

## Shaping Tourist Visiting Intention through Government-Managed Social Media Promotion: Insights from Gorontalo Whale Shark Tourism

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has transformed the way tourism destinations are promoted and has positioned social media as a decisive factor in influencing travel intentions. This study examines how Government Social Media Promotion (GSMP) influences tourists' visiting intention toward Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani, Gorontalo, Indonesia. Drawing on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), GSMP is conceptualised through three dimensions which are promotion reach, promotion frequency, and message quality, that collectively shape tourists' attitude and subjective norms. A quantitative explanatory design was employed using data from 96 respondents collected through online and on-site surveys. Analysis using simple linear regression revealed a positive and significant effect ( $\beta = 0.706$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.547$ ) of GSMP on visiting intention, confirming that well-managed official social media enhances behavioral intention through persuasive communication and social endorsement. The study contributes theoretically by extending TRA into the public-sector marketing domain and provides practical guidance for tourism authorities seeking to optimize official social media strategies.

**Keywords:** Social media promotion, Tourism, TRA, Visit intention

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism is widely recognised as a vital sector and a central pillar of economic development. Growth in this sector stimulates related industries and creates a reciprocal relationship in which progress in one reinforces advancement in the other (Mardhani et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022). Nevertheless, encouraging tourists to visit or revisit destinations is not a straightforward task. While natural attractions provide the foundation of a destination's appeal, they are insufficient without effective promotion and marketing strategies. Indonesia's tourism sector illustrates this dynamic. According to the Indonesia Central Bureau of Statistics, international tourist arrivals in July 2024 reached 1.31 million, representing a 16.91 percent increase compared with the same period in the previous year. This growth reflects the positive trajectory of Indonesia's tourism sector within the context of global competition and highlights the importance of regions actively leveraging their unique assets.

Gorontalo Province, for instance, is endowed with distinctive natural resources that offer substantial tourism potential. Among its most notable attractions is Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani Village, Kabila Bone District, Bone Bolango Regency. The seasonal presence of

whale sharks provides a rare and memorable experience that attracts both domestic and international visitors. Visitor statistics, however, reveal fluctuation in recent years (Table 1). In 2020, Botubarani recorded 8,980 visitors including 525 international tourists. Numbers fell sharply during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 but gradually recovered in subsequent years, reaching 13,578 visitors in 2024. This pattern illustrates both the vulnerability of tourism to external shocks and the resilience of the destination in regaining market interest. Sustaining this recovery requires effective promotion strategies that enhance visibility and competitiveness.

**Table 1. Number of Tourist Visits to Botubarani Whale Shark Tourism, 2020-2024**

| Year | International Tourists | Domestic Tourists | Total  |
|------|------------------------|-------------------|--------|
| 2020 | 525                    | 8,455             | 8,980  |
| 2021 | 26                     | 12,332            | 12,358 |
| 2022 | 649                    | 7,415             | 8,064  |
| 2023 | 1,462                  | 11,100            | 12,562 |
| 2024 | 672                    | 12,906            | 13,578 |

Source: Botubarani Whale Shark Tourism Management, 2025

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has transformed the way destinations engage with potential visitors (Kusuma et al., 2025). Social media, in particular, enables interactive and visually engaging promotion that can influence both tourists' attitudes and the social norms that shape decision-making (Gabor & Varga, 2021; Pop et al., 2022). Recognizing this potential, the Gorontalo Provincial Tourism Office has adopted a range of digital tools, including official websites and social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to promote the province's attractions. Yet despite consistent use of these channels, overall engagement remains low and content specifically highlighting Whale Shark Tourism is relatively scarce (Table 2). The data indicate that a large proportion of social media content consists of administrative information rather than destination promotion. This imbalance suggests that government-managed social media platforms may not yet be fully effective in shaping favourable tourist attitudes or generating social endorsement for specific destinations, thereby limiting their capacity to influence visiting intentions.

