evaluations resulting from their interactions with tourism destinations before, during, and after their

visits. Unlike destination image or tourist satisfaction, destination brand experience encompasses tourists' overall cognitive evaluations, emotional responses, behavioral engagement, and relational attachment developed throughout the tourism journey. Consequently, destination brand experience represents a holistic assessment of tourists' interactions with destination attributes, tourism services, local communities, cultural attractions, and digital communication (Calderón-Fajardo et al., 2024; Maulidina & Siregar, 2024).

Recent tourism studies emphasize that memorable destination experiences play a crucial role in strengthening destination competitiveness and creating long-term relationships between tourists and destinations. Destination brand experience is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional construct that reflects not only tourists' perceptions of destination quality but also their emotional engagement and meaningful connections with tourism destinations. Therefore, creating memorable destination experiences has become one of the primary objectives of destination marketing and tourism management strategies (Abbasi et al., 2024; Calderón-Fajardo et al., 2024; Maulidina et al., 2025). Previous empirical studies consistently demonstrate that destination brand experience positively influences tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, revisit intention, recommendation intention, and positive electronic word-of-mouth (Abbasi et al., 2024; Maulidina et al., 2025).

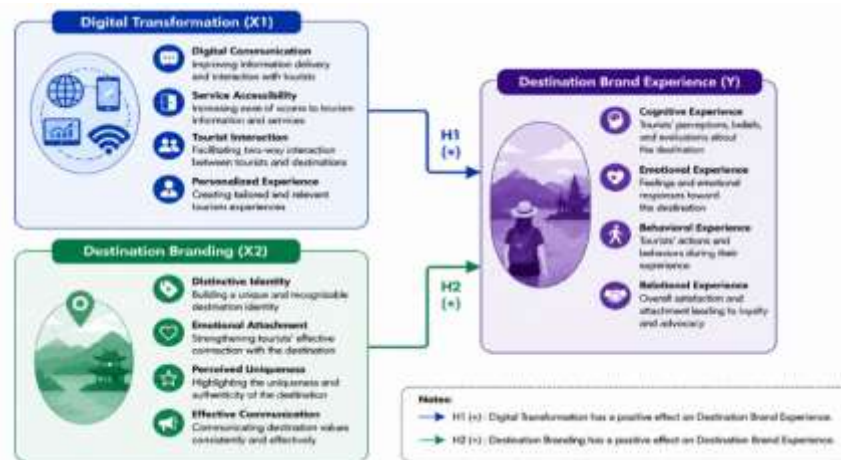
Tourists who experience meaningful and memorable interactions with tourism destinations are more likely to revisit destinations, recommend them to others, and establish stronger long-term relationships with destination brands. Accordingly, destination brand experience serves as an important indicator of destination marketing effectiveness and sustainable tourism competitiveness (Maulidina et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2025). In the era of digital tourism, destination brand experience is increasingly shaped by digital interactions throughout the tourist journey. Tourists evaluate destinations through official tourism websites, social media platforms, user-generated content, online reviews, virtual tours, mobile applications, and various digital communication channels before, during, and after their visits. These digital interactions significantly influence tourists' perceptions, expectations, emotional engagement, and overall destination experiences (Gutierriz et al., 2025; Maulidina, 2024; Yuan et al., 2026).

In this study, destination brand experience is conceptualized through four dimensions, namely cognitive experience, emotional experience, behavioral experience, and relational experience. These dimensions represent tourists' comprehensive evaluations, emotional responses, behavioral engagement, and relational attachment toward tourism destinations and are considered appropriate for measuring destination experiences within the context of contemporary tourism marketing (Abbasi et al., 2024; Calderón-Fajardo et al., 2024; Maulidina et al., 2025). Based on the above discussion, destination brand experience is positioned as the dependent variable in this study because it reflects tourists' overall evaluations resulting from the implementation of digital transformation and destination branding strategies. Therefore, tourism destinations that successfully integrate digital technologies with effective destination branding are expected to create superior destination brand experiences.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Based on the theoretical review and previous empirical findings, this study proposes that Digital Transformation and Destination Branding represent two strategic antecedents that positively influence Destination Brand Experience. Digital Transformation enables

