

# Revitalizing Island Tourism in the Digital Transformation Era : Case of Jebudo Island

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## Abstract

This research aims to employ the focus group interview methodology to extract important insights and policy recommendations for the revitalization of tourism in island regions during the era of significant digital transformation. To achieve this objective, the current study focuses on Jebudo Island, located in Hwaseong-city, Gyeonggi province, as a representative case area and utilizes the findings obtained to identify practical and efficacious viewpoints. The ensuing report highlights the paramount importance and policy recommendations extracted via a focus group interview technique. Initially, considering the prospect of being established as a tourism hub, Jebudo Island has persistently engaged in development and business promotions. However, the island continues to be characterized by an aging tourist destination, emphasizing private facilities, which does not align with the current tourism trend. In light of the ongoing digital transformation, it is imperative that Jebudo Island utilizes its local resources efficiently while adhering to contemporary tourism trends by implementing relevant technologies appropriately. Another noteworthy policy recommendation pertains to the underdevelopment of Jebudo Island, given its remarkable geographical conditions and regional resources. Conventionally, tourism activities were confined to sightseeing, primarily highlighting hardware and natural landscapes. However, recently, such activities have shifted towards experiences and emotions, emphasizing content and engagement. Consequently, the need to develop content using cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, metaverse, and ChatGPT is essential to enhance national awareness. Finally, concerning the island's placeness strategy in conjunction with digital transformation, islands face a daunting challenge of regional extinction, with a more severe decline in population than that of mainland areas. Despite various policy measures to address this

issue, no effective exit strategy has emerged thus far. Therefore, it is imperative to devise a strategy centered on the sense of place that aligns with regional characteristics. In particular, engaging the MZ generation, which values novel social values and actively utilizes social media and the internet, could lead to broader engagement across other generations. Moreover, in the process of revitalizing island tourism during the digital transformation era, various stakeholders are intricately interconnected. Hence, it is crucial to utilize different platforms and establish cooperative governance. Furthermore, to create a functional ecosystem, it is crucial to institute policies such as island business schools, forums, and full-time operating organizations to enhance expertise and commercial viability, while fostering sustainable strategic discussions. Notwithstanding, considering that the present study solely examined the case of Jebudo Island in Hwaseong through the focus group interviews in the era of significant digital transformation, it remains uncertain whether the findings can be uniformly applied and extrapolated to other islands. Consequently, further studies are essential to enhance objectivity and empirical validity by broadening the scope of case areas and incorporating stakeholder surveys.

## Keywords

digital transformation, island tourism, revitalization

## Introduction

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift from face-to-face work and business activities to non-face-to-face online interactions, bringing the issue of digital-based social transformation to the forefront. As this transition to a non-face-to-face, online-oriented society impacts residential space and culture, there has been an increased emphasis on rediscovering regions and transitioning towards small cities (The Seoul Institute, 2020; Cho, 2022). The digital revolution of the 4th industrial era has facilitated communication between people irrespective of time and location, leading to the rapid growth of novel networks through the use of smartphones (Choi, 2018). Consequently, we presently reside in an era where real-time sharing of daily information is ubiquitous.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is characterized by technological convergence, where digital technology blurs the boundaries between physical, digital, and biological space. This convergence is expected to have a significant impact on the global industrial structure and market economy model (Kim, 2016). The future growth of a region is expected to depend on the speed and level of its digital transformation. To this end, the government has announced several policies such as the 'Digital-Based Industrial Innovation Growth Strategy (August 2020)' and the 'Industrial Digital Transformation Expansion Strategy (April 2021)' to facilitate this transition (Kim, 2023). The government is also actively preparing to launch the National Data Policy Committee and, in October 2021, enacted the 'Framework Act on Data Industry Promotion and Utilization Promotion,' the first of its kind globally. Moreover, the 'National Strategy for Data Utilization and Promotion (2022–2024)' is currently being promoted.

