

Research Article

Smart Tourism Ecosystems and Digital Job Creation in the Platform Economy Era: A Qualitative Study in Emerging Tourism Destinations

Nova Yudha Andriansyah Putra^{1*}, Lia Mazia², and Instianti Elyana³

1 Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, Indonesia; email : Nova.noy@bsi.ac.id

2 Universitas Nusa Mandiri, Indonesia; email : lia.lmz@nusamandiri.ac.id

3 Universitas Nusa Mandiri, Indonesia; email : instianti.iny@nusamandiri.ac.id

*Corresponding Author: Nova.noy@bsi.ac.id

Abstract: The accelerated growth of digital technologies has transformed the tourism industry into a highly interconnected and platform driven ecosystem. This study explores how smart tourism ecosystems contribute to digital job creation within the platform economy, particularly in emerging tourism destinations. While previous research has focused on technological adoption and tourist experience, limited attention has been given to employment generation and local economic inclusion. This study adopts a method qualitative approach using in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving tourism stakeholders such as local entrepreneurs, digital platform workers, and community leaders. The findings reveal that smart tourism ecosystems characterized by ICT infrastructure, data integration, and stakeholder collaboration play a crucial role in enabling new forms of employment, including gig work, digital entrepreneurship, and content-based tourism promotion. Platforms such as Traveloka and Airbnb facilitate market access, reduce entry barriers, and create flexible job opportunities. However, challenges remain in terms of digital literacy, income stability, and platform dependency. This study contributes to the literature by integrating smart tourism and digital labor perspectives and offers practical recommendations for policymakers and also stakeholders to foster inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Digital Employment; Digital Transformation; Platform Economy; Qualitative Research; Smart Tourism Ecosystem; Tourism Innovation.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the global tourism industry, leading to the emergence of Smart Tourism as a key paradigm in destination development. Smart tourism ecosystems integrate information and communication technologies (ICT), big data, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to enhance service delivery, tourist experience, and destination competitiveness. At the same time, the rise of the Platform Economy has reconfigured traditional employment structures by enabling flexible, decentralized, and digitally mediated forms of work. Platforms such as Airbnb and Traveloka illustrate how tourism services are increasingly delivered through digital infrastructures, creating new opportunities for individuals to participate in economic activities.

Emerging tourism destinations, particularly rural and community-based tourism areas, have experienced significant transformation due to digitalization. Destinations that were previously limited by accessibility and marketing constraints are now able to reach broader markets through social media and smart tourism technologies. The integration of digital ecosystems has also encouraged the growth of digital jobs such as social media administrators, tourism content creators, digital marketers, online reservation managers, and platform-based tourism entrepreneurs.

Digital platforms have become an essential part of this transformation by simplifying the travel experience through features that enable users to reserve accommodations, design personalized itineraries, and discover tourist destinations more conveniently (Mia et al., 2020). The integration of digital technologies has transformed the way people interact, while the growing global concern for environmental and social issues has encouraged various sectors

Received: March 12, 2026
Revised: April 19, 2026
Accepted: May 22, 2026
Online Available: May 30, 2026
Curr. Ver.: May 30, 2026



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.
Submitted for possible open access
publication under the terms and
conditions of the Creative
Commons Attribution (CC BY SA)
license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

to combine technological innovation with greater social and environmental responsibility (Akhtar, et al., 2021,).

Previous studies on smart tourism ecosystems have largely employed quantitative approaches, particularly surveys and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to examine relationships between technology adoption, service quality, and destination competitiveness. While these methods provide strong statistical generalization, they are limited in capturing the complexity of social processes and human experiences underlying digital transformation. On the other hand, qualitative studies have explored stakeholder perceptions and user experiences, offering deeper contextual insights; however, such studies often focus on isolated aspects and rarely address employment generation within platform-based tourism systems.

Previous studies have examined how platforms such as Airbnb, Booking.com, and TripAdvisor have disrupted conventional market structures. However, only a limited number of studies have investigated how the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies, including artificial intelligence, blockchain, and immersive digital technologies, influences market competition, inclusivity, and sustainability performance (Chen et al., 2024).

This imbalance highlights a critical research gap. Despite the growing importance of digital platforms in tourism, limited attention has been given to how smart tourism ecosystems contribute to the creation of digital jobs, especially in emerging tourism destinations where local communities rely heavily on tourism for their livelihoods. The transformation from traditional employment to platform-based work such as gig work, digital entrepreneurship, and content-driven tourism services remains underexplored, particularly from a qualitative perspective that captures the lived experiences of stakeholders.

