

Digital Tourism, Social Media and Socio-economic Change in Bundelkhand: An Analytical Sociological Study

Rajendra Kumar Yadav

Assistant Professor, Government College Dhana, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between digital tourism, social media and socio-economic change in the Bundelkhand region from an analytical sociological perspective. The study is based exclusively on secondary data, including government and institutional documents, tourism policy materials, digital reports and relevant scholarly literature. It analyses how digital technologies influence destination visibility, tourist engagement, local entrepreneurship, community participation and the retention of tourism-generated economic value within local communities. The analysis suggests that digital tourism creates new opportunities for promoting heritage, rural, cultural and community-based tourism, but its benefits are neither automatic nor equally distributed. Digital inequality, differences in skills, platform dependence, gendered access, weak local enterprise capacity and uneven institutional support can limit the ability of communities to benefit from digital tourism. The study argues that digital tourism should therefore be understood as a socially mediated transformation process rather than a technological intervention that automatically produces development. Its socio-economic impact depends on the interaction of digital infrastructure, digital capability, community participation, local entrepreneurship and economic retention. The study proposes a community-centred digital tourism model for Bundelkhand and recommends stronger digital infrastructure, skills development, support for women and youth entrepreneurs, direct digital market access for artisans and local enterprises, responsible cultural representation, environmental safeguards and participatory regional tourism governance.

Keywords: Digital Tourism; Social Media; Bundelkhand; Socio-economic Change; Community Participation; Digital Inequality; Local Economic Retention; Tourism Entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have increasingly transformed the ways in which tourism destinations are represented, accessed and consumed. [1, 21] Tourists now encounter destinations through search engines, social-media platforms, online reviews, digital maps, short-form videos, booking systems and user-generated content before undertaking physical travel. This transformation has made tourism increasingly dependent upon both physical mobility and digital communication.

For historically and culturally rich regions such as Bundelkhand, digital tourism creates an important opportunity to connect existing tourism resources with wider markets. The region possesses heritage monuments, religious sites, cultural traditions, rural landscapes, handicrafts and local food cultures that

can potentially be presented through digital platforms. Yet visibility alone does not guarantee inclusive local development.

The central argument of this study is that digital tourism does not automatically produce socio-economic development. Its transformative potential depends on the ability of local communities to access, participate in and retain economic value from digital tourism networks. Digitalisation therefore needs to be examined within the social structures, institutional arrangements and inequalities that shape tourism participation.

2. Review of Literature

Existing scholarship on tourism and digitalisation demonstrates that digital media increasingly influences destination image, tourist decision-making and tourism marketing. Social media has expanded the role of user-generated content, online reviews and visual storytelling in the construction of destination identity. [3, 4, 21, 22] Digital platforms have also reduced some information barriers between tourism enterprises and consumers. [1, 22]

Research on sustainable and community-based tourism indicates that tourism produces stronger local benefits when communities participate in ownership, decision-making and service provision. [19] Studies of digital inequality further show that access to technology is only one dimension of digital inclusion; skills, affordability, language, networks and the capacity to convert connectivity into economic benefits also matter. [13]

The emerging literature on platformisation shows that digital platforms can simultaneously expand market access and create new forms of dependency. [20, 12] Taken together, these perspectives suggest that digital tourism should not be treated as a purely technological phenomenon. It is embedded in relations of access, power, participation, ownership and distribution.

3. Research Gap

Although digital tourism has received increasing scholarly attention, relatively limited analytical work connects digital tourism and social media with the socio-economic transformation of Bundelkhand from a sociological perspective. Existing discussions often focus on individual destinations, tourism promotion or heritage development, while less attention is given to the mechanisms through which digital visibility may translate into local livelihood opportunities and economic retention. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on community participation, digital capability and local economic retention as mediating conditions.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of digital tourism and social media in increasing the visibility of tourism resources in Bundelkhand.
2. To analyse the potential socio-economic effects of digital tourism on local communities.
3. To examine opportunities for local entrepreneurship, women, youth, artisans and community-based tourism.
4. To identify digital inequalities, platform-related risks and other constraints affecting local participation.
5. To develop a community-centred analytical and policy framework for inclusive digital tourism in Bundelkhand.

