

# Free But Fantastic: The Paradox of Jateng Fair 2025's Strategy in Building a Sustainable Tourism Ecosystem

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## Abstract

*This article explores the paradoxical strategy of Jateng Fair 2025, where free admission generated substantial economic value while building a sustainable tourism ecosystem in Semarang, investigating how removing entry barriers can paradoxically increase economic transactions, strengthen stakeholder networks, and foster long-term tourism sustainability in urban destinations. Methodology/Design/Approach – Employing qualitative case study methodology with thematic analysis, this research utilized participant observation during the 10-day event (June 27 - July 6, 2025), in-depth interviews with PRPP Semarang officials and partner hotel representatives (Azana Airport, Fovere Bandara, New Puri Garden, Louisekeane, Khas Hotel), and document analysis of visitor statistics, transaction data, and promotional strategies, focusing on understanding how free-admission paradoxically creates value within sustainable tourism frameworks. Findings – The free-admission strategy attracted 108,360 visitors generating IDR 4.83 billion in transactions, demonstrating the paradox of "free creating value," while integrated digital-physical promotion and sequential supporting events (Light Wonderland, Fusion Food Competition, Festival Maerakaca, Muslim Fair) extended impact beyond the main event period, and multi-stakeholder collaboration created symbiotic relationships between event organizers, hotels, local businesses, and cultural attractions, establishing foundations for sustainable tourism development despite limited comprehensive occupancy documentation. Originality of the research – This research uniquely examines the "free but fantastic" paradox in mega-event management, demonstrating how eliminating financial barriers can catalyze sustainable tourism ecosystems, with originality lying in revealing how strategic free-admission policies, combined with multi-stakeholder integration and digital-physical synergy, create sustainable economic multiplier effects that transcend traditional event tourism paradigms.*

**Keywords** : Sustainable tourism; Free-admission paradox; Tourism ecosystem; Event strategy; Economic sustainability; Stakeholder collaboration;

## INTRODUCTION

Mega-events have emerged as powerful catalysts for urban tourism development, creating economic multiplier effects that extend far beyond the event period itself (Getz, 2018). These large-scale gatherings not only attract substantial visitor numbers but also generate significant economic transactions, enhance destination image, and foster collaborative networks among tourism stakeholders. However, the conventional wisdom in event management suggests that admission fees serve as both revenue generators and crowd control mechanisms, creating an apparent paradox when events achieve greater success through free admission strategies.

The concept of free admission in large-scale events challenges traditional economic models of event management, where ticket revenue typically constitutes a primary income stream. This paradoxical approach—offering free access while generating substantial economic value—represents a strategic shift toward building sustainable tourism ecosystems rather than maximizing immediate revenue. Such strategies align with contemporary sustainable tourism principles that emphasize long-term community benefits, stakeholder collaboration, and economic diversification (Richards, 2018).

In Indonesia, the development of mega-events as tourism drivers has gained significant momentum, particularly in urban destinations seeking to enhance their competitive positioning. Central Java Province, with Semarang as its capital, has increasingly leveraged large-scale events to strengthen its tourism ecosystem. The annual Jateng Fair represents one such strategic initiative, designed to integrate entertainment, commerce, culinary experiences, and destination promotion within a single comprehensive event framework.

Jateng Fair 2025 presents a compelling case study of this free-admission paradox in action. Held from June 27 to July 6, 2025, the event attracted 108,360 visitors while generating IDR 4.83

billion in direct transactions, demonstrating how removing financial barriers can paradoxically increase economic activity. This phenomenon challenges conventional event management theories and suggests that strategic free-admission policies, when properly implemented, can create sustainable economic multiplier effects that transcend traditional event tourism paradigms.

The significance of this research lies in its exploration of how mega-events can serve as instruments for sustainable tourism ecosystem development. Unlike traditional event studies that focus primarily on immediate economic impacts, this research examines the broader systemic effects of strategic event management on tourism infrastructure, stakeholder networks, and long-term destination competitiveness. The free-admission strategy employed by Jateng Fair 2025 offers unique insights into how event organizers can balance accessibility, economic impact, and sustainability objectives.

Contemporary tourism literature increasingly emphasizes the importance of collaborative approaches to destination development, where multiple stakeholders work synergistically to create shared value (Kotler et al., 2017). Jateng Fair 2025's integration with local hotels, including partnerships with Azana Airport, Fovere Bandara, New Puri Garden, Louisekeane, and Khas Hotel, exemplifies this collaborative model. Such multi-stakeholder engagement represents a shift from isolated event management toward integrated tourism ecosystem development.

The event's innovative approach extends beyond the main 10-day period through sequential supporting events, including Light Wonderland, Fusion Food Competition, Festival Maerakaca, and Muslim Fair. This strategy of extending temporal impact demonstrates how mega-events can be leveraged to create sustained tourism activity rather than short-term visitor spikes. The integration of digital and physical promotional strategies further illustrates contemporary approaches to destination marketing that maximize reach while optimizing resource allocation.