Based on this gap, the main research problem addressed in this study is: how do smart tourism ecosystems facilitate digital job creation within the platform economy, and how are these processes experienced by tourism stakeholders? This problem was particularly relevant in the context of developing destinations, where digital transformation presents both opportunities and also challenges for the inclusive economic development.

Tourism possesses significant potential to support economic growth and cultural development; however, unmanaged tourist flows can also generate various social and environmental risks. Contemporary tourism policies therefore face the challenge of balancing economic benefits with sustainable destination management. The rapid influence of social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, has intensified the phenomenon of over tourism by popularizing “Instagram Mable” destinations through highly visual content. Such exposure increases tourist demand, often without considering the actual carrying capacity of destinations. This condition has become a major concern for many European cities and resort areas, where maintaining equilibrium between tourism-driven economic advantages and the quality of life of local communities is increasingly central to strategic tourism management (H.Tarasiuk, 2025).

To address this issue, this study was adopts a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of stakeholder experiences, including local entrepreneurs, digital platform workers, and tourism managers. By focusing on meanings, processes, and interactions, the study aims to uncover how smart tourism ecosystems operate in practice and how they enable or constrain digital employment opportunities.

This study offers several contributions. First, it extends the theoretical discourse on smart tourism by integrating perspectives from digital labor and employment studies within the platform economy. Second, it provides empirical insights into the mechanisms through which digital platforms create new forms of work in tourism. Third, it contributes practical recommendations for policymakers and industry stakeholders to promote inclusive, sustainable, and technology-driven employment in tourism destinations.

For the remainder in this paper is structured as follows. Part of Section 2 is reviews the relevant literature on smart tourism ecosystems, platform economies, and digital job creation. Section 3 was explains the qualitative with research methodology and including data collection then analysis techniques. Section 4 was presents the findings and discussion. Section 5 compares the results with previous studies, and Section 6 concludes the paper with implications and suggestions for future research.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of smart tourism and platform economy literature by integrating tourism digitalization with community-based employment transformation. Practically, the findings are expected to provide recommendations for

policymakers, tourism managers, and local communities in strengthening inclusive and sustainable digital tourism ecosystems.

2. Literature Review

The development of Smart Tourism has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past decade, particularly in relation to how digital technologies enhance tourism experiences and destination management. Early studies emphasize the role of information of course communication technologies (ICT) than big data and mobile applications in creating more efficient, personalized, and responsive tourism services. These studies generally conclude that smart tourism contributes to increased destination competitiveness and improved tourist satisfaction. However, most of this body of work adopts a technology-centric perspective, focusing primarily on system efficiency and innovation outcomes, rather than broader socio-economic impacts.

Digital platforms can be understood as algorithm-based online systems that facilitate connections among stakeholders while organizing and managing economic activities (Kenney & Zysman, 2016,).

Subsequent research has expanded the discussion by incorporating stakeholder perspectives and ecosystem thinking. Smart tourism is increasingly conceptualized as a socio-technical system in which technology, institutions, and human actors interact dynamically. Qualitative studies in this area highlight the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, digital literacy, and local adaptability in ensuring the success of smart tourism initiatives. While these studies provide deeper contextual insights, they still tend to emphasize governance and experience co-creation, with limited attention to employment generation and labor transformation.

Existing literature on digital platforms emphasizes their transformative influence across various sectors, particularly in relation to governance, ecosystem innovation, and broader industrial transformation (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2020; Rietveld & Schilling, 2020,).

In parallel, the rise of the Platform Economy has reshaped the structure of tourism markets. Research on platform-based **tourism** particularly involving platforms such as Airbnb and Traveloka demonstrates how digital intermediaries reduce transaction costs, expand market access, and enable peer-to-peer interactions. Many studies highlight the efficiency and scalability of these platforms, as well as their role in democratizing access to tourism markets for small-scale entrepreneurs.

However, critical perspectives have emerged, particularly from qualitative research, which examine the power dynamics embedded within platform systems. These studies reveal that platform governance mechanisms such as algorithms, rating systems, and policies—significantly influence user visibility, income distribution, and access to opportunities. While platforms create new economic possibilities, they also introduce challenges related to dependency, inequality, and lack of control among workers.