**Table 2. Distribution of Social Media Content by Platform**

| Social media platform                                    | Number of followers | Year | Whale Shark | Other Destinations | Other Content |
|--|---------------------|------|-------------|--------------------|---------------|
| <b>Facebook</b><br>(Dinas Pariwisata Provinsi Gorontalo) | 855                 | 2023 | 7           | 5                  | 270           |
|  |                     | 2024 | 13          | 20                 | 205           |
|  |                     | 2025 | 0           | 2                  | 55            |
| <b>TikTok</b><br>(@dispar_gorontalo)                     | 1,538               | 2023 | 4           | 2                  | 5             |
|  |                     | 2024 | 2           | 7                  | 8             |
|  |                     | 2025 | 0           | 1                  | 16            |
| <b>Instagram</b><br>(@dispar_gorontaloprov)              | 4,931               | 2023 | 20          | 13                 | 350           |
|  |                     | 2024 | 35          | 35                 | 335           |
|  |                     | 2025 | 12          | 25                 | 65            |

Source: Official social media accounts of the Gorontalo Provincial Tourism Office, 2025

Previous studies consistently highlight the decisive role of social media in shaping tourist behavior. Tarigan and Tinambunan (2022) found that social media-based promotion significantly influences travel decision-making with promotional activities explaining up to

66.2% of tourists' decisions. Their findings underscore that social media serves as an effective and low-cost promotion tool that directly shapes consumer decision processes in tourism. Similarly, Armutcu et al. (2023) proposed a comprehensive model linking online destination content, satisfaction, and digital marketing interactions to behavioral intentions. Their study revealed that the quality and accessibility of online content positively affect tourist satisfaction and subsequent intention to visit. This affirms that social media and digital marketing play a critical role not only in shaping initial travel decisions but also in cultivating long-term behavioral outcomes such as loyalty and revisit intention.

However, much of this research has focused on general or commercial social media accounts, leaving the influence of government-managed platforms relatively underexplored. Within the framework of Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), such platforms are particularly important as they contribute to destination image, credibility, visibility, and policy-driven branding strategies. To address this gap, the present study adopts the concept of Government Social Media Promotion (GSMP) referring to the use of official government-managed social media platforms as a marketing communication tool to promote tourism destination. GSMP encompasses the reach, frequency, and message quality of promotional content disseminated through government accounts. Grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), this study posits that government-managed digital promotion influences tourists' visiting intention by shaping attitudes through message quality and credibility and reinforcing subjective norms through exposure and social validation. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the effect of GSMP on tourists' visiting intention toward Whale Shark Tourism in Gorontalo.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)**

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which originally developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) provides a foundational framework for understanding how individual attitudes and social influences combine to shape behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Trafimow, 2009). TRA theorizes that an individual's intention to perform a behavior is the most immediate predictor of actual behavior. This intention is jointly influenced by two primary components which are attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms (Alsaad, 2021; Chae et al., 2024). Attitude reflects the degree to which a person perceives that engaging in the behavior will lead to desirable outcomes (Panjaitan & Cahya, 2025). Prior research has demonstrated that positive attitudinal shifts significantly enhance behavioral intentions across various domains such as sustainable consumption (Rai & Narwal, 2025) and green purchasing (Ogiemwonyi et al., 2023; Roh et al., 2022). The second determinant is subjective norms which refer to perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform a behavior (Lucian et al., 2023).

In the context of this study, TRA provides a compelling lens through which to understand how promotional communication through social media can shape tourists' visiting intentions. Attitude reflects tourists' internal evaluation of destination appeal which can be influenced by message quality, credibility, and visual presentation of promotional content. Subjective norms emerge from the social context of media exposure where likes, shares, and comments signal social endorsement of a destination. Accordingly, within this research, TRA provides a theoretical foundation for explaining how government social media promotion influences tourists' visiting intentions by simultaneously shaping their attitudes and reinforcing subjective norms through credible and socially visible communication.

## **2.2 Government Social Media Promotion (GSMP) and tourist visiting intention**

The rise of social media has fundamentally transformed the communication landscape between governments and the public (Wukich, 2022). With the growing emphasis on digital engagement, government social media (GSM) serves not only for political marketing but it has expanded into broader areas of public services, branding, and promoting public goals (Y.-P. Yuan et al., 2023). In tourism marketing context, social media has become a critical medium in destination marketing due to its capacity to deliver interactive, real-time, and user-centred communication. For government tourism agencies, such platforms function as dual instruments by providing reliable informational content while creating social validation through visibility and engagement (Sitthipon et al., 2022; Yanti et al., 2023). Yuan et al. (2023) conceptualised GSM through three key dimensions: (1) social media engagement (SME); (2) trust in government social media (TSM); and (3) information quality (IQ). These dimensions highlight the importance of credibility, interaction, and message clarity in digital public communication.