tourism destinations to improve Digital Communication, enhance Service Accessibility, facilitate Tourist Interaction, and deliver Personalized Experiences, thereby strengthening tourists' perceptions and creating memorable tourism experiences. Similarly, Destination Branding strengthens Distinctive Identity, fosters Emotional Attachment, enhances Perceived Uniqueness, and promotes Effective Communication, all of which contribute to tourists' cognitive and emotional evaluations of destinations. Accordingly, the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationships among the research variables, where Digital Transformation and Destination Branding are conceptualized as independent variables (antecedents), while Destination Brand Experience is positioned as the dependent variable (outcome).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondent Characteristics

A total of 150 valid respondents participated in this study. All respondents met the predetermined inclusion criteria established for the research. Specifically, respondents were required to be at least 17 years old, have visited at least one tourism destination in Medan City, have accessed tourism-related information through digital media before or during their visit, and voluntarily agree to participate in the survey. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that each participant possessed sufficient tourism experience and familiarity with digital tourism information. This approach enabled the study to obtain reliable responses regarding Digital Transformation, Destination Branding, and Destination Brand Experience within the context of urban tourism in Medan City.

Overall, the sample size of 150 respondents was considered adequate for multiple linear regression analysis involving two independent variables and one dependent variable. The sample also satisfied the minimum requirement for hypothesis testing and provided sufficient statistical power to examine the proposed research model.

**Table 1.** Respondent Characteristics

| Characteristics       | Description                                                  |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Number of respondents | 150 respondents                                              |
| Research location     | Tourism destinations in Medan City, North Sumatra, Indonesia |
| Sampling technique    | Purposive Sampling                                           |
| Minimum age           | 17 years old                                                 |
| Tourism experience    | Visited at least one tourism destination in Medan City       |

| Characteristics            | Description                                                                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Digital tourism experience | Accessed tourism information through digital media before or during the visit |
| Participation              | Voluntary                                                                     |

The respondents represented tourists who had direct experience with tourism destinations in Medan City and therefore were considered appropriate for evaluating the influence of Digital Transformation and Destination Branding on Destination Brand Experience.

### Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine respondents' perceptions of the research variables. As presented in Table 4, all variables obtained high mean scores, indicating that respondents generally had favorable perceptions of Digital Transformation, Destination Branding, and Destination Brand Experience in the context of tourism destinations in Medan City.

Among the Digital Transformation indicators, Tourist Interaction recorded the highest mean score (4.15), while Personalized Experience obtained the lowest mean (4.00). The overall mean of 4.08 indicates that respondents perceived digital technologies as effectively supporting tourism services and visitor experiences.

For Destination Branding, Distinctive Identity achieved the highest mean (4.26), suggesting that respondents strongly recognized the uniqueness and identity of tourism destinations in Medan City. The overall mean score of 4.05 indicates that destination branding practices were positively perceived by tourists.

Regarding Destination Brand Experience, Cognitive Experience obtained the highest mean (4.42), followed by Behavioral Experience (4.29) and Relational Experience (4.21). Although Emotional Experience recorded the lowest mean (3.53), it remained within the high category. Overall, the mean score of 4.11 demonstrates that respondents generally experienced positive interactions with tourism destinations in Medan City.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