The concept of digital job creation has also been explored in recent literature, often linked to the broader discourse on the Sharing Economy. Studies in this area suggest that digital platforms enable new forms of employment, including gig work, digital entrepreneurship, and content-based labor. These opportunities are often characterized by flexibility, low entry barriers, and accessibility, making them particularly relevant in emerging tourism destinations. Nevertheless, qualitative findings consistently highlight issues such as income instability, lack of social protection, and precarious working conditions.

Although the body of literature on smart tourism continues to expand, platform economy, and digital employment, these areas are often examined in isolation. There is a lack of integrative research that explores how smart tourism ecosystems and platform economies jointly influence digital job creation. Moreover, much of the existing research relies on qualitative methods, which, while useful for identifying relationships between variables, do not adequately capture the lived experiences, meanings, and adaptive strategies of stakeholders.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by adopting a qualitative approach to explore the intersection between smart tourism ecosystems and digital job creation within the platform economy. By focusing on stakeholder experiences and socio-economic processes, this research aims to provide a more holistic and context-sensitive understanding of how digital transformation shapes employment in tourism.

Smart Tourism Ecosystem and Digital Transformation

The concept of Smart Tourism has emerged as a response to the increasing integration of digital technologies within the tourism sector. A smart tourism ecosystem refers to a dynamic network in which digital infrastructure, stakeholders, and data-driven processes interact to create value for both tourists and local communities. This ecosystem is typically supported by information and communication technologies (ICT), including mobile applications, cloud computing, and real-time data analytics, which enable more efficient and personalized tourism services.

The adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and big data analytics, has significantly transformed various sectors of the economy. Youssef & Mejri (2023) including the tourism and hospitality value chain. These technological advancements have enabled digital platforms to enhance personalization, improve operational efficiency, and increase guest satisfaction (Gössling & Hall, 2019; Nikopoulou et al., 2023).

The digital transformation of the tourism industry is a multifaceted process that involves technological, economic, managerial, and social dimensions in shaping sector development (Svitlana Bondarenko, 2025).

From a quantitative perspective, smart tourism ecosystems are not only technological systems but also socio-technical constructs shaped by human interaction, institutional arrangements, and local cultural contexts. Previous studies highlight that the success of smart tourism initiatives depends on stakeholder collaboration, digital readiness, and the ability of local communities to adapt to technological changes. In this context, digital transformation becomes a key driver in enhancing both service innovation and economic participation.

However, much of existing this literature has focused primarily on technological efficiency and tourist satisfaction, often neglecting the broader socio-economic implications of smart tourism. In particular, the role of smart tourism ecosystems in generating employment opportunities remains underexplored. This limitation suggests the need for a more holistic and qualitative understanding of how digital transformation within tourism ecosystems influences local livelihoods and economic inclusion.

Platform Economy and Digital Job Creation in Tourism

Platforms at the most basic level can be defined as a digital infrastructure that enables interaction between two or more parties. Srnicek (2017) The rise of the Platform Economy has significantly reshaped the structure of tourism markets by enabling direct interactions between service providers and consumers through digital platforms. Platforms such as Traveloka and Airbnb play a central role in facilitating transactions, expanding market access, and lowering entry barriers for individuals and small-scale tourism enterprises.

the large amount of information generated by digital channels allows the company to improve strategies and forecast demand. The importance of adapting tourism companies to the digital environment was also confirmed, which in turn will quickly increase the efficiency and competitiveness of the tourism business (Tyshchuk, 2023).

Qualitative studies on platform economies emphasize that these platforms are not merely intermediaries but active agents that influence economic relationships, power dynamics, and access to opportunities. Features such as rating systems, algorithms, and platform governance mechanisms shape how users participate and compete within the digital marketplace. As a result, the platform economy enables new forms of employment, including gig work, digital entrepreneurship, and content-based tourism promotion.

From the perspective of digital job creation, the platform economy provides flexible and accessible opportunities for individuals to engage in tourism-related activities. This is particularly relevant in emerging tourism destinations, where traditional employment opportunities may be limited. However, qualitative research also reveals several challenges associated with digital employment, such as income instability, lack of social protection, and dependence on platform policies.

The entry of new actors, including analytics service providers and energy management systems, has contributed to the diversification of the ecosystem while encouraging innovation. This development is consistent with platform theory, which highlights the central role of digital platforms in reshaping economic relationships and enabling collaborative business models, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Gawer, 2014).

Despite these insights, there remains a lack of integrative research that connects platform economy dynamics with smart tourism ecosystems in the context of employment generation. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring how digital platforms and smart tourism infrastructures collectively contribute to the creation of digital jobs, while also examining the lived experiences of stakeholders involved in these processes.