5. Research Questions and Analytical Propositions

The study asks how digital tourism and social media are changing tourism visibility and communication in Bundelkhand; through what mechanisms digital tourism may influence livelihoods and entrepreneurship; what social and institutional factors determine community benefits; and what risks of digital inequality, platform dependence, cultural commodification and uneven development may emerge. The central proposition is that digital tourism is most likely to generate inclusive socio-economic change when digital visibility is connected with local capability, community participation, locally owned enterprises and economic value retention.

6. Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualises digital tourism as a socially mediated transformation process. The analytical pathway is: Digital Infrastructure → Digital Capability → Social-Media Visibility → Tourist Engagement → Tourist Mobility → Local Tourism Participation → Local Economic Retention → Livelihood Diversification → Socio-economic Change.

The pathway is moderated by institutional support, digital inequality, community participation, cultural sustainability and environmental sustainability. This framework rejects technological determinism and emphasises that similar technologies can produce different outcomes across communities because access to skills, resources and decision-making power is uneven.

7. Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive, analytical and exploratory research design based exclusively on secondary data. No primary survey, interview or field experiment was conducted. The analysis draws upon government publications, tourism policy documents, institutional reports, digital-economy reports and relevant scholarly literature.

Government and institutional sources are prioritised for official statistics and policy information, followed by peer-reviewed research and reputable international digital datasets. Because the study is based on secondary evidence, causal claims are avoided where direct empirical evidence is unavailable. Findings are therefore expressed in terms of observed patterns, analytical relationships and plausible mechanisms identified in the literature and policy evidence.

8. Study Area: Bundelkhand

Bundelkhand is a historically and culturally distinctive region located across parts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It is treated in this study as a trans-state cultural and socio-economic region rather than simply as an administrative unit. Its identity is associated with historical heritage, religious traditions, rural landscapes, folk culture, traditional crafts and natural resources. For administrative context, the Uttar Pradesh part of Bundelkhand comprises seven districts, while Niwari district was separated from Tikamgarh in 2018 [23, 24].

The wider tourism resource base includes heritage, religious, rural/community, cultural and nature-based tourism. Destinations such as Khajuraho, Orchha, Jhansi, Datia and Chitrakoot are associated with the broader cultural and tourism landscape. The region provides an appropriate setting for studying digital tourism because it combines substantial tourism resources with uneven tourism visibility and a need for livelihood diversification. [8, 17, 18].

9. Digital Tourism and Social Media Context in India

Table 1. Selected Digital Indicators Relevant to Tourism in India

Indicator	Latest reported evidence	Reference period
Internet penetration	70.0%	Latest estimate reported in Digital 2026
Internet users	Approximately 1 billion	Latest estimate
Internet-connected households	86.3%	Latest estimate
Social-media user identities	Platform-based estimate	Late 2025
Mobile connectivity	More than 1 billion cellular connections	Late 2025

Source: DataReportal, Digital 2026: India and associated source datasets. Note: Social-media “user identities” should not automatically be interpreted as unique individual persons. [2, 7, 15, 16].

India's tourism sector increasingly operates within a rapidly expanding digital environment. Internet connectivity, smartphones, social-media platforms, online travel information, digital payments and platform-based booking systems have changed how tourists search for destinations, evaluate alternatives and communicate their experiences. [2, 6, 7, 15, 16, 18].

The latest Digital 2026: India reporting indicates approximately 70% internet penetration according to the underlying estimate cited by DataReportal, with 86.3% of Indian households reported as having some form of internet connection. Platform-based estimates also indicate extensive social-media and mobile connectivity. These figures demonstrate the scale of the digital environment within which tourism increasingly operates. [2, 7].

The Government of India has recognised digitalisation through the National Digital Tourism Mission, linking it with market reach, destination connectivity, operational efficiency, data use and destination management. Digital access, however, should not be confused with equal digital capability. [9, 10, 11].

10. Results and Analysis

The secondary evidence identifies five interconnected pathways through which digital tourism may influence socio-economic outcomes in Bundelkhand: destination visibility, tourist engagement, local entrepreneurship, community participation and economic retention.

Social-media content, online reviews, photographs and videos can improve destination visibility and provide opportunities for lesser-known attractions. [5, 22] Digital platforms can reduce promotional barriers for homestays, local food providers, guides, artisans and cultural service providers. [5, 14] However, successful participation requires skills, infrastructure, financial resources and institutional support.