Building upon this framework, the present study introduces the concept of Government Social Media Promotion (GSMP) which focuses specifically on the marketing and persuasive role of government-managed social media in promoting tourism destinations. While general GSM research emphasises governance and citizen participation, GSMP adapts this notion to capture the strategic use of official social media channels for destination visibility, credibility, and persuasion. In this study, GSMP is operationalised through three key indicators which are promotion reach, promotion frequency, and message quality. Promotion reach reflects the extent to which audiences are exposed to promotional content; promotion frequency represents the consistency and intensity of social media posting; and message quality denotes the clarity, visual appeal, and informativeness of the promotional material. These indicators measure the effectiveness of government-managed platforms in shaping of tourism destinations.

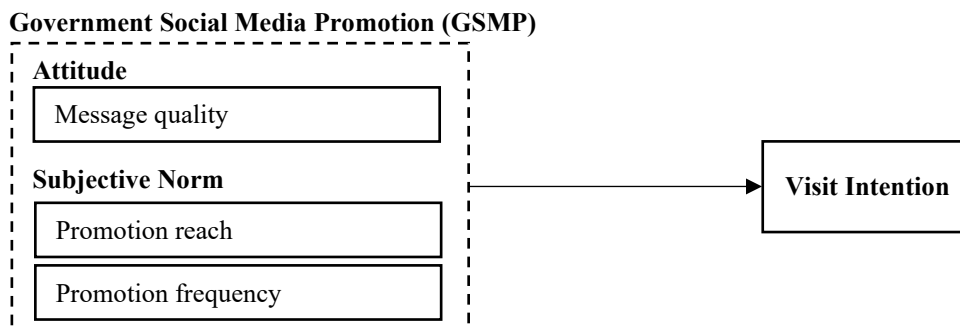
As Gabor and Varga (2021) highlighted that interactive social media content enhances emotional connection and persuasive impact, reinforcing both cognitive and normative aspects of decision-making. Social media platforms enable tourists to gather destination information, experience virtual engagement, and perceived social validation through peer-generated or official content (Y. Yuan et al., 2022). Empirical studies have demonstrated that visually rich, credible, and informative online content positively influences tourist attitude, satisfaction, and behavioral intention (Abbasi et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Visiting intention is influenced by a complex interaction of cognitive, affective, and social factors that shape how individuals evaluate destinations and decide to undertake travel (F. Yuan & Vui, 2023). While prior research has confirmed that digital and social media influence visiting intention, few studies have tested these mechanisms within government-managed platforms. Based on that explanation, the hypothesis proposed for this research is as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** GSMP has a significant positive relation with visit intention

## **3. Research Method**

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the influence of government-managed social media promotion on tourists' visiting intention towards Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani, Gorontalo. Government Social Media Promotion (GSMP) is conceptualised as a communication mechanism that shapes both attitudinal and normative factors influencing tourists' behavioral intention. Two main constructs were measured in this

study which are GSMP as the independent variable and tourist visiting intention as the dependent variable. In line with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), this study interprets GSMP as influencing tourists' behavioral intention through two pathways: attitude toward visiting (driven by message quality) and subjective norms (driven by promotional reach and frequency). These dimensions were translated into measurable indicators in the questionnaire. The relationship between these variables is illustrated in the research framework presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. research framework**

The population of this study comprised individuals who had knowledge of or experience with Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani, either through social media exposure or direct visitation. Using a purposive sampling technique, respondents were selected based on three criteria: (1) aged 18 years or older; (2) active users of social media; and (3) exposed to government-managed promotional content. A total of 96 valid responses were collected through online and on-site surveys conducted between July-September 2025, meeting the requirement for regression analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2018).