Digital Job Creation in Tourism

Digital job creation refers to employment opportunities that emerge from the use of digital technologies and platforms. In the tourism sector, this includes a wide range of roles, such as gig workers, digital entrepreneurs, and content creators. The expansion of digital platforms has enabled individuals to participate in tourism-related activities without requiring significant capital or formal organizational structures.

The development of the digital economy has also created various new job opportunities previously unavailable in the conventional economic system. Abdillah stated that the digital economy has become a major factor driving economic growth in Indonesia. This transformation opens up opportunities for the younger generation to engage in various technology-based economic sectors (Abdillah, 2024).

Research conducted by Alfyon and Rostiana shows that digital literacy has a positive relationship with work engagement. Individuals with good digital literacy tend to have a higher ability to utilize technology to improve performance and productivity (Alfyon, 2024).

From a qualitative standpoint, digital employment is often characterized by flexibility, autonomy, and accessibility. Workers can choose when and how they engage in economic activities, which can be particularly beneficial in rural or emerging tourism destinations. However, qualitative studies also highlight several challenges, including income instability, lack of social protection, and dependence on platform policies.

Furthermore, digital job creation is closely linked to the concept of the Sharing Economy, where resources such as accommodation, transportation, and local experiences are shared through digital platforms. While this model promotes inclusivity and efficiency, it also raises concerns about labor conditions and sustainability.

Platform Economy and Digital Job Creation in Tourism

Although previous studies have examined smart tourism ecosystems, platform economies, and digital employment, these concepts are often treated separately. There is a lack of integrative research that explores how smart tourism ecosystems and platform economies jointly contribute to digital job creation, particularly from a qualitative perspective.

Existing quantitative studies provide valuable insights into relationships between variables but are limited in explaining the underlying processes and stakeholder experiences. On the other hand, qualitative studies offer rich contextual understanding but often focus on isolated aspects, such as user experience or platform usage, without linking them to broader ecosystem dynamics and employment outcomes.

Furthermore, the emergence of new professions, such as content creators on social media platforms, indicates a shift in career patterns among the younger generation. Zirzis explained that content creators on digital platforms, such as TikTok, are increasingly sought after by Generation Z as an alternative career in the digital age (Zirzis, 2025).

Research conducted by Alfyon and Rostiana shows that digital literacy has a positive relationship with work engagement. Individuals with good digital literacy tend to have a higher ability to utilize technology to improve performance and productivity (Alfyon, 2024).

Fotaleno and Batubara explain that differences in perspective between the younger generation and traditional work systems can create a generation gap in the work environment (Fotaleno, 2024). As a result, some Generation Z tend to prefer flexible work, such as working independently as a freelancer or running a digital business, compared to formal work that has a more rigid work structure (Haq, 2022).

Social media strategy serves to operationalize broader organizational strategies while also providing valuable market and customer insights that can inform the development and refinement of business strategy. In the case study organization, current practices in social media marketing suggest that strategic implementation has not yet been fully optimized. Therefore, the company requires more deliberate decision-making to better leverage available marketing opportunities and attract a larger customer base, in line with its intended improvements in social media utilization for business promotion (Gohil, 2015).

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by adopting a qualitative approach to explore how smart tourism ecosystems enable digital job creation within the platform economy. It focuses on understanding the interactions between technology, platforms, and stakeholders, as well as the meanings and experiences associated with digital work in tourism.

3. Proposed Method

This study is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm, aiming to explore and interpret how Smart Tourism ecosystems contribute to digital job creation within the Platform Economy. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this research as it enables an in-

depth understanding of complex social phenomena, focusing on meanings, experiences, and interactions among tourism stakeholders in the context of digital transformation.

A thorough literature review was undertaken, drawing on peer-reviewed scholarly sources such as journal articles, conference papers, and selected book chapters, alongside relevant industry reports and policy documents (Adelina Zeqiri, 2025).

The study focuses on emerging tourism destinations that have adopted digital tourism practices and platform-based tourism services. The selected destinations represent community-based tourism areas experiencing rapid digital adaptation and tourism innovation. **Research Design**

This research was adopts a multiple case of study design, allowing for a contextual and holistic exploration of smart tourism practices in emerging tourism destinations. The case study approach is chosen because it facilitates the investigation of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. The study focuses on destinations where digital platforms such as Traveloka and Airbnb are actively used by local stakeholders.