Even at the level of local governments, digital technology is being utilized as a means to enhance regional competitiveness. However, the digital divide is becoming increasingly serious between urban and rural areas, areas with high proportions of elderly residents, and areas with a high concentration of young people. Particularly, island regions show significant discrepancies in digital access. In the past, island regions were considered attractive tourist destinations simply due to their remote location from the mainland, and their natural environment was recognized as an important resource for regional development. However, island regions are currently perceived as synonymous with

exclusion, isolation, disconnection, and loneliness, and are confronted with serious regional issues such as aging, low birth rates, and local extinction (Namdoilbo, 2022). The population extinction index indicates that the smaller the number, the greater the risk of extinction. According to the Korean Broadcasting System (2022), island regions have a value of 0.234, which is lower than rural coastal areas at 0.303 and rural areas at 0.341, suggesting that islands are predicted to face the fastest extinction.

This study aims to derive the significance and policy recommendations for tourism activation in island areas in the digital transformation era by selecting Jebudo in Hwaseong City, Gyeonggi Province, as a case study area. Jebudo has been selected as one of the top 10 promising tourist attractions in Gyeonggi Province and one of the top 100 tourist destinations in Korea by the Korea Tourism Organization in 2017. It is known for its well-equipped tourism infrastructure, including Jebudo Waterwalk, Jeby Tail Trail, beaches, and art parks, attracting many tourists to visit the island (Hwaseong-City, 2021).

Thus, this study aims to examine the significance and provide policy suggestions for revitalizing tourism in island regions during the era of great digital transformation. To achieve this goal, Jebudo Island, located in Hwaseong-si, Gyeonggi-do, was selected as a case area. Jebudo Island has a notable tourism history, having been selected as one of the 10 promising tourist destinations in Gyeonggi Province in 2017 and one of the 100 tourist attractions in Korea selected by the Korea Tourism Organization. Specifically, Jebudo Island is renowned for its well-equipped tourist infrastructure, such as the Water Walk, Swallow Tail Road, Beach, and Art Park, making it a popular tourist destination. In addition, the study conducted a focus group interview with public officials and experts from Hwaseong City who participated in the establishment of the comprehensive tourism plan in Hwaseong City. The aim of the focus group interviews were to present a plan for revitalizing Jebudo tourism in the era of digital transformation and to provide implications for other island regions.

## 1. Theoretical Background and Research Trend

### 1.1 Digital Transformation and Island Tourism

The term "digital transformation" refers to the comprehensive overhaul of organizations, processes, business models, cultures, and systems that underpin industrial foundations using data-based technological innovation (Kwon, 2022). The first usage of the term "DX" was in a research report titled "Digital Transformation: A Roadmap for Billion-Dollar Organizations" published by consulting firm Cap Gemini in 2011. Although the report characterizes digital transformation as "the use of technology to fundamentally improve performance or scope of a business," digital transformation is not limited to maintaining competitiveness or cost reduction in existing businesses; rather, it involves discovering and promoting new businesses (Lee, 2022; Kim, 2023). Digital transformation is, in essence, a paradigm shift that transcends the transformation of corporate activities in response to changes in the new technology environment and extends to government and public areas (National Information Society Agency, 2022).

The policy of implementing digital twin technology in the national land space is a prime illustration of digital innovation at the national level. This demonstrates how digital transformation is a crucial factor not only in industrial innovation through emerging digital technologies like the Internet of things, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and big data, but also in determining a country's competitiveness. Digital innovation, therefore, drives change and generates value as a result of the extensive digital transformation. As such, it encompasses all activities that exceed the mere adoption of digital technology-based alterations and instead foster novel value creation.

Moreover, the tourism industry is undergoing significant changes due to the digital transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of non-face-to-face tourism experiences, such as metaverse and online tours, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) to replace travel industry personnel. These factors are contributing to the promotion of digital transformation and the emergence of virtual reality experiences that transcend time and space constraints, facilitating interactions between AI technology and objects. In particular, the rapid digitization and virtualization of the tourism industry are eliminating traditional industry boundaries, leading to fundamental changes in the tourism ecosystem. This development is creating new opportunities for the expansion of the tourism market, as tourism and technology converge (Korea Culture & Tourism Institute, 2022).

