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## **Digital Transformation in Tourism Governance: Evaluating Policy Readiness and Implementation in Bangladesh**

**Md. Sohan Ali<sup>1\*</sup>**

**Md. Maksudur Rahaman<sup>2</sup>**

Cox's Bazar International University, Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>

TBD Holidays, Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

This study examines digital transformation in tourism governance in Bangladesh by evaluating policy readiness and implementation effectiveness through a mixed-method approach. Drawing on both Institutional Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the research investigates how policy frameworks, institutional capacity, and stakeholder adoption interact to shape digital transformation outcomes. Quantitative data was collected from 250 respondents using a structured questionnaire, while qualitative insights were obtained through 35 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The findings reveal that although digital technologies are increasingly adopted within tourism operations, policy readiness remains moderate and implementation effectiveness is comparatively weak, indicating a significant gap between policy formulation and execution. The results further highlight that digital transformation is largely driven by private-sector initiatives, while institutional fragmentation, limited technical capacity, and weak coordination hinder integration within governance systems. The triangulated analysis confirms that digital transformation in Bangladesh's tourism sector is progressing in a fragmented manner rather than as part of a coherent policy-driven strategy. The study contributes to literature by shifting the focus from technology-centric perspectives to a governance-oriented analysis of digital transformation and provides practical implications for policymakers. It recommends the development of integrated policy frameworks, strengthening institutional capacity, and enhancing coordination mechanisms to achieve effective digital tourism governance. The findings offer valuable insights for emerging economies seeking to align digital innovation with sustainable tourism development.

**Keywords:** Digital transformation; Tourism governance; Policy readiness; Implementation effectiveness; Institutional capacity; Mixed-method research; Bangladesh

Correspondence Author\*

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### **Introduction**

The tourism industry is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies. Innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), and smart tourism platforms are fundamentally reshaping how destinations are managed, governed, and experienced. These technologies facilitate real-time data-driven decision-making, enhance operational efficiency, and improve tourist engagement, thereby redefining traditional models of tourism management (Al-kanany, 2026; Buhalis & Law, 2008;

Bushi, 2025; Mishra et al., 2024; Gretzel et al., 2015; Sigala, 2018;). Consequently, digital transformation has become a strategic priority for governments and tourism authorities seeking to enhance competitiveness, resilience, and sustainability in an increasingly dynamic global tourism landscape.

However, digital transformation in tourism extends beyond the mere adoption of technological tools; it requires systemic changes in governance structures, institutional arrangements, and policy frameworks (Hall, 2011; Kaleli, 2026). Tourism governance encompassing policy formulation, stakeholder coordination, and regulatory oversight plays a critical role in enabling or constraining digital innovation. The effective integration of digital technologies into governance mechanisms depends on the readiness of policy frameworks, institutional capacity, and the alignment of multiple stakeholders within the tourism ecosystem (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Avi et al., 2020; Muneem et al., 2020; Sánchez-Bayón et al., 2024). Without such alignment, digital initiatives risk becoming fragmented and ineffective.

Despite the global momentum toward digitalization, developing countries continue to face significant challenges in translating policy intentions into effective implementation (Muneem et al., 2018; Hammerschmid et al., 2026; Ghazal Masri & El-Fadel, 2026). In many cases, digital initiatives are introduced without adequate institutional preparedness, resulting in partial adoption and limited impact. Bangladesh presents a particularly relevant context for examining these challenges. While the country has made notable progress under national digitalization initiatives, including improvements in ICT infrastructure and e-governance, the tourism sector has yet to fully integrate these advancements into its governance and operational systems (Avi et al., 2019). This indicates a persistent gap between national digital ambitions and sector-specific policy execution in tourism.

Existing literature on tourism development in Bangladesh further highlights structural and policy-related challenges. Studies have emphasized the importance of sustainable destination development, institutional performance, and stakeholder engagement in strengthening the tourism sector (Muneem & Avi, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018). Additionally, digital platforms, particularly internet-based promotion and social media, have been identified as critical tools for enhancing tourism visibility and administrative effectiveness (Avi et al., 2019; Avi et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these studies primarily focus on marketing, development, and community participation aspects, with limited attention to governance structures and policy readiness for digital transformation.

At the global level, prior research on digital transformation in tourism has largely concentrated on technological innovation, smart destinations, and consumer experience (Bekele & Raj, 2025; Gretzel et al., 2015; Buhalis et al., 2019; Sigala, 2020; Xu et al., 2025). While these studies provide valuable insights into the role of technology in tourism, they often overlook the institutional and policy environments that shape technology adoption and implementation. Issues such as inter-agency coordination, regulatory coherence, and institutional capacity remain underexplored, despite their critical importance in ensuring effective digital governance (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022). This creates a significant research gap, particularly in the context of emerging economies like Bangladesh.