Research Participants

The participants are selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who are directly involved in digital tourism activities. These include:

| Participant Category | Criteria |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Local tourism entrepreneurs | Homestay owners, tour operators, tourism MSMEs |
| Digital platform workers | Online service providers, gig workers |
| Community leaders | Individuals involved in tourism management |
| Tourism managers | Destination coordinators and tourism administrators |

This sampling strategy ensures that the data collected reflects diverse perspectives within the smart tourism ecosystem.

Data Collection Techniques

Data are collected through three main qualitative methods to ensure depth and triangulation:

- a. **In-depth Interviews**
Semi-structured interviews were used to examine participants’ experiences, perceptions, and approaches in interacting with digital platforms. Open-ended questions enable participants to share their perspectives without restriction, yielding in-depth and nuanced insights.
- b. **Participant Observation**
The researcher conducts direct observations of tourism activities, service interactions, and digital platform usage in natural settings. This method helps capture real-time behaviors and contextual dynamics that may not be fully revealed through interviews.
- c. **Document Analysis**
Relevant documents such as tourism policies, development plans, and platform-related materials are analyzed to complement primary data and provide institutional context.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, employing a systematic and iterative procedure:

- a. **Data Familiarization:** Transcribing interviews, reading field notes, and reviewing documents
- b. **Open Coding:** Identifying initial codes and meaningful units of data
- c. **Axial Coding:** Codes were then organized into categories by identifying relationships and recurring patterns among them.
- d. **Selective Coding:** Developing core themes that explain the role of smart tourism ecosystems in digital job creation

This process allows the researcher to construct a comprehensive understanding of how digital transformation shapes employment opportunities and challenges.

The coding process focused on several themes:

Table 1. Main Dimensions of the Smart Tourism Ecosystem.

| Main Theme | Sub-Themes |
|---------------------------|--|
| Smart Tourism Ecosystem | Digital infrastructure, tourism platforms, ICT adoption |
| Digital Job Creation | Content creators, digital marketing, online booking operators |
| Platform Economy | Gig economy, digital entrepreneurship, platform dependency |
| Stakeholder Collaboration | Government support, community participation, partnerships |
| Challenges | Digital literacy, infrastructure limitations, market competition |

To ensure the credibility and rigor of the study, several qualitative validation strategies are applied:

- a. **Credibility:** This was achieved through prolonged engagement and member checking, in which the findings were confirmed with participants to ensure accuracy and credibility.
- b. **Transferability:** This was ensured by presenting thick, detailed descriptions of the research context and participants to enhance transferability.
- c. **Dependability:** Maintained through a clear and transparent research process, including documentation of data collection and analysis procedures
- d. **Confirmability:** Strengthened by minimizing researcher bias and maintaining an audit trail of decisions and interpretations

Additionally, data triangulation is employed by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documents, enhancing the reliability of the results.

This study complies with ethical research standards by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity. Participants are fully informed about the study's objectives and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without any consequences.

4. Results and Discussion

This section reports the results derived from in-depth interviews conducted with participants. Participant observations, and document analysis regarding the role of Smart Tourism ecosystems in creating digital employment opportunities within the Platform Economy. The analysis focuses on how digital infrastructures, tourism platforms, and stakeholder collaboration shape new forms of tourism-related work in emerging destinations.

The findings reveal that smart tourism ecosystems contribute significantly to the expansion of digital-based economic activities. The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT), online tourism platforms, and digital marketing practices has enabled local communities to participate more actively in tourism value chains. At the same time, the study identifies several structural challenges related to digital literacy, platform dependency, and income sustainability.

Characteristics of the Smart Tourism Ecosystem

The first finding demonstrates that the smart tourism ecosystem is supported by three interconnected dimensions: digital infrastructure, platform integration, and stakeholder collaboration. Participants explained that access to smartphones, internet connectivity, online booking systems, and social media significantly changed tourism management practices.

Local tourism entrepreneurs stated that platforms such as Traveloka and Airbnb simplified promotion and market access. Tourism actors who previously relied on conventional marketing methods are now able to reach broader markets through digital platforms.

Table 2. Presents the main dimensions identified in the smart tourism ecosystem.

| Dimension | Indicators | Findings |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Digital Infrastructure | Internet access, mobile devices, digital payment systems | Facilitates online tourism activities and communication |
| Platform Integration | Use of Traveloka, Airbnb, social media | Expands market reach and booking efficiency |
| Stakeholder Collaboration | Government, communities, entrepreneurs | Supports tourism innovation and digital adaptation |
| Data Utilization | Online reviews, ratings, customer feedback | Improves service quality and destination visibility |

The findings indicate that digital infrastructure functions as the foundation for tourism transformation. Participants emphasized that online accessibility increased tourist engagement and accelerated service responsiveness. This supports previous studies suggesting

that smart tourism ecosystems rely heavily on technological connectivity and information exchange.