Table 1. Digital Use Cases at Each Tourism Stage

Stages	Contents
Tourism Motivation Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information seeking and preparation: Tour information guide, reservation, navigation (virtual tour assistance service, guide robot, chatbot, etc.)</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IoT-based parking service, IoT-based luggage tracking, etc.</li> <li>Mobility (UAM, electric-hydrogen vehicles, etc.), ICT (immersive virtual environment, IoT, AI, etc.), etc.</li> </ul>
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Artificial intelligence concierge, IoT-based room control platform, voice recognition robot, robot dealer, etc.</li> </ul>
Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AR/VR theme park, wearable device, immersive media art exhibition, etc.</li> </ul>

Source: Samjeong KPMG Economic Research Institute, 2018

## 1.1 Literature Review

This study can be categorized into two parts: the first pertains to the linkage between digital content and island areas, while the second is related to a specific case area, Jeju Island. Several studies have explored the relationship between digital content and island areas. Han (2023), Jeong & Choi (2019), and Kim & Lee (2018) are some of the authors who have investigated this subject. Han (2023) examined the factors that influence the behavioral intentions of the MZ generation toward island tourism and presented a goal-oriented behavior model to revitalize island tourism. The study found that the MZ generation had a higher psychological intimacy with the island when they had more information and contact with it. Furthermore, their desire and behavior for island tourism were higher when positive or negative anticipatory emotions about island tourism were stimulated.

Jeong & Choi (2019) proposed digital content that domestic and foreign tourists can enjoyably use to experience the local culture and history of the anti-Japanese movement in Soando, Wando-gun, using the core technologies of the 4th industry. Kim & Lee (2018) also suggested a plan to revitalize the culture of neglected island regions by utilizing the core technologies of the 4th Industrial Revolution. The study observed that the emergence of mobile devices along with artificial intelligence, IoT, and big data technologies, which are the core technologies of the 4th industrial revolution, transformed the global village into a single network in a short period of time and resolved regional imbalance and underdeveloped island residents, thus improving their quality of life.

Regarding Jeju Island, Ha et al. (2021) mentioned its potential for development as a new geoscience education site in the southern part of the metropolitan area due to the various geologic, topographical, and ecological heritages distributed in the geological attractions. Kim (2019) analyzed the impact of local residents' social capital on the perception of regional change following the creation of an art park in Jeju, located in Hwaseong-si, Gyeonggi-do.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Overview of Project Site

#### 1) Primary Objective



Jebudo Island is a significant tourist destination in Hwaseong City, attracting two million visitors annually, as reported by internal data of Hwaseong City Corporation. A survey conducted during the development of the comprehensive tourism plan in Hwaseong found that 21.7% of tourists (foreigners) and 13.6% of Hwaseong citizens recognize Jebudo as a representative tourist destination in Hwaseong. However, there is room for improvement in expanding and utilizing the awareness of Jebudo as a tourism destination, and its tourism competitiveness is somewhat stagnant. Recent changes in tourism activity patterns have diversified according to changing trends, but there is still a significant difference in the inflow of tourists depending on the presence or absence of representative tourism resources in a region, which has a substantial impact on promoting tourism sites. Thus, in the age of great digital transformation, it is necessary to enhance the attraction of Jebudo by expanding awareness of it as a representative tourist destination, increasing the influx of tourists, and strengthening its competitiveness as a representative tourist destination in Hwaseong. This will facilitate its development as a base for tourism in the region.

Jebudo Island is a popular tourist destination in Hwaseong, but its outdated facilities have hindered its landscape and created an image of an outdated tourist destination. This image can negatively impact tourist satisfaction and deter potential visitors from visiting Jebudo. In order to address these issues, it is crucial to break away from the fixed image of an old tourist destination on Jebudo Island and transform it into a desirable tourist destination through landscape improvements that harmonize with the island's natural beauty. This can help to enhance the brand value of Jebudo Island and attract more tourists.

Jebudo Island boasts remarkable marine and natural scenery, including geological wonders like Maebawi Rock. Despite this, the preservation of natural scenery is often overlooked, with commercial development indiscriminately damaging the island's attractiveness. Additionally, Jebudo's unique feature of being connected to the mainland by sea causes problems with traffic congestion, safety hazards, and environmental degradation. To overcome these issues, it is crucial to establish an institutional framework that positions Jebudo as an eco-friendly marine tourism destination in the metropolitan area. Utilizing the island's unique natural resources, an eco-friendly image strategy can be developed to promote sustainable tourism. This will enhance the island's attractiveness and mitigate environmental issues associated with tourism activities.