In order to measure respondents' perceptions of government-managed social media promotion and visiting intention, a structured questionnaire was used consisted of closed-ended questions rated on a five-point Likert scale. Close-ended questions were chosen because they allow for efficient data collection and facilitate quantitative analysis. However, such questions may not fully reflect respondent's attitude and not obtain in-depth response if not carefully designed (Baburajan et al., 2022; Hyman & Sierra, 2016). To address the limitation, the items were pre-tested to ensure clarity and reliability before the full survey was distributed. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded 0.70 confirming that the measurement scale was reliable and suitable for further analysis (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Following data collection, the responses were analysed using SPSS version 21. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to summarise respondent demographics and data distribution, followed by simple linear regression to examine the hypothesized relationship between GSMP and visiting intention. This analytical technique was chosen due to its ability to estimate both the magnitude and direction of influence between the independent and dependent variables. While this study employed simple linear regression to evaluate the direct influence of GSMP on tourists' visiting intention, no mediating variables were included in the model due to the scope and structure of the available data. This approach allows for the estimation of GSMP's overall predictive power in explaining behavioral intention, consistent with the study's objective to assess the direct impact of government-managed social media on tourist decision-making. However, in line with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), future research could employ hierarchical regression or mediation analysis to

examine the indirect pathways through attitude and subjective norms which provide more comprehensive understanding of the cognitive and social mechanisms underlying tourist behavior.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

A total of 96 valid responses were collected from both online and on-site surveys conducted between July and September 2025. As shown in Table 3, most respondents resided within Gorontalo Province (76%) while 24% were from outside the region. The majority of respondents were female (73.3%) and between the ages of 21-30 years (75%) which reflecting a dominance of young adult users who are highly active on social media. This group represents the demographic segment most likely to engage with online tourism promotion and digital media content.

**Table 3. Respondents' Criteria Based on Age, Gender, and Region of Origin**

| Criteria                | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------|------------|
| <b>Age</b>              |       |            |
| 18-20 years             | 10    | 10%        |
| 21-30 years             | 72    | 75%        |
| >31 years               | 14    | 15%        |
| <b>Gender</b>           |       |            |
| Male                    | 28    | 29%        |
| Female                  | 68    | 71%        |
| <b>Region of origin</b> |       |            |
| Gorontalo               | 73    | 76%        |
| Outside Gorontalo       | 23    | 24%        |

Source: Primary data, 2025 (*processed*)

To ensure the consistency of the measurement instrument, a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's alpha. As shown in Table 4, all variables obtained alpha coefficient above 0.70 indicating acceptable internal reliability. GSMP variable recorded a value of 0.874 while the tourist visiting intention variable recorded 0.834. These results confirm that all items were reliable and suitable for further analysis.

**Table 4. Reliability test**

| Variable            | Cronbach alpha | Cronbach alpha coefficient | Interpretation                  |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GSMP (X)            | 0.874          | 0.70                       | Acceptable internal consistency |
| Visit intention (Y) | 0.834          | 0.70                       | Acceptable internal consistency |

Source: SPSS processed data, 2025

The regression analysis revealed that GSMP significantly influence tourists' visiting intention toward Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani. The regression equation obtained was:

$$\hat{Y} = 2,746 + 0,706X$$

This result indicates that for every one-unit increase in GSMP leads to a 0.706 unit increase in tourist visiting intention, assuming other variable remain constant. The positive coefficient demonstrates that more effective and intensive social media promotion is associated with stronger behavioral intention to visit Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani.

**Table 5. T-test**

| Model                         | Coefficient Regression Value | Coefficient Std. Error | Standardized Coefficient $\beta$ | t      | Sig. |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|------|
| (Constant)                    | 2.746                        | 1.645                  |                                  | 1.669  | .099 |
| Social media promotion (GSMP) | .706                         | .066                   | .739                             | 10.645 | .000 |

Source: SPSS processed data, 2025

The t-test results support this finding, showing a t-value of 10.645 with a significance level of  $p < 0.001$  (Table 5). This confirms that the variable of GSMP exerts a real and measurable influence on tourists' willingness to visit. The constant value of 2.746 suggest that even in the absence of promotional activity, there remains a baseline level of tourist interest in the destination. In addition, the significance value of 0.000 (less than 0.05) confirms that the relationship between social media promotion and visiting intention is not due to chance. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that GSMP significantly influences tourist visiting intention is accepted.