Furthermore, stakeholder collaboration emerged as a critical factor. Community leaders explained that cooperation between local governments, tourism managers, and digital entrepreneurs strengthened destination branding and collective promotion strategies. This finding confirms that smart tourism ecosystems are socio-technical systems rather than merely technological frameworks.

Digital Platforms and New Employment Opportunities

The second major finding concerns the emergence of digital employment opportunities generated through tourism platforms. The study identified three dominant forms of digital work:

- a. Gig-based tourism services
- b. Digital entrepreneurship
- c. Content-based tourism promotion

Participants reported that online platforms lowered entry barriers for individuals seeking income opportunities in tourism. Homestay owners, freelance tour guides, transportation providers, and local culinary businesses increasingly rely on digital applications to connect with consumers.

Table 3. Forms of Digital Employment in Tourism.

| Type of Digital Work | Description | Example Activities |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Gig Work | Flexible service-based work | Tour guiding, transportation services |
| Digital Entrepreneurship | Independent tourism businesses using platforms | Homestays, culinary MSMEs |
| Content-Based Promotion | Tourism marketing through digital media | Travel vloggers, Instagram promotion |
| Platform Administration | Management of digital tourism operations | Online booking management |

One tourism entrepreneur explained that online booking platforms significantly increased occupancy rates and reduced dependence on travel agents. Similarly, digital content creators stated that social media promotion enabled them to monetize tourism experiences through collaborations and sponsored content.

The findings also show that digital employment provides flexibility and accessibility, especially for younger generations. Many participants perceived digital tourism work as more adaptive to current economic conditions compared to conventional tourism employment.

The relationship between smart tourism ecosystems and digital job creation can be conceptually illustrated as follows:

Digital Infrastructure → Platform Accessibility → Tourism Innovation → Digital Employment Creation

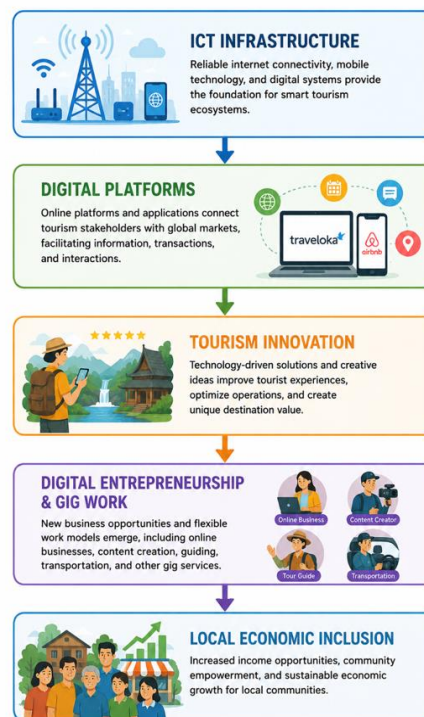
This relationship demonstrates that technological accessibility acts as a catalyst for employment transformation within tourism destinations.

The Influence of Social Media on Tourism Promotion

Another important finding relates to the increasing role of social media in destination marketing and employment generation. Participants highlighted that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube significantly influence tourist behavior and destination visibility.

Tourism actors increasingly produce digital content to attract visitors, including short videos, travel photography, and storytelling content. This phenomenon has created new professions such as tourism influencers, freelance photographers, and digital campaign managers.

Figure 1. Smart Tourism Ecosystem and Digital Employment Model.



The findings indicate that social media functions not only as a promotional tool but also as an economic platform that enables monetization opportunities. This supports the concept of the Platform Economy, where digital participation creates new forms of labor and value creation.

However, observations also revealed intense competition within digital platforms. Visibility is strongly influenced by algorithms, ratings, and online engagement metrics. Consequently, tourism workers are increasingly dependent on platform systems that they do not fully control.

Challenges in Digital Tourism Employment

Despite the positive impacts, the study identified several significant challenges associated with digital employment in tourism.

- a. Digital Literacy Gaps
Older tourism actors often experienced difficulties adapting to online systems, digital marketing strategies, and platform management. Limited digital skills reduced their competitiveness within the digital tourism ecosystem.
- b. Income Instability
Many gig workers reported fluctuating income patterns due to seasonal tourism demand and changing platform algorithms. Unlike formal employment, digital tourism work often lacks stable wages and social protection.
- c. Platform Dependency
Participants expressed concerns regarding dependency on dominant digital platforms. Changes in platform policies, commission systems, or visibility algorithms directly affected business performance and worker income.