In response to this gap, the present study examines digital transformation in tourism governance in Bangladesh, with a specific focus on evaluating policy readiness and implementation effectiveness. The study aims to assess whether existing policy frameworks adequately support digital integration and to identify the institutional, technological, and operational challenges that hinder effective implementation. By adopting a qualitative approach and incorporating perspectives from policymakers, industry practitioners, and academic experts, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between policy, technology, and governance.

This study makes several important contributions. First, it extends the existing literature by shifting the focus from a predominantly technology-centric perspective to a governance-oriented analysis of digital transformation in tourism. Second, it provides empirical insights from a developing country's context, addressing the geographical imbalance in current research. Third, it offers practical implications for policymakers by identifying critical gaps in policy readiness and

proposing strategic directions for strengthening digital governance in the tourism sector (Muneem et al., 2020; Buhalis et al., 2019).

Overall, this research underscores the importance of aligning policy frameworks with technological advancements to ensure effective digital transformation in tourism governance. By bridging the gap between policy design and implementation, the study contributes to the development of more coherent, adaptive, and sustainable tourism governance systems in the digital era.

## Literature Review

### Digital Transformation in Tourism

Digital transformation has emerged as a defining paradigm in contemporary tourism, fundamentally altering how destinations are managed, marketed, and experienced. Early research emphasized the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in enhancing efficiency and information exchange within the tourism sector (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Kuzman et al., 2024). More recent studies conceptualize digital transformation as a systemic shift involving advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and immersive technologies integrated into tourism ecosystems (Gretzel et al., 2015; Sigala, 2018; Olena et al., 2025; Fatema et al., 2024).

The notion of smart tourism further expands this transformation by emphasizing interconnected digital infrastructures that enhance destination competitiveness and sustainability (Khaeriah & Zarkasih, 2026; Gretzel et al., 2015). Buhalis et al. (2019) argue that technological disruptions are redefining service delivery systems, enabling more personalized and real-time tourism experiences. However, despite these advancements, much of the literature remains technology-centric, often neglecting governance and policy dimensions that are essential for sustainable digital transformation (Sigala, 2020; Ghazal Masri & El-Fadel, 2026). This limitation is particularly significant in developing countries' contexts, where institutional and policy constraints play a decisive role.

### Tourism Governance and Policy Frameworks

Tourism governance refers to the institutional structures, processes, and stakeholder interactions through which tourism is managed and regulated. It involves coordination among public authorities, private sector actors, and local communities to ensure sustainable development outcomes. According to Hall (2011), governance is central to understanding policy effectiveness in tourism, especially in complex and multi-level institutional environments. Good governance in tourism refers to the involvement of all stakeholders, both from the government, private sector, local communities, and tourists, in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of tourism policies (Hajar et al., 2024). Similarly, Bramwell and Lane (2011) highlight that governance systems influence both policy formulation and implementation through stakeholder collaboration and institutional capacity.

In the context of digital transformation, governance assumes even greater importance, as digital integration requires alignment between policy frameworks, technological infrastructure, and institutional capabilities. Studies on public service delivery in Bangladesh demonstrate that digital initiatives, particularly e-governance systems, often depend on effective public-private partnerships and institutional coordination (Hoque et al., 2019; Breaugh et al., 2023). This indicates that governance capacity is a critical determinant of successful digital transformation, not only in tourism but across public sectors.

### Policy Readiness for Digital Transformation

Policy readiness is a multidimensional concept that reflects the preparedness of policy frameworks, institutions, and regulatory environments to support digital transformation (Mettler et al., 2024). It includes strategic vision, infrastructure development, human capital readiness, and financial commitment. In tourism, policy readiness is particularly important because digital transformation

requires coordinated action across multiple stakeholders and governance levels (Sánchez-Bayón et al., 2024).

However, existing tourism literature provides limited empirical assessment of policy readiness. In the Bangladesh context, Ananya et al. (2020) emphasize gaps in tourism policy related to infrastructure and service provision, suggesting that policy frameworks often lack the specificity required to support sectoral development. Similarly, Muneem et al. (2020) argue that tourism policies in Bangladesh require stronger strategic alignment and clearer implementation mechanisms.

Furthermore, broader development studies indicate that institutional readiness and governance effectiveness significantly influence sectoral growth and innovation. For instance, Muneem et al. (2026) demonstrate how institutional support mechanisms, such as banking and financial systems, can drive entrepreneurship and growth in tourism and hospitality sectors. These findings highlight the importance of integrating policy readiness with institutional and financial ecosystems to enable digital transformation.