| Variable                         | Indicator                    | Mean | Interpretation |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Digital Transformation (X1)      | X1.1 Digital Communication   | 4.06 | High           |
|                                  | X1.2 Service Accessibility   | 4.11 | High           |
|                                  | X1.3 Tourist Interaction     | 4.15 | High           |
|                                  | X1.4 Personalized Experience | 4.00 | High           |
|                                  | Overall Mean                 | 4.08 | High           |
| Destination Branding (X2)        | X2.1 Distinctive Identity    | 4.26 | Very High      |
|                                  | X2.2 Emotional Attachment    | 3.94 | High           |
|                                  | X2.3 Perceived Uniqueness    | 4.02 | High           |
|                                  | X2.4 Effective Communication | 3.96 | High           |
|                                  | Overall Mean                 | 4.05 | High           |
| Destination Brand Experience (Y) | Y1 Cognitive Experience      | 4.42 | Very High      |
|                                  | Y2 Emotional Experience      | 3.53 | High           |
|                                  | Y3 Behavioral Experience     | 4.29 | Very High      |

| Variable | Indicator                | Mean | Interpretation |
|----------|--------------------------|------|----------------|
|          | Y4 Relational Experience | 4.21 | Very High      |
|          | Overall Mean             | 4.11 | High           |

### Instrument Testing

Before testing the proposed hypotheses, the quality of the research instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability testing. These procedures were conducted to ensure that all questionnaire items accurately measured the intended constructs and demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. The validity test was performed using the Corrected Item–Total Correlation (CITC), whereas the reliability test was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

### Validity Test

The validity test was conducted using the Corrected Item–Total Correlation (CITC). An indicator was considered valid when its CITC value exceeded 0.30. The results of the validity test are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Results of the Validity Test

| Variable                     | Indicator                    | Corrected Item–Total Correlation | Decision |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
| Digital Transformation       | X1.1 Digital Communication   | 0.612                            | Valid    |
|                              | X1.2 Service Accessibility   | 0.684                            | Valid    |
|                              | X1.3 Tourist Interaction     | 0.647                            | Valid    |
|                              | X1.4 Personalized Experience | 0.593                            | Valid    |
| Destination Branding         | X2.1 Distinctive Identity    | 0.639                            | Valid    |
|                              | X2.2 Emotional Attachment    | 0.574                            | Valid    |
|                              | X2.3 Perceived Uniqueness    | 0.628                            | Valid    |
|                              | X2.4 Effective Communication | 0.661                            | Valid    |
| Destination Brand Experience | Y1 Cognitive Experience      | 0.671                            | Valid    |
|                              | Y2 Emotional Experience      | 0.582                            | Valid    |
|                              | Y3 Behavioral Experience     | 0.695                            | Valid    |
|                              | Y4 Relational Experience     | 0.653                            | Valid    |

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that all measurement items obtained Corrected Item–Total Correlation values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.30. The CITC values ranged from 0.574 to 0.695, indicating that each questionnaire item demonstrated satisfactory validity in measuring its respective construct. Consequently, all indicators of Digital Transformation, Destination Branding, and Destination Brand Experience were considered valid and retained for subsequent statistical analyses.

### Reliability Test

The reliability test was conducted to examine the internal consistency of the research instrument using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. A Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.70 generally indicates satisfactory reliability, although values slightly below this threshold may still be considered acceptable in exploratory research.

**Table 4.** Results of the Reliability Test

| Variable                     | Cronbach's Alpha | Decision |
|------------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Digital Transformation       | 0.697            | Reliable |
| Destination Branding         | 0.707            | Reliable |
| Destination Brand Experience | 0.704            | Reliable |

The reliability analysis revealed that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.697 to 0.707. Destination Branding achieved the highest reliability coefficient (0.707), followed by Destination Brand Experience (0.704), while Digital Transformation obtained a coefficient of 0.697. Although the reliability coefficient for Digital Transformation was marginally below the conventional threshold of 0.70, it remained within the acceptable range for exploratory social science research. Therefore, all three constructs were considered to exhibit satisfactory internal consistency and were deemed reliable for further statistical analysis.

### Classical Assumption Tests

Prior to conducting multiple linear regression analysis, several classical assumption tests were performed to ensure that the regression model satisfied the underlying assumptions. These tests included the normality test, heteroscedasticity test, and multicollinearity test. The results are presented in Table 7.

