

IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON TOURISM-DRIVEN LOCAL ECONOMY IN VARANASI: A STUDY OF STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Varanasi, one of the world's oldest living cities, has seen a phenomenal transformation of its tourism landscape in the last five years, from being a largely pilgrimage-based destination to becoming a globally recognised hub of spiritual and cultural tourism. This transformation has been accompanied by a widespread uptake of digital marketing tools — social media platforms, search engine optimization, online travel agencies, influencer collaborations, and government-led digital campaigns — by tourism stakeholders including hoteliers, tour operators, boatmen, artisans, and local authorities. The paper explores how and to what extent digital marketing has influenced the local economy of Varanasi, a city that thrives on tourism, and its stakeholders' point of view. The study is based on secondary data from government reports, industry sources, news articles, and peer-reviewed literature till March 2026. The paper documents the dramatic increase in tourist footfall especially foreign arrivals, along with the parallel expansion of digital engagement platforms used to promote the city. The findings suggest that digital marketing has significantly boosted Varanasi's visibility, diversified its tourist base and created income and employment opportunities for local stakeholders, while simultaneously highlighting infrastructural strain, digital literacy gaps and over-tourism concerns. The study concludes that the coordinated digital marketing strategy, supported by capacity-building measures for small and informal tourism enterprises, is essential for sustaining inclusive and long-term economic benefit within Varanasi's local economy.

KEYWORDS: Digital Marketing, Tourism Economy, Varanasi, Stakeholders, Social Media, Secondary Data, Spiritual Tourism.

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