The most important analytical finding concerns local economic retention. Tourism demand creates stronger community benefits when expenditure is connected to locally owned accommodation, food, guiding, transport, crafts and cultural experiences. Tourist numbers alone are therefore insufficient as a measure of local development.

11. Socio-economic Dimensions of Digital Tourism in Bundelkhand

Digital tourism can influence local communities through employment, entrepreneurship, women and yo-

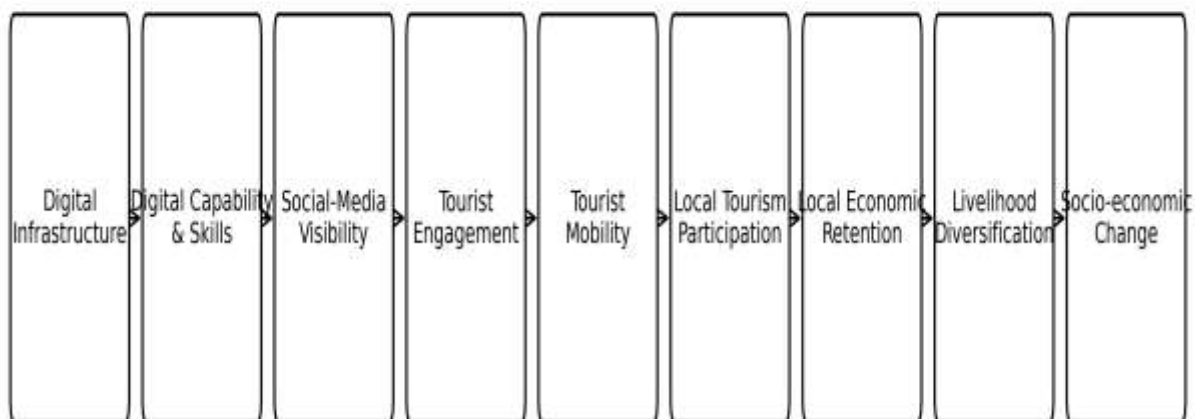
with participation, the cultural economy and regional economic linkages. Tourism can provide direct and indirect employment through accommodation, food services, guiding, transport, handicrafts and cultural activities. For households dependent on agriculture or informal work, tourism may provide supplementary income and livelihood diversification.

Women can participate through homestays, food enterprises, handicrafts, cultural products and hospitality services, while youth can contribute through digital marketing, photography, videography, content creation, guiding and tourism entrepreneurship. [19, 5] Yet participation should not automatically be interpreted as empowerment: ownership, income control, skills and decision-making remain important.

Artisans can potentially gain wider markets through digital tourism, but unequal value distribution remains possible when intermediaries capture a large share of final consumer expenditure.

12. Digital Tourism, Social Media and Socio-economic Transformation

Figure 1. Digital Tourism Transformation Pathway in Bundelkhand



Source: Author's conceptualisation based on the literature and secondary evidence reviewed in the study. The central proposition is that digital tourism produces stronger local developmental effects when digital demand is connected to locally owned tourism supply.

13. Challenges, Digital Inequality and Risks

Table 2. Opportunities and Risks of Digital Tourism in Bundelkhand

Opportunity	Potential benefit	Major risk
Greater destination visibility	Wider tourist market	Unequal digital visibility
Social-media promotion	Low-cost marketing	Platform dependency
Online booking	Greater market access	Platform dependence
Homestays	Household income diversification	Unequal participation
Digital payments	Easier transactions	Cybersecurity risks
Artisan promotion	Wider market for crafts	Unequal value distribution
Women's entrepreneurship	Income opportunities	Gendered digital barriers
Youth digital work	New employment pathways	Precarious employment

Cultural promotion	Greater cultural visibility	Commodification
Rural tourism	Local livelihood opportunities	Uneven benefit distribution
Increased tourist flows	Higher tourism revenue	Environmental pressure

Source: Author's analytical synthesis based on the secondary literature and policy evidence reviewed in the study.

Digital tourism creates opportunities but can reproduce existing inequalities. [13, 20] Differences in internet quality, smartphone ownership, affordability, digital literacy, language and marketing skills can determine which enterprises benefit.