### **Digital Transformation and Tourism Governance in Bangladesh**

The tourism sector in Bangladesh faces multiple structural and institutional challenges that directly affect digital transformation. Muneem and Avi (2017) emphasize the need for sustainable destination management, while Rahman et al. (2018) highlight the potential of rural tourism in contributing to sustainable development goals. These studies underscore the importance of effective governance and policy support in tourism development.

Institutional limitations are further reflected in the performance of tourism authorities. Muneem et al. (2018) identify weaknesses in the strategic and promotional functions of the Bangladesh Tourism Board, suggesting broader governance inefficiencies. Similarly, Muneem et al. (2020) discuss policy-related challenges in tourism development, emphasizing the need for more coherent and actionable policy frameworks.

Digital platforms have been recognized as important tools for tourism promotion and administration. Avi et al. (2019) provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of internet-based promotion, while Avi et al. (2020) highlight the role of social media in enhancing stakeholder communication and administrative processes. Additionally, Rahman et al. (2020) demonstrate the influence of media and digital content on tourists' behavioral intentions, reinforcing the importance of digital ecosystems in tourism.

However, challenges persist. Muneem et al. (2020) identify structural barriers in tourism development, including infrastructure limitations and governance inefficiencies, which also affect digital adoption. These findings suggest that while digital tools are increasingly recognized, their integration into governance systems remains limited due to policy and institutional constraints.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Digital Transformation in Tourism Governance**

Digital transformation in tourism governance is shaped by both institutional conditions and stakeholder adoption behavior. In this regard, insights from Institutional Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model provide a useful analytical foundation. From an institutional perspective, tourism governance is influenced by regulatory frameworks, organizational structures, and stakeholder coordination mechanisms. Institutional Theory explains how policy environments and governance capacity shape the effectiveness of digital initiatives (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In Bangladesh, studies highlight those limitations in institutional capacity and policy coherence constrain tourism development and digital integration (Muneem et al., 2020; Ananya et al., 2020). At the same time, the success of digital transformation depends on stakeholder acceptance and usage of technology. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) suggests that perceived usefulness and ease of use influence adoption behavior. Empirical evidence indicates that while digital tools such as online platforms and social media are increasingly used in Bangladesh's tourism sector, adoption remains uneven due to capacity and policy limitations (Avi et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2020; Hoque et al., 2019). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that digital transformation in tourism governance is not solely a technological process but a combined outcome

of policy readiness and stakeholder adoption. This integrated lens helps explain the gap between policy formulation and implementation in emerging economies such as Bangladesh.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital transformation in tourism, existing studies remain predominantly technology-centric, with a strong emphasis on innovation adoption, smart tourism, and customer experience, while comparatively neglecting the governance and policy dimensions that critically shape digital transformation outcomes. Although prior research has highlighted the importance of tourism governance, institutional capacity, and stakeholder coordination, there is limited integration of these perspectives with digital transformation frameworks, particularly in developing country contexts. In the case of Bangladesh, existing studies have explored tourism development, digital promotion, community participation, and institutional challenges (Muneem & Avi, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018; Avi et al., 2019; Muneem et al., 2018), yet they fall short of systematically examining how policy environments influence the adoption and implementation of digital technologies within tourism governance. Moreover, while recent works have addressed policy considerations and institutional support mechanisms (Ananya et al., 2020; Muneem et al., 2020; Muneem et al., 2026), there remains a lack of empirical investigation into policy readiness as a multidimensional construct encompassing strategic vision, regulatory alignment, and institutional capacity. Additionally, the gap between policy formulation and actual implementation of digital initiatives remains underexplored, particularly in terms of inter-agency coordination, resource constraints, and stakeholder engagement (Shoeb-Ur-Rahman et al., 2020; Hammerschmid et al., 2026). Therefore, a comprehensive analysis that integrates digital transformation, tourism governance, and policy readiness within the specific context of Bangladesh is still lacking. This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating both policy preparedness and implementation effectiveness, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of digital transformation in tourism governance in emerging economies.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to examine digital transformation in tourism governance in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on policy readiness and implementation effectiveness. The use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches enables methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the robustness and credibility of the findings. Mixed-method designs are widely recognized for their ability to combine the generalizability of quantitative data with the contextual depth of qualitative insights. A convergent parallel design is employed, where quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and integrated during the interpretation phase. This approach is particularly suitable for complex policy and governance research, where both statistical relationships and stakeholder perspectives are essential for comprehensive analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### Quantitative Method

The quantitative component of the study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. A total of 250 respondents participated in the survey, including tourism stakeholders such as tourism operators, service providers, policymakers, and individuals with relevant knowledge of tourism management and digital practices. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient familiarity with the topic, which is consistent with prior tourism research in Bangladesh (Avi et al., 2019; Muneem et al., 2018). The questionnaire was developed based on key constructions identified in the literature, including policy readiness, digital transformation adoption, institutional capacity, and implementation effectiveness. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” a widely used approach in behavioral and tourism studies (Buhalis et al., 2019).