Jebudo Island is a popular destination for tourists who visit the island for its accommodation facilities and camping amenities. However, it is noteworthy that the majority of visitors come to enjoy the island's marine and natural scenery, such as the famous Maebawi Rock. Although it is possible to drive around the island or visit specific sites within a limited time, the rate of transit tourism is high. With the recent opening of marine cable cars in Seohae and Jebudo, the number of tourists, including those on foot, is increasing. This shift in tourism activity is likely influenced by the monotony of tourism elements present in Jebudo. Due to the lack of tourism content, there are limitations in stimulating the needs of tourists for an extension of stay time. Thus, there is a need to establish a robust basis for providing diverse and enjoyable experiences for tourists by expanding the currently insufficient tourism content. This strategy will promote changes in tourism activity patterns and increase the length of stay in Jebudo.

Table 2. Current Status of Jebudo Island

Jebudo Island Tourism Site and Description	
	<p><b>Jebudo Island (Hwaseong City)</b></p> <p>Where the sea parts to make a road twice daily. As it is located in the capital area. It makes a good one-day trip excursion. You can experience unpolluted landscape and mudflats.</p> 

Source: <https://www.hscity.go.kr/www/index.do>

## 2) Status of Jebudo Development Project

As a prominent tourist destination in Hwaseong, Jebudo Island is embarking on a development initiative to enhance its reputation and image through various means, including landscape improvement, eco-friendly branding, and expanding its tourism offerings to encourage longer stays. The Hwaseong City Tourism Comprehensive Plan (2023) outlines seven strategic projects aimed at positioning Jebudo as a leading tourist destination. Despite the island's excellent natural and marine scenery, Jebudo's image as an outdated tourist spot hinders its attractiveness to modern visitors. Therefore, Jebudo aims to transform itself into a contemporary and sophisticated tourist destination.



Table 3. Current Status of 7 Strategic Development Projects in Jebudo

Project names	Contents	Project period
(1-1) Jebudo landscape basic plan establishment and landscape improvement project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of basic landscape plan unique to Jebudo with the theme of sky</li> <li>Designate the entire Jebudo Island as a 'specialized landscape district' through institutional arrangements such as ordinances</li> <li>Development of streetscape maintenance and signboard maintenance support projects</li> </ul>	2023–2025
(1-2) Jebudo Pedestrian-Friendly Island Creation Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote restrictions on vehicle entry (expansion of personal mobility)</li> <li>Expansion of public parking lot</li> </ul>	2024–2028
(1-3) Jebudo Sky Bridge (Road to the Sky) Construction Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building a pedestrian bridge connecting the island to the mainland</li> <li>Creation of 'Sunset Lounge', a unique space on the sea</li> </ul>	2025–2029
(1-4) Jebudo Sunset Tower and Art Factory Creation Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jebudo Sunset Tower construction</li> <li>Creation of an art factory using design-specific container boxes</li> </ul>	2028–2032
(1-5) Jebudo Marine Culture Experience Center Creation Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of Jebudo Maritime Art Museum</li> </ul>	2027–2030
(1-6) Jebudo Village Art Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resident-led village art project</li> <li>Contest for a dreaming art site using a closed school (Seoshin Elementary School Jebun School)</li> </ul>	2025–2027
(1-7) Jebudo Light & Night Festival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Night program promotions such as laser, lighting, and drone shows for nighttime attraction</li> </ul>	2024–2032

## 2.2 Research Subject

The present study focused on public officials and experts from Hwaseong City who were involved in the establishment of the comprehensive tourism plan. A total of six participants were selected, and three focus group interviews were conducted, covering the entire process from the initial to the final stages of the plan. The comprehensive tourism plan in Hwaseong City involves preparing existing tourism resources, identifying and analyzing similar plans, conducting comparative analyses with neighboring cities, suggesting alternative plans, materializing the concept, and suggesting implications through opinion surveys of residents and tourists. Public officials and experts participated directly or indirectly in the establishment of the plan. Particular attention was given to revitalization measures suitable for the era of great digital transformation, as the development of Jebudo focuses on physical elements such as infrastructure and landscape improvement. In particular, qualitative research methods require homogeneous research participants' experiences to yield valid results (Kim, 2022). Therefore, analyzing the interview contents of all public officials and experts who participated in the planning, selection, and implementation stages of the comprehensive tourism plan in Hwaseong was expected to result in more practical policy implications.

