



E-ISSN: 2706-9591

P-ISSN: 2706-9583

www.tourismjournal.net

IJTHM 2025; 7(1): 277-280

Received: 02-04-2025

Accepted: 15-04-2025

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Digital Kumbh: Evaluating the Impact of online marketing on the 2025 Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela

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Abstract

The 2025 Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela, one of the world's largest religious gatherings, showcased a significant digital transformation in its promotion and management through online marketing. This study uses secondary data from government records, media coverage, and digital analytics to assess how digital marketing efforts affected the event. Official websites, smartphone applications, and massive social media campaigns that improved worldwide outreach and participation were among the key projects. Real-time updates, enhanced crowd control via AI-powered technologies, and safer, better-organized pilgrim experiences were all made possible by digital platforms. Online booking portals and digital payment systems were also used to encourage a cashless society and boost economic growth. Problems including unequal access to digital technology and worries about data privacy were observed despite the favorable results. According to the findings, digital marketing was essential to the Maha Kumbh Mela's increased tourist arrivals, enhanced communication, and growth of local companies. This study highlights how crucial it is to incorporate digital solutions while overseeing major cultural events and provides suggestions for future developments in religious tourism.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela, religious tourism, social media, online promotion, crowd management, digital payments, cultural events

1. Introduction

Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela is revered for its spiritual, cultural, and social significance, making it one of the biggest and most important religious events in the world. The Kumbh Mela, which is celebrated once every twelve years at the meeting point of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the legendary Saraswati, is a religious event of great religious importance to millions of Hindus. Because they believe it will save them from sin, pilgrims congregate to take a holy bath in these hallowed waters. With millions of people attending from all across India and the world, the Kumbh Mela has historically been a huge gathering that serves as both a religious event and a magnificent showcase of India's social cohesiveness and cultural legacy.

In many respects, Prayagraj's 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela was a historic occasion. Over 660 million pilgrims are estimated to have attended the festival over its months-long duration, breaking records once again, but it also set a new standard by utilizing smart technologies and advanced digital marketing like never before (Ministry of Tourism, 2025) ^[10]. This was a dramatic shift in the festival's management, promotion, and experience, mirroring larger patterns in the digital transformation of India's travel and cultural industries.

The management and promotion of tourism has been completely transformed by the explosive growth of digital platforms and internet marketing, and this is also true of religious tourism in India. With its intricate logistics, large crowds, and varied stakeholder interests, digital marketing is an essential tool for outreach, communication, safety management, and economic facilitation at events like the Maha Kumbh Mela. The 2025 Maha Kumbh was different from past editions in that it made use of social media, mobile applications, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics to provide a more accessible, secure, and economically robust "Digital Kumbh" experience.

Prior to the festival, extensive online marketing campaigns were conducted through a variety of digital platforms in an effort to raise awareness, interact with prospective pilgrims, and highlight the festival's cultural significance both domestically and abroad. Numerous campaigns were run on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. These efforts featured interactive material, influencer partnerships, live streaming of rites, and competitions for user-generated content.

Cashless purchases and digital donations were made possible via the official Kumbh app and website, which also gave pilgrims vital information about itineraries, lodging, routes, and safety precautions. Through the use of AI-powered tools and Internet of Things (IoT) devices, this technological integration also made it easier to manage crowds effectively, monitor in real time, and respond to emergencies, making the pilgrimage experience safer.

The 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela's digital marketing, taken as a whole, is in line with the government of India's flagship Digital India project, which seeks to make India a knowledge economy and society empowered by technology. Large-scale cultural and religious events can be supported and enhanced by utilizing digital marketing and infrastructure, as demonstrated by the Digital Kumbh. It illustrates how, in the context of large meetings, digital solutions have the ability to enhance governance, safety, and economic results in addition to increasing visibility and engagement.

A significant portion of India's tourism business, religious tourism accounts for more than 60% of domestic visitor arrivals and makes a significant economic contribution to the nation (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). Being a major pilgrimage event, the Kumbh Mela draws both religious believers and tourists who are curious in India's rich cultural legacy. The increasing digitization of religious tourism is a reflection of shifting visitor expectations, as contemporary pilgrims look for immersive digital experiences, real-time information, and ease. In order to draw in a variety of audiences and make sure their demands are satisfied, online marketing tactics designed specifically for these kinds of events are essential.

Digital marketing for an event the size of the Maha Kumbh has many advantages, but it also has drawbacks. Due to the large number of pilgrims from various socioeconomic and linguistic origins, there is a significant range in digital literacy and internet access. Older or rural pilgrims may encounter difficulties when utilizing modern technologies, whereas younger, urban pilgrims may adapt social media and mobile apps with ease. Concerns over cybersecurity and data privacy are also raised by the dependence on digital platforms, particularly in light of the sensitive nature of some of the technologies used, such as RFID wristbands and facial recognition.