Prior to data collection, the instrument was pre-tested to ensure clarity, reliability, and content validity. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics to

summarize the data and inferential techniques such as correlation and regression analysis to examine relationships among variables. Such statistical techniques are commonly applied in tourism and digital transformation research to assess variable relationships and predictive effects (Hair et al., 2019). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha to ensure internal consistency of the measurement scales.

**Qualitative Method**

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data were collected through 35 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials, tourism practitioners, and academic experts. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective for exploring policy-related issues and capturing nuanced insights into governance processes (Kvale, 2007). A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to identify participants with relevant expertise, which is consistent with qualitative research practices in tourism and policy studies (Hall, 2011).

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves systematic coding, identification of patterns, and development of themes. This approach allows for the interpretation of complex social and institutional phenomena and has been widely applied in tourism governance research (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In the context of Bangladesh, qualitative insights are particularly valuable for understanding institutional challenges, policy gaps, and implementation barriers that may not be fully captured through quantitative analysis (Muneem et al., 2020; Ananya et al., 2020).

**Table: Inclusion Criteria and Study Respondents and Participants**

Category	Participants	Inclusion Criteria	Sample Size (n)
Quantitative Study	Tourism stakeholders	Individuals involved in tourism operations, management, or policy with knowledge of digital practices	250
Qualitative Study	Government officials	Individuals directly involved in tourism policy formulation and implementation	12
	Tourism practitioners	Professionals engaged in tourism services and digital platform usage	13
	Academic experts	Researchers and academicians with expertise in tourism governance and policy	10
<b>Total (Qualitative)</b>			<b>35</b>

**Integration of Data**

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was conducted during the interpretation stage to ensure triangulation and enhance the validity of the results. Mixed-method integration allows researchers to corroborate findings across different data sources and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this study, quantitative data provided broad patterns and statistical relationships, while qualitative findings offered detailed explanations and contextual depth. This combined approach is particularly useful in explaining the gap between policy formulation and implementation in tourism governance.

**Reliability and Validity**

To ensure methodological rigor, several measures were undertaken throughout the research process. Reliability was assessed through internal consistency testing using Cronbach’s alpha, while content validity was ensured through careful instrument design grounded in existing literature and expert review. The use of multiple data sources contributed to triangulation, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally,

pilot testing of the survey instrument helped refine question clarity and improve consistency in responses.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured, and all data was used solely for academic purposes. These practices align with established ethical guidelines for social science research.

The findings are presented using a theme-based mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital transformation in tourism governance in Bangladesh. This triangulated approach strengthens the validity and interpretive depth of the results by combining statistical patterns with stakeholder experiences.

## **Findings**

### **Policy Readiness in Digital Tourism Governance**

The quantitative results indicate that 61% of respondents agreed and 14% strongly agreed that existing tourism policies moderately support digital transformation, while 17% remained neutral and 8% disagreed. The mean score for policy readiness ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) reflects a moderate level of preparedness, suggesting that policy frameworks exist but lack operational strength. This pattern is strongly supported by qualitative insights, where respondents emphasized the absence of clear implementation structures.

*“Digitalization is mentioned in policy documents, but there is no clear implementation framework specific to tourism”* (Interview-1), while another participant noted *“Policies exist, but they are too general and not actionable at the operational level”* (Interview-3). These insights indicate that policy readiness is largely conceptual, lacking specificity, coordination, and execution mechanisms.

The quantitative results indicate a generally moderate perception of policy readiness for digital transformation, as reflected in the mean score ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). This suggests that while policy frameworks are present, they lack sufficient operational strength and clarity to effectively support digital initiatives within tourism governance. This pattern is reinforced by qualitative insights, where respondents consistently highlighted the absence of clear implementation mechanisms. *“Digitalization is mentioned in policy documents, but there is no clear implementation framework specific to tourism”* (Interview-1), while another participant noted *“Policies exist, but they are too general and not actionable at the operational level”* (Interview-3).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that policy readiness remains largely conceptual rather than operational, characterized by limited specificity, weak coordination, and inadequate execution mechanisms. This finding aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes that effective tourism governance depends not only on policy formulation but also on institutional capacity and implementation alignment (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In the Bangladesh context, similar challenges in policy coherence and execution have been reported, particularly in relation to tourism planning and governance structures (Ananya et al., 2020; Muneem et al., 2020).