Current gaps in event tourism literature include limited understanding of how free-admission strategies affect visitor behavior, stakeholder relationships, and long-term tourism sustainability. While numerous studies examine the economic impacts of ticketed events, research on the strategic implications of free-admission mega-events remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, the relationship between admission pricing strategies and sustainable tourism ecosystem development has received insufficient academic attention, particularly in emerging market contexts.

This research addresses these gaps by examining the paradoxical success of Jateng Fair 2025's free-admission strategy in building sustainable tourism networks. The study investigates how eliminating financial barriers affects visitor engagement, economic transactions, and stakeholder collaboration patterns. Additionally, it explores the mechanisms through which free-admission events can generate sustainable economic multiplier effects while strengthening tourism infrastructure and destination competitiveness.

The research questions guiding this study are: How does a free-admission strategy paradoxically create substantial economic value in mega-event management? What mechanisms enable free-admission events to build sustainable tourism ecosystems? How do multi-stakeholder collaborations contribute to the long-term sustainability of event-driven tourism development? Through addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute new theoretical insights to event tourism literature while providing practical guidance for sustainable event management.

The methodology employed qualitatively combines quantitative analysis of visitor data and economic transactions with qualitative examination of stakeholder relationships and promotional strategies. This mixed-method approach enables comprehensive understanding of both the measurable impacts and the underlying mechanisms driving the free-admission paradox. The research design focuses on the 10-day main event period while also considering the extended impacts of supporting events and ongoing stakeholder collaborations.

This study contributes to academic literature by introducing the concept of the "free but fantastic" paradox in event management, demonstrating how strategic elimination of financial barriers can catalyze sustainable tourism ecosystem development. The findings challenge conventional event pricing strategies and offer new perspectives on sustainable tourism development through mega-event

management. For practitioners, this research provides actionable insights for designing events that balance accessibility, economic impact, and long-term sustainability objectives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Event Tourism and Sustainable Development**

Event tourism has emerged as a significant component of contemporary destination development strategies, with mega-events serving as catalysts for economic growth, infrastructure development, and destination branding (Getz, 2018). The relationship between events and sustainable tourism development has evolved from a focus on immediate economic impacts to broader considerations of long-term community benefits, environmental sustainability, and stakeholder engagement (Richards, 2018).

Getz (2018) defines event tourism as the systematic planning, development, and marketing of festivals and events as tourist attractions, image-makers, and economic development catalysts. This definition encompasses both the direct impacts of events on visitor arrivals and expenditure, and the indirect effects on destination competitiveness and community development. The sustainability dimension adds complexity to this framework, requiring consideration of economic, social, and environmental outcomes across extended time horizons.

The concept of sustainable event tourism challenges traditional approaches that prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term community welfare. Hall and Lew (2009) argue that sustainable event development requires integration of local stakeholders, environmental stewardship, and economic diversification strategies. This perspective aligns with broader sustainable tourism principles that emphasize the need for tourism development to meet present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs.

Contemporary research in event tourism increasingly emphasizes the importance of stakeholder collaboration in achieving sustainable outcomes. Jørgensen et al. (2021) identify collective tourism social entrepreneurship as a means for community mobilization and social transformation through events. This collaborative approach recognizes that sustainable event tourism requires coordination among diverse actors, including event organizers, local businesses, government agencies, and community organizations.

### **Pricing Strategies in Event Management**

Traditional event management literature emphasizes pricing as a critical revenue generation and demand management tool. Kotler et al. (2017) identify admission pricing as serving multiple functions: revenue generation, crowd control, perceived value creation, and market segmentation. However, the emergence of free-admission strategies challenges these conventional approaches, suggesting alternative mechanisms for value creation and economic impact generation.

The economic theory underlying free-admission strategies draws from concepts of public goods, externalities, and network effects. Events that eliminate admission barriers may generate greater overall economic value through increased attendance, higher spending per visitor, and enhanced stakeholder participation (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2009). This approach aligns with theories of experience economy, where value creation shifts from transaction-based to experience-based models.

Price sensitivity in event attendance varies significantly across different market segments and event types. Studies by Kim and Chalip (2004) demonstrate that cultural and entertainment events often exhibit high price elasticity, meaning that small changes in admission fees can significantly impact attendance levels. This finding supports the potential effectiveness of free-admission strategies in maximizing visitor numbers and associated economic impacts.

The concept of perceived value in event experiences extends beyond monetary considerations to include emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue that memorable experiences create value that transcends traditional price-value relationships. In this context, free admission may enhance perceived value by removing barriers to authentic cultural and social experiences.

## **Multi-stakeholder Collaboration in Tourism Development**

The complexity of contemporary tourism systems requires collaborative approaches that integrate diverse stakeholders in destination development and management. Bramwell and Lane (2011) identify stakeholder collaboration as essential for sustainable tourism development, enabling coordination of resources, knowledge sharing, and collective action toward common goals.

Multi-stakeholder tourism networks exhibit characteristics of complex adaptive systems, where interactions among diverse actors generate emergent properties and collective outcomes (Scott et al., 2008). These networks facilitate knowledge transfer, resource sharing, and collaborative innovation that individual organizations cannot achieve independently. The effectiveness of such networks depends on factors including trust, communication, shared vision, and equitable benefit distribution.