## 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The present study employed a focus group interview as a data collection method. Focus group interview is a qualitative research technique that involves gathering necessary information or implications through interactive discussions on a specific research topic among a group of individuals sharing a common characteristic (Kim et al., 2022). A focus group typically consists of a group interview with a representative sample of 6 to 12 participants to elicit information or perceptions, with the moderator posing questions to the group. Focus group interview is considered an effective method for collecting data from residents to observe the policy process on a specific topic, such as a resident contest project aimed at resolving local problems (Choi & Kim, 2022).

Table 4. Focus Group Interview (FGI) Process

Date	Contents	Note
2022.04.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment of experts and pre-meeting</li> </ul>	
2022.05.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1<sup>st</sup> Jebudo vitalization consulting</li> <li>Gathering opinions on development direction and vitalization plan</li> <li>Idea meeting by content, including domestic and international cases</li> </ul>	1 <sup>st</sup> FGI
2022.06.~2022.07.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-site survey</li> <li>Investigation of representative resources and marine resources</li> <li>Survey: tourists and locals</li> </ul>	
2022.08.~2.22.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with villagers.</li> <li>Opinion survey and business consultations related to the Jebudo Island project</li> </ul>	
2022.11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gathering opinions of working-level staff (public officials) and experts in related departments</li> <li>Establishment of Jebudo development direction and problems</li> <li>Jebudo development strategy planning</li> </ul>	
2022.12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2<sup>nd</sup> Jebudo consulting</li> <li>Business planning and feedback by development strategy</li> <li>Jebudo specialization plan</li> </ul>	2 <sup>nd</sup> FGI
2023.02.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final consulting</li> <li>Gathering final opinions on the plan to revitalize Jebudo Island</li> </ul>	3 <sup>rd</sup> FGI

For the purpose of collecting data without interfering with the process of developing a comprehensive tourism plan in Hwaseong, the researcher acted as a facilitator and participated in the first three meetings of the existing promotion schedule. A total of three focus group interviews were conducted, with the first interview involving a three-hour discussion on the purpose and progress of the study and the sharing of the contents of the Jebudo development plan with the participants. The second and third interviews also lasted for three hours each. The questions for the focus group interviews were based on Kruegar and Casey (2009) and previous studies (Hong, 2016; Chu. et al., 2022) and followed the Warm-up, Introduction, Transition, Key question, and Ending order.

This study employed a focus group interview as a means to collect data during the actual planning process, allowing for the identification of valuable ideas and opinions for analysis. The research questions and process were conducted from start to finish, and the analysis of the results focused on identifying key themes that would provide insights and policy implications for the Jebudo development project in the era of digital transformation.

Table 5. Focus Group Interview Questions and Core Themes

Stages	Primary questions	Core themes
Warm-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-introduction and opportunity to participate, impressions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jebudo-centered tourism base</li> <li>Direction setting through objective recognition of regional conditions and resources</li> <li>Island locality strategy linked to digital transformation in line with the era of digital transformation</li> </ul>
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jebudo's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis)</li> <li>Significance, limitations, and effectiveness of the existing projects in Jebudo</li> </ul>	
Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local resource linkage plan for content development using Jebudo tourism resources</li> </ul>	
Key question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ultimate purpose and target of Jebudo development, and its ripple effects</li> </ul>	
Ending order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiated Jebudo content development ideas and effects</li> </ul>	



### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 Jebudo-Centered Tourism Base

The present study aimed to identify effective strategies for enhancing the tourist appeal of Jebudo Island through a focus group interview with public officials and experts involved in the comprehensive tourism plan in Hwaseong City. The focus group interviews revealed that the limited tourism programs available on Jebudo Island are a significant challenge to attracting visitors, despite its unique attraction where the sea road diverges. Therefore, the promotion of an island contest project and the development of tourism programs that can be enjoyed during the stay were identified as crucial strategies to increase the tourism appeal of the island. In particular, the study emphasized the importance of incorporating cultural contents that appeal to young people and strengthening the existing programs to attract visitors. Furthermore, to expand the image of Jebudo Island as a tourist destination, various capacity-building projects and tourism campaigns in which local residents and merchants can participate are necessary. Overall, the study identified the need for comprehensive and innovative strategies to strengthen the tourist appeal of Jebudo Island and transform it into a modern and sophisticated tourist destination.