Additionally, even in isolated or crowded locations, the event's digital infrastructure needs to be strong enough to manage massive traffic volumes and deliver uninterrupted services. App bugs or network outages during crucial times could jeopardize safety or cause misunderstanding. Thus, the dependability of the technology environment as well as the caliber of marketing content are critical to the Digital Kumbh's success.

Thus, this study uses secondary data sources to critically assess how digital technologies and internet marketing affected the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela in 2025. It aims to comprehend how digital platforms improved the festival's visibility and response, impacted the pilgrims' experience and security, and affected the local economy. Through the use of official reports, media assessments, academic research, and digital analytics, the study provides a thorough evaluation of the Digital Kumbh concept.

This answers a number of important questions: To what extent did internet marketing help the Maha Kumbh become more visible both domestically and internationally? How

much did digital tools help with crowd control, safety, and information distribution? What are the financial advantages of digital marketing, and what effects did it have on stakeholders and local businesses? What obstacles surfaced throughout the process of digital transformation, and what lessons might be applied to mega-events in the future?

The Kumbh Mela itself is not the only event that will be affected by the answers to these concerns. It's critical to comprehend the potential and constraints of digital tools as India and the rest of the globe use them more and more for religious, cultural, and tourism-related events. The Digital Kumbh provides insightful information about how to use digital marketing in a responsible and efficient manner when handling large, complex, dynamic, and culturally significant crowds.

In conclusion, the 2025 Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela is a trailblazing attempt to combine technology and tradition. It adopted cutting-edge marketing and management techniques to embrace the digital era while respecting traditional customs and spiritual principles. This combination of the modern and the sacred not only made the event more successful, but it also opened the door for a new kind of religious tourism that is fueled by technology. In an increasingly interconnected world, this research helps us better understand how smart technology and internet marketing can influence India's cultural festivals in the future while fostering inclusivity, safety, and economic development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Religious Tourism and Digital Outreach

Millions of people travel domestically in India for religious reasons, and these pilgrimages have significant cultural and economic value (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). According to Raj and Morpeth (2021), digital outreach greatly changes religious tourism by enhancing information access and tourist interaction. For large-scale events like the Kumbh Mela, where digital platforms are essential for handling the enormous flood of pilgrims and tourists, this is especially pertinent.

2.2 Digital Marketing in Tourism

Through the use of technologies like social media marketing, smartphone apps, search engine optimization (SEO), and influencer partnerships, digital marketing has completely transformed the travel and tourism sector by increasing destination visibility and visitor engagement (Leung *et al.*, 2013) ^[8]. Gretzel *et al.* (2015) ^[2] emphasize the idea of "smart tourism," in which seamless and customized travel experiences are produced through the integration of technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), real-time communication, and mobile services. The Prayagraj Kumbh Mela saw widespread use of these smart technology, which changed the way religious events are publicized and run.

Internet-based travel planning has a significant impact on consumer behavior, as demonstrated by Xiang, Magnini, and Fesenmaier (2015) ^[17]. This highlights the importance of the digital Kumbh campaign's online resources, such as official websites and mobile applications. Their results on how technology helps people make travel decisions are consistent with the rise in online hotel and transportation reservations during the Mela period.

2.3 Social Media and Mega Event Marketing

Social media sites are now essential for connecting with wide-ranging and sizable audiences. In their study of social media's involvement in mega-event marketing, Ketter *et al.* (2017) ^[6] show how these platforms increase brand awareness, foster community relationships, and encourage traveler engagement. These strategies are mirrored in the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela's usage of viral video campaigns, targeted hashtags (#Kumbh 2019), and live updates, as seen by the event's remarkable social media impressions and video views.

Leung *et al.* (2013) ^[8] offer a thorough analysis of social media's effects on travel and hospitality, emphasizing its function in sharing material, instantaneous communication, and user-generated reviews. These features help the digital ecosystem that made the Kumbh Mela's management and promotion so effective.

2.4 Technology and Visitor Experience

Li, Li, and Hudson (2018) ^[9] talk about how pilgrimage tourism uses digital marketing to engage consumers. They point out that personalized information and interactive platforms boost visitor loyalty and satisfaction. The Digital Kumbh initiative's findings that real-time warnings and mobile apps improved visitor planning, safety, and navigation during the Mela are corroborated by this.

Additionally, Han and Hyun (2017) ^[4] emphasize how crucial high-quality digital services are for enhancing overall visitor happiness and desire to return, including information correctness and usability. These findings are supported by the Kumbh Mela's investment in user-friendly digital kiosks and smartphone apps.

2.5 Integration of Smart Technologies in Event Management

Adding smart technologies to large-scale events enhances operational efficiency in addition to marketing. According to Gretzel *et al.* (2015) ^[2], artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics maximize crowd control and resource allocation, two crucial aspects of maintaining safety and order during the Kumbh Mela.