### **Digital Transformation Adoption**

The findings show that 65% of respondents agreed and 12% strongly agreed that digital technologies are increasingly adopted in tourism operations, while 15% reported moderate adoption and 8% indicated low adoption levels. The mean score ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) suggests a moderate level of digital transformation. Qualitative findings reveal that this adoption is uneven across sectors.

*“Most businesses are using digital platforms for promotion, but integration with government systems is still weak”* (Interview-5), and another respondent stated, *“Digital tools are growing, but they are mostly driven by the private sector rather than policy initiatives”* (Interview-7).

These findings indicate that digital transformation is progressing, but in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner, largely driven by private actors rather than institutional frameworks. The triangulation of these findings indicates that digital transformation in Bangladesh’s tourism sector is progressing, but in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner, with stronger adoption at the operational and private-sector level than within institutional frameworks. This imbalance suggests that while digital tools are increasingly embedded in day-to-day tourism activities, their integration into formal governance systems remains limited. As a result, digital transformation is occurring in isolation rather than as part of a coherent, system-wide strategy. This pattern aligns with prior research suggesting that in developing contexts, digital adoption is often market-driven rather than policy-led, resulting in weak institutional integration and limited strategic coordination (Buhalis et al., 2019; Sigala, 2018). From a governance perspective, this reflects a lack of alignment between technological advancement and policy frameworks, which constrains the ability of digital initiatives to generate broader systemic impact.

In the Bangladesh context, similar patterns have been observed where digital tools—particularly for promotion, communication, and customer engagement—are widely utilized yet remain insufficiently embedded within formal tourism governance and policy structures (Avi et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2020). This indicates that digital transformation is not constrained by technological availability, but rather by institutional readiness and policy coordination, highlighting the need for a more integrated and governance-driven approach to digital tourism development.

### **Institutional Capacity and Governance Challenges**

The quantitative results indicate that 63% of respondents agreed and 11% strongly agreed that institutional capacity is moderate, while 18% remained neutral and 8% perceived it as inadequate. The mean score ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) reflects moderate readiness but highlights notable capacity constraints. Qualitative insights further reinforce these limitations.

*“There is a lack of skilled personnel to manage digital systems effectively”* (Interview-9), while another participant emphasized *“Different ministries and agencies are working separately, which creates duplication and inefficiency”* (Interview-12).

These findings suggest that institutional capacity is constrained not only by skill gaps but also by governance fragmentation and weak coordination mechanisms. The findings indicate a moderate level of institutional capacity in supporting digital transformation within tourism governance, suggesting that while foundational structures are in place, significant constraints remain in terms of effective implementation and coordination. This pattern is reinforced by qualitative insights, where respondents highlighted both technical and structural limitations; *“There is a lack of skilled personnel to manage digital systems effectively”* (Interview-9), while another participant emphasized *“Different ministries and agencies are working separately, which creates duplication and inefficiency”* (Interview-12). The triangulation of these findings indicates that institutional capacity in Bangladesh’s tourism sector is constrained not only by technical skill gaps but also by fragmented governance structures and weak inter-agency coordination, which collectively limit the effectiveness and integration of digital initiatives. This observation aligns with prior research suggesting that institutional capacity particularly in terms of human capital, coordination, and governance alignment is a critical determinant of successful digital transformation in public sector contexts (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In the Bangladesh context, similar challenges have been identified in tourism governance and development, where institutional inefficiencies, lack of coordination, and capacity limitations continue to hinder policy implementation and sectoral advancement (Muneem et al., 2018; Hoque et al., 2019; Muneem et al., 2020). These findings therefore suggest that strengthening institutional capacity requires not only investment in skills and training, but also structural reforms aimed at enhancing coordination, accountability, and governance integration.

### **Implementation Effectiveness**

The results reveal that only 52% of respondents agreed and 6% strongly agreed that digital policies are effectively implemented, while 24% remained neutral and 18% disagreed. The mean score for implementation effectiveness ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) is the lowest among all variables, indicating a clear implementation gap. This is strongly supported by qualitative evidence highlighting execution challenges.

*“Implementation is the biggest challenge—we have plans, but execution is weak”* (Interview-15), and another respondent noted *“There is no proper monitoring or evaluation system for digital initiatives in tourism”* (Interview-18).