The focal point of this study is to explore the development of Jebudo Island as a tourist destination. The results of the study indicate that lodging and food facilities are the primary commercial districts in the area and that the characteristics of visitors are evident in the one-day and two-day accommodation types. In order to maximize the image of Jebudo as a tourist destination, the study suggests that a strategy must be developed to create innovative products and services. Given its location on the western coast, it is crucial to prepare conditions where visitors can stay and spend at least one day instead of simply passing through to other destinations. Despite continuous development and business promotion, Jebudo has been perceived as an aging tourist destination due to its outdated private facilities. Moreover, the 'art' theme promoted by Hwaseong City has not been clearly established. To firmly establish the theme, it is essential to strengthen the tourism resources of Jebudo Island.

#### 3.2 Objective Recognition of Local Conditions and Resources

Based on the findings of the study, it can be inferred that the residents who participated in the Jebudo development project exhibited a strong understanding of the local challenges and issues. This observation is supported by the SWOT analysis, which was conducted through open and free discussion of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats during the focus group interview process.

Table 6. Results of SWOT Analysis Related to Jebudo Tourism

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Image of Hwaseong City's representative tourism resource</li> <li>Possibility of growth through West Coast tourism belt development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permanent existence of underdeveloped facilities and insufficient accommodation facilities</li> <li>Lack of connectivity between tourism resources and lack of youth population</li> <li>Absence of digital (including technology) related policies and projects</li> </ul>
Opportunity	Threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased interest in the tourism industry at the national and local government levels</li> <li>Increased demand for tourism consumption and improved infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to recover foreign tourism activities due to COVID-19</li> <li>Intensifying competition for similar content from nearby local governments (i.e., Ansan City)</li> </ul>

Residents residing in Jebudo Island raised concerns about regional discrimination faced by the island during the process of tourism development at the national and regional government levels. Jebudo Island, known for the 'Miracle of Moses', has gained popularity as a 2-day and 1-night resort due to its convenient transportation and proximity to the metropolitan area. However, residents expressed the need for content development using advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, metaverse, and ChatGPT to enhance national recognition. Traditionally, tourism activities on Jebudo Island were limited to scenic views and hardware-based experiences. However, with the shift towards experience-based tourism activities that prioritize emotions and content, it is necessary for Hwaseong City to leverage its tourism and resource competitiveness fully. This will enable the city to adapt to changing environmental factors and stay up to date with the latest trends in the era of digital transformation.

In order to establish Hwaseong City as a tourist destination with a variety of attractions, it is necessary to strengthen its tourism resources and contents through digital technology-based publicity and marketing. A comprehensive plan is needed to promote the city's image and spread awareness of its current projects and promotional plans. To achieve this goal, a series of processes should be implemented to connect the diverse tourism resources of Hwaseong City through physical and psychological routes, themes, and stories. Furthermore, efforts should be made to strengthen the tourism competitiveness of Jebudo Island by promoting investment and revitalizing tourism through active publicity activities targeted towards private business operators. This includes the development of the Hwaseong International Theme Park, which is adjacent to Jebudo Island, and other tourism projects that are currently being promoted or planned.

### 3.3 Island Locality Strategy Linked to Digital Transformation

The importance of developing strategies for placeness that correspond to the local characteristics of islands has become increasingly evident due to the expanding interest in islands. Placeness refers to the concept that emerges when a specific activity occurs in a particular geographical space over an extended period of time (Relph, 2005; Kim & Kim, 2018; Kang et al., 2021). It is a concept that contrasts with space, where a location with no unique features can become a place by imbuing it with memories and values (Tuan Yi-Fu, 2001). As such, it is essential to identify and utilize the unique characteristics of islands to create and enhance placeness that can attract tourists and sustain the livelihoods of local residents.

In recent times, islands have gained immense popularity through their portrayal in various entertainment programs, such as MBC's 'It's Glad You Don't Fight' and tvN's 'Three Meals a Day' and 'Island Musketeers,' and are now emerging as a tourism product. Now, it raises the question of whether these islands are merely spaces or places. If we approach it from the perspective of a place that incorporates the element of time, it becomes evident that these islands have a special meaning as they are linked to the stories of the local islanders who have resided there for an extended period. Until now, government projects aimed at revitalizing the local economy and achieving balanced regional development in the island region have been implemented primarily to cater to the needs of tourists. However, it is challenging to evaluate their effectiveness due to limitations on developing tourism content based on the unique topography of islands and the uncertainty of the target market. Currently, islands are facing an impending crisis of regional extinction, with a more significant decline in population compared to mainland areas. Despite various policy efforts to address this issue, there seems to be no clear solution in sight.