Table 3. Main Challenges in Digital Tourism Employment.

| Challenges | Impacts |
|--------------------------|--|
| Limited Digital Literacy | Unequal participation in digital tourism |
| Income Instability | Economic uncertainty among workers |
| Platform Dependency | Reduced autonomy and bargaining power |
| High Digital Competition | Difficulty maintaining online visibility |

These findings align with critical perspectives on the Platform Economy, which argue that digital platforms simultaneously create opportunities and vulnerabilities. Although platforms democratize market access, they also centralize control within algorithmic systems.

5. Comparison

Previous studies mainly discussed smart tourism from technological and destination competitiveness perspectives. Meanwhile, this study highlights the socio-economic transformation occurring through platform-based tourism ecosystems.

This research also expands platform economy discussions by demonstrating how digital tourism creates flexible employment systems and local entrepreneurship opportunities in rural tourism contexts.

The research findings demonstrate that smart tourism ecosystems significantly contribute to digital job creation by integrating technology, platforms, and collaborative governance structures. Unlike traditional tourism systems, smart tourism ecosystems enable decentralized and flexible economic participation through digital infrastructures.

This study extends previous smart tourism research by emphasizing employment transformation rather than solely tourist experience and technological efficiency. The qualitative findings reveal that digital platforms function as labor mediators that reshape economic relationships within tourism destinations.

The emergence of gig work, digital entrepreneurship, and content-based tourism promotion reflects broader changes associated with the Platform Economy. In this context, tourism workers increasingly operate within digitally mediated environments where visibility, reputation, and platform engagement determine economic opportunities.

From a theoretical perspective, this study confirms that smart tourism ecosystems are socio-technical ecosystems involving continuous interaction between technology, institutions, and communities. The findings also support digital labor theories which argue that technological innovation simultaneously creates flexibility and precarity.

Practically, the study suggests that policymakers should strengthen digital literacy programs, provide training for local tourism communities, and develop inclusive tourism policies that reduce inequalities in digital participation. Furthermore, sustainable smart tourism development requires stronger protection mechanisms for digital workers, particularly regarding income security and platform transparency.

Overall, the findings indicate that smart tourism ecosystems have substantial potential to promote local economic inclusion and digital employment in emerging tourism destinations. However, the sustainability of these opportunities depends on balanced governance, technological accessibility, and equitable platform regulation.

6. Conclusions

This study explored how Smart Tourism ecosystems contribute to digital job creation within the Platform Economy in emerging tourism destinations using a qualitative research approach. The results indicate that the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT), digital platforms, and collaborative engagement among stakeholders has substantially reshaped economic activities within the tourism sector. Smart tourism ecosystems enable the emergence of new employment opportunities such as gig work, digital entrepreneurship, online tourism services, and content-based tourism promotion.

The results reveal that digital platforms such as Traveloka and Airbnb play an important role in expanding market access, reducing business entry barriers, and increasing local participation in tourism economies. The study also found that social media platforms support destination visibility and create additional economic opportunities for digital content creators and tourism influencers. These findings confirm that smart tourism ecosystems are not only technological systems but also socio-economic environments that facilitate local economic inclusion through digital transformation.

The findings support the main research objective by showing that smart tourism ecosystems directly influence digital employment creation through the interaction between ICT infrastructure, digital platforms, tourism innovation, and entrepreneurial activities. The study further strengthens previous theoretical discussions on smart tourism by integrating perspectives from digital labor and platform economy studies. This research highlights that technology-driven tourism development simultaneously creates opportunities for economic participation and challenges related to labor precarity, platform dependency, and income instability.

From a practical standpoint, this study offers significant implications for policymakers, tourism managers, and local communities. Governments and tourism stakeholders should strengthen digital literacy programs, improve digital infrastructure accessibility, and develop inclusive tourism policies that support sustainable digital employment. In addition, platform governance and worker protection mechanisms are necessary to ensure fair economic participation and reduce vulnerabilities experienced by gig workers and small tourism entrepreneurs.

This study adds to the expanding body of literature on smart tourism and digital transformation by providing a qualitative, context-specific perspective on how digital ecosystems influence employment structures in tourism destinations. Unlike many previous studies that focus primarily on technological efficiency and tourist satisfaction, this research emphasizes the socio-economic dimensions of smart tourism, particularly its role in local economic empowerment and digital labor creation.