A prime example of the real-world implementation of these smart tourism ideas is the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela, which uses facial recognition, RFID monitoring, and GPS-enabled services to improve coordination between tourists, sellers, and authorities.

3. Objectives

The main objectives of this research paper are as follows:

- Analyze the scale and reach of digital marketing efforts during the 2025 Maha Kumbh using secondary data.
- Assess the role of digital platforms and smart technologies in enhancing pilgrim experience and safety.
- Evaluate economic outcomes linked to digital marketing and technology integration.
- Provide recommendations for future events based on secondary insights.

4. Methodology

This study relies entirely on secondary data sources:

- Official government reports from the Ministry of Tourism, Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department, and Digital India Corporation.

- Social media analytics published by platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- News articles and economic analyses from reputed Indian media outlets (The Economic Times, Hindustan Times).
- Peer-reviewed research papers and conference reports on religious tourism and digital marketing.
- Publicly available digital marketing campaign data and app statistics.

The data were collected, collated, and analyzed through thematic synthesis and trend identification to assess digital marketing impact comprehensively.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 Digital Marketing Reach and Engagement

- **Official Web and App Usage:** Over 150 million people visited the official Kumbh website between October 2024 and March 2025 (Ministry of Tourism, 2025) ^[10]. The smartphone app, which offers navigation, real-time updates, and emergency services, has more than 5 million downloads (Digital India Report, 2025) ^[11].
- **Social Media Metrics:** The Kumbh-related hashtags trended across platforms with:
 - Over 80 million Facebook impressions.
 - More than 25 million tweets with official hashtags.
 - Instagram engagement of nearly 15 million interactions (likes, shares, comments).
- According to the Social Media Analytics Report (2025), these numbers show significant online visibility and worldwide engagement fueled by influencer alliances and focused social media efforts.

5.2 Pilgrim Experience and Safety

Digital tools enhanced pilgrim navigation, emergency response, and information accessibility, according to secondary sources. Real-time data from the AI-powered crowd control system allowed officials to reroute pilgrims during periods of high traffic (Digital India Corporation, 2025) ^[11]. RFID wristbands made it easier to identify people and guaranteed their safety in crowded areas (Uttar Pradesh Government, 2025).

5.3 Economic Impact

- Online reservations for hotels and transportation rose by over 45% in comparison to the 2019 Kumbh, indicating increased promotional reach and digital access (Economic Times, 2025) ^[15].
- Vendors adopted digital payments almost universally, accounting for over 95% of event sales during cashless transactions (Reserve Bank of India Report, 2025) ^[13].
- The Kumbh's sponsorships and digital ads brought in an estimated ₹1,000 crore, which helped the state and local economy (Uttar Pradesh Tourism Report, 2025).
- The Maha Kumbh Mela's predicted total economic effect, including indirect benefits, exceeded ₹6,000 crore (Ministry of Tourism, 2025) ^[10].

5.4 Challenges Noted in Secondary Sources:

- Digital literacy gaps among elderly pilgrims limited app and online tool usage (Hindustan Times, 2025) ^[5].

- Network connectivity issues in some remote areas affected real-time updates (Media Report, 2025).
- Privacy concerns were raised regarding the use of facial recognition and RFID data (Privacy Watch, 2025) ^[11].

6. Discussion

A paradigm shift in the management of large-scale religious festivals is represented by the 2025 Maha Kumbh's incorporation of smart technologies and digital marketing. According to secondary data, the extensive online presence improved pilgrim safety and happiness through real-time information and AI-enabled crowd control, in addition to expanding the event's global impact.

The increase in online reservations and digital payments points to a boost in the economy made possible by better digital marketing and infrastructure. Secondary sources, however, emphasize that in order to optimize advantages, digital inclusion and privacy issues must be addressed.

7. Recommendations

Based on the secondary data analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Increase Digital Literacy Campaigns:** Target older pilgrims with tailored training to improve technology adoption.
- **Enhance Network Infrastructure:** Strengthen connectivity at pilgrimage sites to ensure uninterrupted digital services.
- **Develop Inclusive Multilingual Content:** Cater to diverse linguistic groups for wider accessibility.
- **Strengthen Data Privacy Protocols:** Implement transparent policies for data collection and usage.
- **Leverage AI for Dynamic Crowd Management:** Expand predictive analytics and real-time monitoring capabilities.
- **Promote Year-round Digital Engagement:** Use digital platforms for continuous interaction beyond the event period.

8. Conclusion

The Prayagraj Maha Kumbh in 2025, the use of technology and digital marketing by Mela represents a turning point in religious tourism. The beneficial effects of digital methods on international participation, pilgrim experience, safety, and economic results are supported by secondary data. The Digital Maha Kumbh can teach future religious and cultural mega-events a lot about inclusive digital transformation and sustainable technical innovation.

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