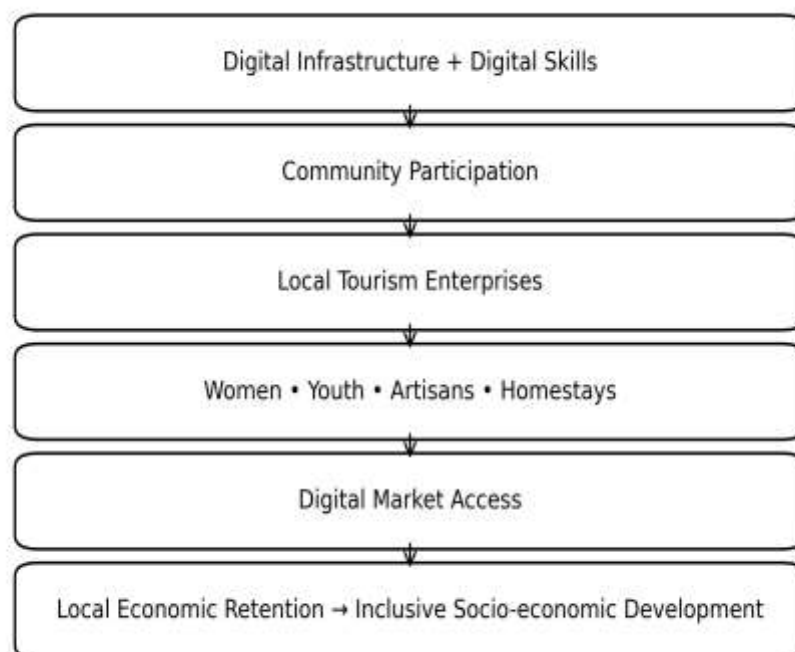
Platform dependency is another challenge. [20, 12] Local enterprises may depend on algorithms, advertising systems, review mechanisms and third-party booking platforms. Tourist demand also does not automatically translate into local income because expenditure may flow to external platforms, large hotels, non-local operators and outside suppliers.

Gendered digital inequality may limit women's participation. Youth may obtain new digital work opportunities but also experience seasonal and precarious employment. Digital tourism may contribute to cultural visibility but can also create commodification. [19, 20] Environmental pressure and cybersecurity risks also require attention.

The central sociological question is therefore not simply whether digital tourism increases tourism, but who benefits, who remains excluded, who controls digital visibility and who captures the value generated through tourism networks.

14. Discussion

Figure 2. Community-centred Digital Tourism Model for Bundelkhand



Cross-cutting principles: Institutional Support • Cultural Conservation • Environmental Sustainability

Source: Author's conceptualisation based on the analytical findings of the study.

Platformisation creates new forms of digital intermediation. Community participation is therefore a key mediating variable: Digital Visibility → Tourist Demand → Local Participation → Economic Retention → Socio-economic Benefit.

The study also highlights cultural representation, gender, youth and sustainability. [19] Its theoretical contribution is to conceptualise digital tourism as an opportunity structure and an inequality structure simultaneously. Outcomes depend on access, capability, participation, power, ownership and distribution.

15. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Table 3. Policy Framework for Inclusive Digital Tourism in Bundelkhand

Policy area	Recommended intervention	Expected outcome
Digital infrastructure	Improve connectivity in tourism and rural areas	Wider digital participation
Digital skills	Training for entrepreneurs and communities	Greater digital capability
Local enterprises	Market and financial support	Higher local economic retention
Women	Digital entrepreneurship and financial inclusion	Greater economic agency
Youth	Digital tourism skill and enterprise programmes	New livelihood opportunities
Rural tourism	Community-based tourism models	Livelihood diversification
Artisans	Direct digital market access	Greater producer benefits
Heritage	Responsible digital promotion	Cultural conservation
Environment	Visitor and resource management	Sustainable tourism
Cybersecurity	Digital safety training	Safer digital transactions
Governance	Multi-stakeholder regional strategy	Inclusive tourism development

Source: Author's policy framework based on the findings and secondary evidence analysed in the study.

This study finds that digital tourism creates new opportunities for destination visibility, market access, entrepreneurship and community participation, but its benefits are neither automatic nor equally distributed. Digital visibility alone does not guarantee inclusive development.