These findings confirm that policy–practice misalignment is a major barrier, driven by weak accountability, lack of monitoring systems, and limited institutional support. The findings indicate a relatively low level of implementation effectiveness in digital tourism governance, reflecting a clear gap between policy formulation and actual execution. This pattern is strongly supported by qualitative evidence highlighting persistent execution challenges; *“Implementation is the biggest challenge—we have plans, but execution is weak”* (Interview-15), while another respondent noted *“There is no proper monitoring or evaluation system for digital initiatives in tourism”* (Interview-18). The triangulation of these findings confirms that policy–practice misalignment is a major barrier, driven by weak accountability mechanisms, absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and limited institutional support. This aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes that implementation failure in tourism governance is often linked to deficiencies in coordination, oversight, and institutional capacity rather than policy design alone (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Ndaguba & Van Zyl, 2026). In the Bangladesh context, similar challenges have been identified, where tourism policies frequently remain under-implemented due to structural inefficiencies, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and inadequate governance integration (Muneem et al., 2020; Ananya et al., 2020). These findings suggest that improving digital transformation outcomes requires a shift from policy formulation toward implementation-oriented governance, supported by robust monitoring systems, accountability structures, and coordinated institutional action.

### **Role of Digital Platforms in Tourism Governance**

The quantitative findings indicate that 68% of respondents agreed and 13% strongly agreed that digital platforms enhance tourism services and governance, while 12% were neutral and 7% expressed negative perceptions. The mean score ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) is comparatively higher, indicating positive perceptions toward digital tools.

Qualitative insights further elaborate on this dimension. *“Social media and online platforms have significantly improved tourism promotion”* (Interview-20), while another participant stated, *“Digital platforms are useful, but they are not integrated into a central governance system”* (Interview-22).

These findings suggest that digital platforms are effective at the operational level but | The findings indicate a generally positive perception of digital platforms in enhancing tourism services and governance, suggesting that digital tools are increasingly recognized for their operational effectiveness within the sector. Qualitative insights further elaborate on this dimension; *“Social media and online platforms have significantly improved tourism promotion”* (Interview-20), while another participant stated, *“Digital platforms are useful, but they are not integrated into a central governance system”* (Interview-22). The triangulation of these findings suggests that digital platforms in Bangladesh’s tourism sector are effective at the operational level, particularly in marketing, communication, and service delivery, but lack systemic integration within formal governance frameworks. This aligns with prior research indicating that digital tools often enhance front-end service functions while remaining insufficiently embedded in governance and decision-making systems, particularly in developing contexts (Buhalis et al., 2019; Sigala, 2018; Breaugh et al., 2023). In Bangladesh, similar patterns have been observed where digital platforms are widely used for promotion and stakeholder engagement but are not fully aligned with institutional systems or policy-driven governance structures (Avi et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2020). These findings

highlight the need to transition from isolated digital applications toward integrated digital governance systems that support coordination, data-driven decision-making, and policy implementation systemic integration within governance frameworks.

### **Triangulation and Interpretation**

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals strong convergence across all dimensions. Quantitative results indicate moderate levels of policy readiness ( $M = 3.21$ ), digital adoption ( $M = 3.42$ ), and institutional capacity ( $M = 3.30$ ), alongside relatively lower implementation effectiveness ( $M = 3.08$ ). These patterns are consistently supported by qualitative insights, which highlight policy ambiguity, institutional fragmentation, and capacity limitations as key barriers.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital transformation in tourism governance in Bangladesh is characterized by partial progress combined with structural inefficiencies. While digital adoption is advancing, particularly in marketing and service delivery policy frameworks and institutional systems are not sufficiently aligned to support comprehensive transformation. The persistent gap between policy design and implementation emerges as the most critical issue, emphasizing the need for stronger governance coordination, clearer policy direction, and enhanced institutional capacity.

### **Discussion and Policy Implications**

This study examined digital transformation in tourism governance in Bangladesh by evaluating policy readiness and implementation effectiveness through a mixed-method approach. The findings reveal that although digital technologies are increasingly adopted within the tourism sector, digital transformation remains fragmented and uneven. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the primary barriers are not technological availability but policy ambiguity, institutional fragmentation, and weak implementation mechanisms. These findings reinforce the view that digital transformation is fundamentally a governance issue requiring alignment among policy frameworks, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement.