**Table 5.** Results of the Classical Assumption Tests

| Test                    | Indicator               | Result | Decision              |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------|-----------------------|
| Normality Test          | Kolmogorov–Smirnov Sig. | 0.829  | Normally distributed  |
| Heteroscedasticity Test | Digital Transformation  | 0.426  | No heteroscedasticity |
|                         | Destination Branding    | 0.316  | No heteroscedasticity |
| Multicollinearity Test  | Tolerance (X1 & X2)     | 0.651  | Acceptable            |
|                         | VIF (X1 & X2)           | 1.535  | No multicollinearity  |

The normality test produced a Kolmogorov–Smirnov significance value of 0.829, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the regression residuals were normally distributed, indicating that the normality assumption was satisfied.

The heteroscedasticity test revealed significance values of 0.426 for Digital Transformation and 0.316 for Destination Branding, both of which were greater than 0.05. These findings indicate the absence of heteroscedasticity, suggesting that the variance of the residuals remained constant across observations.

Furthermore, the multicollinearity test showed Tolerance values of 0.651 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values of 1.535 for both independent variables. Since the Tolerance values exceeded 0.10 and the VIF values were substantially lower than 10, no multicollinearity was detected. Overall, the results confirm that the regression model fulfilled all classical assumptions and was appropriate for subsequent multiple linear regression analysis.

### Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of Digital Transformation and Destination Branding on Destination Brand Experience. The regression results are presented in Table 8.

**Table 6.** Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

| Variable               | Unstandardized Coefficient (B) | Standardized Coefficient (Beta) | t-value | Sig.  |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|-------|
| Constant               | 0.955                          | —                               | 2.801   | 0.006 |
| Digital Transformation | 0.427                          | 0.349                           | 4.262   | 0.000 |
| Destination Branding   | 0.350                          | 0.361                           | 4.402   | 0.000 |

The estimated regression equation is expressed as follows:

$$Y = 0.955 + 0.427 X_1 + 0.350 X_2$$

where:

- Y = Destination Brand Experience
- $X_1$  = Digital Transformation
- $X_2$  = Destination Branding

The regression results indicate that both Digital Transformation and Destination Branding positively influence Destination Brand Experience. The regression coefficient of Digital Transformation ( $B = 0.427$ ) suggests that a one-unit increase in Digital Transformation is associated with a 0.427-unit increase in Destination Brand Experience, assuming other variables remain constant.

Similarly, Destination Branding produced a positive regression coefficient of 0.350, indicating that improvements in destination branding contribute positively to Destination Brand Experience. Among the two independent variables, Digital Transformation demonstrated a slightly stronger unstandardized effect, whereas the standardized coefficients indicate that both variables make comparable contributions to explaining Destination Brand Experience.

### Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination was calculated to evaluate the proportion of variance in Destination Brand Experience explained jointly by Digital Transformation and Destination Branding.

**Table 7.** Model Summary

| R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error |
|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| 0.620 | 0.384    | 0.376             | 0.438      |

The analysis produced an Adjusted R Square value of 0.376, indicating that 37.6% of the variance in Destination Brand Experience could be explained jointly by Digital Transformation and Destination Branding. The remaining 62.4% of the variance is attributable to other variables not included in the present research model. These findings suggest that the proposed model demonstrates a moderate explanatory power in explaining tourists' destination brand experiences in the context of tourism destinations in Medan City.

### Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using the t-test to examine the partial effects of each independent variable and the F-test to examine the simultaneous effect of the independent variables on Destination Brand Experience.

**Table 8.** Results of Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis | Relationship                                                | $\beta$ | t     | Sig.  | Decision |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|----------|
| H1         | Digital Transformation<br>→ Destination Brand<br>Experience | 0.349   | 4.262 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H2         | Destination Branding<br>→ Destination Brand<br>Experience   | 0.361   | 4.402 | 0.000 | Accepted |

The hypothesis testing results indicate that Digital Transformation has a positive and significant effect on Destination Brand Experience ( $\beta = 0.349$ ;  $t = 4.262$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H1 is accepted.