The coefficient of determination analysis further confirms the strength of this relationship (Table 5). The correlation coefficient (R) is 0.739 indicating a strong positive correlation between GSMP and tourist visiting intention. The  $R^2$  value of 0.547 means that 54.7% of the variance in visiting intention can be explained by variations in GSMP. While GSMP explains a substantial portion of variance, other factors such as destination image, accessibility, or peer recommendations may also contribute to visiting intention. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.542 also demonstrates model stability while the standard error of the estimate (0.548) reflects only minor differences between predicted and observed values, implying good model fit.

**Table 6. Coefficient Determination**

| Model | R                 | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | Std error of the estimate |
|-------|-------------------|-------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 1     | .739 <sup>a</sup> | .547  | .542           | 2.548                     |

<sup>a</sup>Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Promotion

Source: SPSS processed data, 2025

The results confirm that GSMP exerts a significant and positive influence on tourists' visiting intention toward Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani. Within the framework of the TRA, this relationship reflects the dual mechanisms of attitude formation and subjective norm reinforcement that shape behavioral intention. From an attitudinal perspective, the findings indicate that message quality comprising clarity, informativeness, and visual appeal plays a central role in stimulating favorable evaluations of the destination. When promotional messages on official government social media accounts are perceived as trustworthy, visually attractive, and emotionally engaging, they create a cognitive appraisal that Whale Shark Tourism is a worthwhile and credible destination to visit. This attitudinal effect resonates with the view of Armutcu et al. (2023) who demonstrated that the quality and user-friendliness of online content enhance tourist satisfaction and intention to visit. In the context of Gorontalo, well-crafted digital messages not only convey factual information about the destination but also construct a sense of authenticity elements that strengthen tourists' desire to experience the site firsthand.

The subjective norm component also emerged as an influential factor which is represented by the reach and frequency of government-managed social media posts. The repetitive exposure

of audiences to official tourism content increases the social visibility of Whale Shark Tourism. This social reinforcement mechanism aligns with TRA's proposition that individuals are motivated to engage in behaviors that are perceived as normative or supported by significant others. In this case, frequent and wide-reaching promotional activities function as digital cues of social approval, signaling to potential visitors that traveling to Botubarani is not only attractive but also socially valued. These findings are consistent with Tarigan and Tinambunan (2022), who found that social media promotion explained 66.2% of tourists' travel decisions.

However, unlike studies focusing on commercial content, this research demonstrates that government-managed platforms amplify the promotional effect through institutional credibility and information reliability. High-quality, visually engaging and consistent messaging from official accounts fosters a positive attitude toward the destination while frequent exposure enhances subjective norms by signaling widespread social endorsement. These findings provide empirical support for the applicability of the TRA in the digital tourism context. Nevertheless, prior study by Sun and Lee (2023) cautioned that excessive posting may lead to message fatigue, hence maintaining content diversity, authentic storytelling, and interactive dialogue is essential to sustain positive user perception. Overall, this study demonstrates that well-executed GSMP not only informs but also persuades by translating institutional communication into behavioral intention. This underscores the potential of government-led digital promotion as a strategic instrument for destination marketing and sustainable tourism development.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study confirms that Government Social Media Promotion (GSMP) exerts a significant and positive influence on tourists' visiting intention toward Whale Shark Tourism in Botubarani, Gorontalo. Within the framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), this finding confirms that social media promotion carried out through official government channels affects tourists' intention through two pathways: (1) strengthening attitude toward visiting by providing clear, appealing, and trustworthy promotional messages; and (2) reinforcing subjective norms through frequent and far-reaching exposure that generates social validation. These mechanisms highlight how credible and consistent digital promotion can effectively transform information dissemination into psychological motivation to visit.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that the Gorontalo Provincial Tourism Office should enhance the quality and consistency of its digital promotional strategy to sustain interest in Whale Shark Tourism. Priority should be given to producing informative and visually engaging content, maintaining posting frequency, and encouraging interactive engagement with audiences to increase reach and social endorsement. As official social media accounts carry higher credibility than commercial or user-generated platforms, government-managed social media should be viewed not merely as a communication tool but as an effective destination marketing instrument capable of influencing tourist attitudes, social perceptions, and visiting intentions.

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