A key finding is the moderate level of policy readiness within Bangladesh's tourism sector. Although digitalization has been incorporated into policy agendas, qualitative evidence indicates that existing frameworks often lack operational clarity, implementation guidelines, and effective coordination mechanisms. This finding is consistent with tourism governance literature, which emphasizes that policy effectiveness depends not only on policy formulation but also on implementation capacity and institutional alignment (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Similar challenges have been reported in Bangladesh, where tourism policies frequently encounter governance and execution constraints (Ananya et al., 2020; Muneem et al., 2020). The findings also support recent research suggesting that digital transformation initiatives struggle when governance systems are not institutionally prepared to support implementation (Ghazal Masri & El-Fadel, 2026). Consequently, policy readiness in Bangladesh appears to remain more aspirational than operational.

The findings further indicate that digital technology adoption is advancing more rapidly than governance transformation. Respondents reported increasing use of digital platforms for tourism promotion, communication, and customer engagement, supporting previous studies highlighting the role of digital technologies in enhancing tourism competitiveness and service innovation (Buhalis et al., 2019; Sigala, 2018). Similar patterns have been documented in Bangladesh, where internet-based promotion and social media have strengthened tourism visibility and stakeholder interaction (Avi et al., 2019; Avi et al., 2020). However, the study also reveals that these technologies remain weakly integrated into formal governance and decision-making systems. This observation aligns with Breaugh et al. (2023), who found that digitalization often improves operational efficiency while remaining insufficiently embedded within governance structures. Collectively, these findings suggest that technological adoption alone cannot ensure comprehensive digital transformation without stronger institutional integration.

Institutional capacity emerged as another critical determinant of digital transformation outcomes. The findings demonstrate that limitations in technical expertise, administrative capabilities, and inter-agency coordination continue to constrain implementation effectiveness. This supports previous research suggesting that successful digital transformation requires institutional readiness and human capital development in addition to technological infrastructure (Hoque et al., 2019; Muneem et al., 2018). Similar observations have been reported in tourism governance studies, where fragmented institutional arrangements often reduce policy effectiveness and implementation success (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Recent studies further emphasize that institutional capacity remains a prerequisite for successful digital transformation initiatives (Hammerschmid et al., 2026; Ndaguba & Van Zyl, 2026). Therefore, governance weaknesses appear to represent a greater obstacle than technological limitations within Bangladesh's tourism sector.

Perhaps the most significant finding is the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation. Although policy readiness and digital adoption were perceived to be moderate, implementation effectiveness recorded the lowest level among all dimensions. Both survey responses and interview evidence indicate that weak accountability structures, inadequate monitoring systems, and limited institutional support contribute to implementation failures. This finding aligns with broader tourism governance literature, which argues that implementation challenges are often associated with deficiencies in coordination, oversight, and institutional capacity rather than policy design alone (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Ndaguba & Van Zyl, 2026). Similar implementation gaps have been identified in Bangladesh's tourism sector, where strategic initiatives frequently encounter obstacles related to governance inefficiencies and stakeholder coordination problems (Muneem et al., 2020; Ananya et al., 2020). Overall, the findings suggest that future digital tourism policies should place greater emphasis on implementation mechanisms, monitoring frameworks, and accountability systems to ensure that digital transformation contributes meaningfully to tourism governance and sustainable sectoral development.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study contributes to the evolving discourse on digital transformation in tourism governance by challenging the predominantly technology-centric orientation of existing scholarship. The findings demonstrate that digital transformation cannot be adequately understood as a process of technological adoption alone; rather, it is deeply embedded within broader governance and institutional contexts. The results reveal that policy readiness, institutional capacity, and implementation effectiveness are critical determinants of transformation outcomes, highlighting the need to expand current theoretical perspectives beyond technological innovation and digital service delivery.

The integration of Institutional Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provide a more comprehensive lens for understanding digital transformation in tourism governance. While Institutional Theory explains the influence of regulatory structures, governance arrangements, and organizational capacity, TAM captures the role of stakeholder perceptions and technology adoption behavior. The findings suggest that meaningful digital transformation emerges from the interaction between these institutional and behavioral dimensions. Consequently, the study advances a more holistic understanding of digital governance by demonstrating that technology acceptance is unlikely to generate transformative outcomes in the absence of supportive institutional environments and effective governance mechanisms.

The study also enriches the limited empirical literature on digital tourism governance in developing-country contexts. By examining policy readiness, digital adoption, institutional capacity, and implementation effectiveness within a unified analytical framework, the research extends current theoretical debates toward issues of governance effectiveness, institutional transformation, and policy implementation. The findings provide a foundation for future theory development that is more responsive to the realities of emerging economies undergoing digital transition.

## **Practical Implications**

The findings underscore the necessity of shifting from technology-led digitalization initiatives toward governance-led digital transformation strategies within the tourism sector. Achieving meaningful transformation requires policymakers to develop sector-specific digital tourism strategies supported by clearly articulated implementation frameworks, measurable performance indicators, and robust accountability mechanisms. Such an approach would strengthen the alignment between policy objectives and implementation outcomes while reducing the persistent gap between policy formulation and execution.