Likewise, Destination Branding also has a positive and significant effect on Destination Brand Experience ( $\beta = 0.361$ ;  $t = 4.402$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Consequently, H2 is accepted.

**Table 9.** Results of the Simultaneous Significance Test (F-test)

| F-value | Sig.  | Decision    |
|---------|-------|-------------|
| 45.828  | 0.000 | Significant |

The F-test indicates that the regression model is statistically significant ( $F = 45.828$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), demonstrating that Digital Transformation and Destination Branding, when considered simultaneously, significantly influence Destination Brand Experience.

## Discussion

### The Effect of Digital Transformation on Destination Brand Experience

The empirical findings demonstrate that Digital Transformation has a positive and significant effect on Destination Brand Experience. This finding confirms the acceptance of Hypothesis 1 (H1) and indicates that the implementation of digital technologies significantly contributes to enhancing tourists' experiences at tourism destinations in Medan City.

The positive relationship suggests that improvements in digital communication, service accessibility, tourist interaction, and personalized experience enable tourism destinations to create more meaningful and memorable experiences for visitors. Digital technologies facilitate tourists' access to destination information before, during, and after their visits, thereby strengthening cognitive evaluations and enriching overall tourism experiences. The growing utilization of official tourism websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, online travel services, and digital navigation systems has transformed the way tourists interact with destinations, making tourism experiences more convenient, interactive, and personalized. These findings are consistent with Verhoef et al. (2021), who argue that digital transformation extends beyond the adoption of digital technologies and represents a strategic organizational capability for enhancing customer value creation. Similarly, Kraus et al. (2021) emphasize that digital transformation improves organizational performance by integrating technological innovation into business processes and customer interactions. Within the tourism context, Buhalis (2022) further explains that digital technologies support smart tourism development by enabling destinations to deliver more efficient services, improve tourist engagement, and create superior tourism experiences. The present findings also support the work of Gutierriz et al. (2025), who highlight that digital transformation has become an essential driver of tourism competitiveness through continuous innovation and digital service integration. Furthermore, the recent study by Yuan et al. (2026) demonstrates that short-form video platforms and digital storytelling significantly influence destination marketing by strengthening tourists' destination awareness, expectations, and engagement prior to travel.

### Practical Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for tourism policymakers and destination managers in Medan City. First, continuous investment in Digital Transformation should be prioritized to improve tourism information accessibility, digital communication, online visitor engagement, and personalized tourism services. Second, destination branding strategies should consistently communicate Medan City's distinctive identity, cultural heritage, historical attractions, culinary uniqueness, and urban tourism experiences across multiple digital platforms.

Moreover, collaboration among local government, tourism stakeholders, destination management organizations, and digital content creators is essential for strengthening Medan City's tourism competitiveness. The integration of digital technologies with effective destination branding strategies is expected to create superior Destination Brand Experiences, encourage positive electronic word-of-mouth, strengthen destination competitiveness, and support sustainable tourism development.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of Digital Transformation and Destination Branding on Destination Brand Experience among tourists visiting tourism destinations in Medan City, Indonesia. The findings indicate that both variables have positive and significant effects on Destination Brand Experience, demonstrating that the integration of digital technologies and effective destination branding enhances tourists' overall experiences. The study contributes to tourism marketing literature by integrating Digital Transformation and Destination Branding into a unified conceptual framework and providing empirical evidence from an Indonesian urban tourism context. Practically, the findings suggest that destination managers and policymakers should strengthen digital tourism infrastructure, digital communication, and integrated branding strategies to improve destination competitiveness. However, this study is limited by its focus on Medan City, cross-sectional design, and the inclusion of only two explanatory variables. Future research is recommended to examine broader tourism destinations, incorporate additional variables such as Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction, and employ more advanced analytical approaches, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to better understand tourists' destination experiences in the digital tourism era.

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