References

- Abdillah, F. (2024). Dampak ekonomi digital terhadap pertumbuhan ekonomi di Indonesia. *Benefit: Journal of Business, Economics, and Finance*, 2(1), 27–35. <https://doi.org/10.70437/benefit.v2i1.335>
- Akhtar, N., Khan, N., Mahroof Khan, M., Ashraf, S., Hashmi, M., Khan, M., & Hishan, S. (2021). Post-COVID-19 tourism: Will digital tourism replace mass tourism? *Sustainability*, 13, 5352. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13105352>
- Alfyoni, G. A. (2024). Peran literasi digital dan perilaku kerja inovatif terhadap keterikatan kerja pada karyawan generasi Z. *Management Studies and Entrepreneurship Journal*, 5(2), 6138–6153.
- Ben Youssef, A., & Mejri, I. (2023). Linking digital technologies to sustainability through Industry 5.0: A bibliometric analysis. *Sustainability*, 15, 7465. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15097465>
- Chen, Y., Zhang, N., & Cheng, X. (2024). The spillover effects of online tourism platforms on sustainable development. *Information Systems Journal*, 34, 788–827. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12448>
- Fotaleno, F., & Rahmawati, A. (2024). Fenomena kesulitan Generasi Z dalam mendapatkan pekerjaan ditinjau perspektif teori kesenjangan generasi. *Syntax Admiration*, 5(8). <https://doi.org/10.46799/jsa.v5i8.1513>
- Gawer, A. (2014). Bridging differing perspectives on technological platforms: Toward an integrative framework. *Research Policy*, 43, 1239–1249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2014.03.006>
- Gohil, D. N. (2015). Role and impact of social media in tourism: A case study on the initiatives of Madhya Pradesh State Tourism. *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences*, 8–15.
- Gössling, S., & Hall, C. M. (2019). Sharing versus collaborative economy: How to align ICT developments and the SDGs in tourism? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 27, 74–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2018.1560455>
- Haq, R. L. (2022). Perilaku preferensi menjadi pengangguran oleh milenial dan Gen Z dalam karir dan pekerjaan. *Jurnal Flourishing*, 2(5), 384–391. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um070v2i52022p384-391>
- Kenney, M., & Zysman, J. (2016). The rise of the platform economy. *Issues in Science and Technology*, 32, 61–69.
- Mia, M., Hossain, S., Toma, T., Mahmud, I., & Roy, J. (2020). Usability testing of tourism apps in Bangladesh. In *Tourism and hospitality management in digital era* (Vol. 9). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003007241-12>
- Nikopoulou, M., Kourouthanassis, P., Chasapi, G., Pateli, A., & Mylonas, N. (2023). Determinants of digital transformation in the hospitality industry: Technological, organizational, and environmental drivers. *Sustainability*, 15, 2736. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032736>
- Rietveld, J., & Schilling, M. A. (2021). Platform competition: A systematic and interdisciplinary review of the literature. *Journal of Management*, 47(6), 1528–1563. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206320969791>
- Srnicek, N. (2017). *Platform capitalism*. Polity Press.
- Svitlana Bondarenko, O. K. (2025). Digital transformation of the tourism business in an open economy: A comprehensive approach to travel planning and partnerships. *Social Development: Economic and Legal Issues*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.70651/3083-6018/2025.4.17>
- Tarasiuk, H., & Danylenko, K. (2025). Digital marketing in tourism: The role of social media and online platforms in shaping tourist flows. *Problemy Teorii ta Metodologii Bukhbalterskoho Obliku, Kontroliu i Analizu*, 73–79. [https://doi.org/10.26642/pbo-2025-2\(61\)-73-79](https://doi.org/10.26642/pbo-2025-2(61)-73-79)
- Tronvoll, B., & Edvardsson, B. (2020). Explaining how platforms foster innovation in service ecosystems. In *Proceedings of the 53rd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (pp. 7–10). <https://doi.org/10.24251/HICSS.2020.198>
- Tyshchuk, I., et al. (2023). Digital technologies in modern tourism business: Features of development and prospects. *Economic Forum*, 13(4), 38–49. <https://doi.org/10.36910/6775-2308-8559-2023-4-5>
- Zeqiri, A., & Berisha, B. (2025). The role of digital tourism platforms in advancing sustainable development goals in the Industry 4.0 era. *Sustainability*, 17, 3482. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17083482>