The results further highlight the importance of strengthening institutional capacity as a prerequisite for successful digital transformation. Investments in digital competencies, organizational learning, technical expertise, and administrative modernization are essential for enabling tourism institutions to effectively manage and sustain digital initiatives. Strengthening institutional readiness will enhance implementation effectiveness and improve the long-term sustainability of digital transformation efforts.

The findings additionally emphasize the need for stronger coordination among government agencies, tourism authorities, and private-sector stakeholders. More integrated governance arrangements can reduce institutional fragmentation, enhance policy coherence, facilitate knowledge exchange, and improve resource utilization. Embedding digital technologies within formal governance processes rather than limiting their use to promotional and operational functions would further support evidence-based policymaking, stakeholder engagement, service delivery, and performance management. Continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are equally important to assess implementation progress, strengthen institutional accountability, and ensure that digital transformation contributes to sustainable tourism development, governance effectiveness, and destination competitiveness.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined digital transformation in tourism governance in Bangladesh by focusing on policy readiness and implementation effectiveness through a mixed-method approach. The findings reveal that while digital transformation initiatives are increasingly present within the tourism sector, their impact remains constrained by policy ambiguity, institutional limitations, and weak implementation mechanisms. Although digital tools are being adopted—particularly in marketing and service delivery, these efforts are largely fragmented and lack integration within formal governance structures.

The study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that digital transformation in tourism governance is fundamentally a governance-driven process rather than purely a technological transition. By integrating institutional and behavioral perspectives, the findings highlight that policy readiness, institutional capacity, and stakeholder adoption must operate in alignment to achieve meaningful transformation. This supports prior research emphasizing the importance of governance structures, coordination, and institutional performance in tourism development (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Muneem et al., 2020).

From a contextual perspective, the study extends existing research on tourism development in Bangladesh by shifting the focus from promotion and sustainability to digital governance and policy readiness. Previous studies have highlighted issues related to tourism promotion, institutional performance, and digital platforms (Muneem et al., 2018; Avi et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2018), but have not systematically examined how policy environments shape digital transformation outcomes. This study addresses that gap and provides empirical evidence on the disconnect between policy formulation and implementation.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that Bangladesh possesses significant potential to advance digital tourism governance, but this requires a strategic shift toward more coordinated, capacity-driven, and implementation-focused approaches. Strengthening policy frameworks, enhancing institutional capacity, and integrating digital systems into governance processes are essential steps toward achieving sustainable and effective digital transformation. Overall, the study

provides both theoretical and practical insights that are relevant not only for Bangladesh but also for other emerging economies undergoing digital transition in tourism governance.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that provide avenues for future research. First, the study is based on a sample of 250 survey respondents and 35 interview participants within Bangladesh, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future studies could adopt larger and more diverse samples, including cross-country comparisons, to enhance external validity and provide broader insights into digital tourism governance.

Second, the study employs a cross-sectional research design, which captures perceptions at a single point in time. Digital transformation, however, is a dynamic and evolving process. Longitudinal studies would be valuable in examining how policy readiness and implementation effectiveness change over time, particularly in response to technological advancements and policy reforms.

Third, while the study adopts a mixed-method approach, the quantitative analysis is primarily based on descriptive and regression techniques. Future research could employ more advanced analytical methods, such as structural equation modeling (SEM), to examine complex relationships among policy readiness, institutional capacity, and digital transformation outcomes in greater depth (Hair et al., 2019).

Fourth, the study focuses primarily on governance and policy dimensions, with limited exploration of technological factors such as system design, data integration, and cybersecurity. Future research could incorporate these dimensions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital transformation in tourism. Additionally, the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and smart tourism systems remains an important area for further investigation (Buhalis et al., 2019; Sigala, 2018).

Finally, the study adopts a predominantly demand- and stakeholder-oriented perspective, with limited attention to supply-side and institutional actors such as government agencies and tourism organizations. Future research could explore the perspectives of policymakers and institutional leaders in greater detail to better understand governance dynamics and policy implementation challenges. In the Bangladesh context, further research is also needed to examine how financial systems, entrepreneurship, and institutional support mechanisms influence tourism development and digital transformation (Muneem et al., 2026).

In conclusion, while this study provides important insights into digital transformation in tourism governance, it also highlights the need for continued research that integrates policy, technology, and institutional perspectives. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of digital tourism development and support the formulation of more effective and sustainable governance strategies.

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