With the advent of social media and the internet, the process and means through which a local sense of place is formed are undergoing significant changes (Zukin et al., 2009; Kim & Park, 2023). In particular, the MZ generation, who will be the main players in the future tourism industry, differ from the older generation in their preference for seeking travel

information online and on social media, and their desire to travel based on their own preferences rather than following the recommendations of others. According to the Modern Wealth Survey, Generation Z is reported to be more influenced by social media than other generations. Moreover, both Generation Z (44%) and Generation M (49%) are more likely to spend money based on what they see on social media compared to Gen X (28%) and Baby Boomers (16%) (Park et al., 2021).

Furthermore, recent trends among the MZ generation show an interest in eco-friendly leisure activities such as beech combing and flogging. Beech-combing is a recreational activity that involves collecting debris such as shells and glass fragments from the beach. This activity is often combined with plogging, which entails picking up litter while jogging. In recent years, it has gained popularity among younger generations. In August 2021, Jebudo Art Park hosted beachcombing and seaglass exhibition activities, further demonstrating the interest in this type of activity. This interest is also reflected on social media platforms such as Instagram, where posts featuring the hashtag "non-chin" (meaning "no litter" in Korean) can be found (Sisailbo, 2022).

Revitalizing island tourism in the era of digital transformation involves intricate connections between various stakeholders, highlighting the need to leverage multiple platforms and establish cooperative governance. To this end, strengthening expertise through targeted activities such as island business schools, forums, and full-time operating institutions is essential. Additionally, specific plans for nurturing talent could be developed by signing business agreements with regional base universities to promote sustainable growth strategies and spread the value of the island.

## 4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to utilize a focus group interview methodology to identify significant and effective policy suggestions for the revitalization of tourism in island regions during the era of digital transformation. Previous studies have linked digital content and island regions, but no study has yet provided effective policy implications for revitalizing island tourism and the local economy in the current era of digital transformation. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the current situation and present effective policy implications for Jebudo Island, located in Hwaseong-si, Gyeonggi-do, by using focus group interview questions based on previous studies. The analysis of data collected from the focus group interviews was centered on Jebudo Island, considering the island's tourism base, regional conditions, resources, and its connection to digital conversion. Key themes and revitalization strategies were derived to identify effective policy suggestions.

Firstly, it was found that although Jebudo Island has been continuously developed and promoted for business, it still suffers from the image of an outdated tourist destination due to the aging of private facilities, and does not reflect recent tourism trends such as workation. Additionally, the art theme strategically promoted by Hwaseong City has not been firmly established, and the local tourism resources need to be effectively utilized while incorporating related technologies and meeting recent trends. Secondly, despite possessing favorable geographical conditions and regional resources, Jebudo Island is still underdeveloped. Hence, there is a need for content development using artificial intelligence, metaverse, and ChatGPT technology to enhance national awareness as tourism activities shift from simple viewing of natural scenery to emphasizing experience and emotion. Lastly, from the perspective of the island's placeness strategy linked to digital transformation, the island is facing a crisis of regional extinction due to population decline. Therefore, a strategy centered on the sense of place is required, particularly for the MZ generation who prioritize new social values that actively utilize social media and the Internet. Various stakeholders are intricately connected in the process of

revitalizing island tourism in the era of digital transformation, and hence, it is necessary to establish cooperative governance and utilize various platforms.

The distinctiveness of this research lies in its potential to influence future policy initiatives of central governments and local authorities by providing alternative policy options to combat rural area decline. However, the generalization of the findings to other islands is questionable, given that only Jebudo Island in Hwaseong was studied. Hence, follow-up studies are needed to increase objectivity and empirical power through the expansion of case areas and stakeholder surveys. In summary, this study provides significant policy suggestions for the revitalization of island tourism in the era of digital transformation. However, based on the case study area, it can be observed that the focus of island tourism development projects has been primarily on infrastructure expansion, while the utilization of technologies and content that align with the era of digital transformation remains inadequate. Therefore, future research should compare and analyze island tourism development projects in other regions, examining the outcomes of applying advanced practices, in order to propose strategies for expanding island tourism initiatives beyond mere development projects and towards the activation of tourism in local governments.

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