Policy should prioritise: (1) stronger digital infrastructure; (2) practical digital-skill development; (3) community-centred tourism platforms; (4) support for women-led enterprises; (5) youth digital tourism entrepreneurship; (6) promotion of lesser-known destinations; (7) measurement of local economic retention; (8) responsible cultural representation; (9) environmental safeguards; (10) cybersecurity and consumer protection; and (11) integrated regional digital tourism governance.

The overall policy objective should shift from “more digital tourism” toward “more inclusive digital tourism”. Communities whose cultural, social and environmental resources constitute the tourism product should participate meaningfully in the digital economy generated by tourism.

16. Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The study is based exclusively on secondary data and therefore does not provide direct evidence from tourists, tourism entrepreneurs or local households. District-level digital-tourism statistics for Bundelkhand are limited, and platform-based digital indicators are not necessarily equivalent to unique individuals or actual tourist behaviour. The study is analytical and does not statistically estimate causal effects on household income.

Future research should include household surveys, tourist surveys, interviews with tourism entrepreneurs, women-led enterprise studies, youth digital-employment studies, district-level comparisons and longitudinal research. Comparative studies between digitally connected and digitally weaker tourism communities could examine whether digital capability produces measurable differences in tourism income, employment and local economic retention.

Cross-cutting principles: Institutional Support; Cultural Conservation; Environmental Sustainability.

References

1. Buhalis D., Law R., “Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet—The state of eTourism research”, *Tourism Management*, 2008, 29 (4), 609–623.
2. DataReportal, “Digital 2026: India”, DataReportal, 2026. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-india>
3. Fotis J., Buhalis D., Rossides N., “Social media use and impact during the holiday travel planning process”, *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2012*, Springer, 2012, 13–24.
4. Gretzel U., Sigala M., Xiang Z., Koo C., “Smart tourism: Foundations and developments”, *Electronic Markets*, 2015, 25, 179–188.
5. Hays S., Page S.J., Buhalis D., “Social media as a destination marketing tool: Its use by national tourism organisations”, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2013, 16 (3), 211–239.
6. Indian Brand Equity Foundation, “Tourism and hospitality industry in India”, IBEF, 2025.
7. Internet and Mobile Association of India, Kantar, “Internet in India report 2024–25”, IAMAI, 2025.
8. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, “Tourism in Madhya Pradesh”, Government of Madhya Pradesh, n.d.
9. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, “National Digital Tourism Mission: Report on National Digital Tourism Mission”, Government of India, 2022.
10. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, “India tourism statistics 2024”, Government of India, 2024.
11. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, “India tourism data compendium 2025”, Government of India, 2025.
12. Ritzer G., Jurgenson N., “Production, consumption, prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital ‘prosumer’”, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2010, 10 (1), 13–36.
13. Sen A., *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999.
14. Sigala M., “Social media and customer engagement in the context of collaborative consumption: The case of Airbnb”, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2018, 70, 1–10.
15. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, “Telecom subscription data as on December 2025”, Government of India, 2026.

16. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, “Telecom subscription data as on June 2026”, Government of India, 2026.
17. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Khajuraho Group of Monuments”, UNESCO, n.d. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/240/>
18. United Nations World Tourism Organization, “Tourism and digital transformation”, UN Tourism, 2024.
19. UNWTO, “Indicators of sustainable development for tourism destinations: A guidebook”, World Tourism Organization, 2004.
20. van Dijck J., Poell T., de Waal M., The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World, Oxford University Press, 2018.
21. Xiang Z., Gretzel U., “Role of social media in online travel information search”, Tourism Management, 2010, 31 (2), 179–188.
22. Zeng B., Gerritsen R., “What do we know about social media in tourism? A review”, Tourism Management Perspectives, 2014, 10, 27–36.
23. Government of Uttar Pradesh, “Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh comprises seven districts: Chitrakoot, Banda, Jhansi, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Mahoba and Lalitpur”, Government of Uttar Pradesh, 2024.
24. District Administration Niwari, Government of Madhya Pradesh, “About district: Niwari district was separated from Tikamgarh on 1 October 2018”, Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2026. <https://niwari.nic.in/en/about-district/>