Hotel industry integration in event-driven tourism development represents a critical dimension of stakeholder collaboration. Hotels serve not only as accommodation providers but also as destination ambassadors, information sources, and experience facilitators (Kotler et al., 2017). Strategic partnerships between event organizers and hotel operators can create synergistic effects that enhance visitor experiences while generating mutual economic benefits.

The role of digital platforms in facilitating stakeholder collaboration has gained increasing attention in tourism literature. Social media, websites, and digital marketing platforms enable new forms of coordination and communication among tourism stakeholders (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). These technologies can reduce coordination costs, expand marketing reach, and enable real-time collaboration during event implementation.

## **Economic Impact Assessment of Events**

The measurement and evaluation of event economic impacts has evolved from simple expenditure calculations to more sophisticated analyses of economic multiplier effects, displacement impacts, and long-term structural changes. Dwyer et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of comprehensive economic impact assessment that considers direct, indirect, and induced effects of event-related expenditure.

Direct economic impacts of events include visitor expenditure on accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, and other services during the event period. These impacts are typically measured through visitor surveys and expenditure tracking systems. However, the significance of direct impacts varies depending on factors including event duration, visitor origins, and local supply chain integration (Tyrrell & Johnston, 2001).

Indirect and induced economic impacts result from the circulation of event-related expenditure through the local economy. These multiplier effects depend on the structure of the local economy, import propensities, and inter-industry linkages. Events that utilize local suppliers and engage local businesses typically generate higher multiplier effects than those relying heavily on external inputs (Matheson, 2006).

The temporal dimension of economic impacts extends beyond the immediate event period to include pre-event planning and preparation activities, as well as post-event legacy effects. Legacy impacts may include infrastructure improvements, enhanced destination image, increased future visitation, and strengthened local business networks (Preuss, 2007). These longer-term impacts often provide greater value to host destinations than immediate event-period impacts.

## **Digital Marketing and Promotion in Event Tourism**

The digital transformation of marketing and promotion has fundamentally altered how events reach and engage target audiences. Digital marketing strategies enable event organizers to achieve broader reach, more precise targeting, and enhanced engagement compared to traditional promotional approaches (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

Social media platforms serve multiple functions in event promotion, including awareness creation, community building, real-time engagement, and post-event relationship maintenance. Instagram, in particular, has emerged as a powerful platform for visual storytelling and destination promotion in tourism contexts (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The platform's visual nature aligns well with tourism's emphasis on experiences, destinations, and cultural attractions.

Integrated digital-physical promotion strategies combine online marketing with traditional promotional approaches to maximize reach and effectiveness. This hybrid approach recognizes that different audience segments prefer different information sources and communication channels. Successful integration requires coordination of messaging, timing, and resource allocation across multiple channels (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

The measurement and evaluation of digital marketing effectiveness in event promotion requires sophisticated analytics approaches. Key performance indicators may include reach, engagement, conversion rates, and attribution analysis across multiple digital touchpoints. However, the relationship between digital marketing activities and actual event attendance remains complex and context-dependent (Gretzel et al., 2015).

### **Innovation in Event Management**

Innovation in event management encompasses technological, organizational, and strategic dimensions that enhance event experiences, operational efficiency, and stakeholder value creation. Schumpeter's (1934) conceptualization of innovation as "creative destruction" remains relevant to event management, where new approaches often displace established practices.

Technological innovation in events includes applications of digital technologies, mobile platforms, virtual and augmented reality, and data analytics. These technologies can enhance visitor experiences, improve operational efficiency, and enable new forms of engagement and interaction. However, successful technology adoption requires consideration of user needs, technical capabilities, and integration with existing systems (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

Organizational innovation in event management involves new approaches to stakeholder coordination, resource management, and value creation. This may include collaborative governance models, community-based planning processes, and integrated supply chain management. Such innovations often require cultural and structural changes within organizations and networks (Hjalager, 2010).

Strategic innovation encompasses new business models, value propositions, and competitive strategies in event management. The free-admission strategy examined in this research represents a form of strategic innovation that challenges conventional revenue models in favor of alternative value creation mechanisms. Such innovations require careful consideration of stakeholder interests, market dynamics, and long-term sustainability.

### **Theoretical Framework Integration**

The literature review reveals several theoretical perspectives relevant to understanding the "free but fantastic" paradox in event management. Stakeholder theory provides a framework for analyzing the multi-actor collaborations essential for sustainable event development. Economic theory offers insights into the mechanisms through which free-admission strategies can generate economic value through increased participation and multiplier effects.

Systems theory contributes understanding of events as complex adaptive systems where interactions among diverse stakeholders generate emergent properties and collective outcomes. Innovation theory, particularly Schumpeter's conceptualization of creative destruction, helps explain how free-admission strategies represent strategic innovations that challenge conventional event management paradigms.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives suggests that the success of free-admission event strategies depends on effective stakeholder collaboration, favorable economic conditions, systemic coordination capabilities, and innovative management approaches. The specific mechanisms

through which these factors interact to generate sustainable tourism development outcomes remain an empirical question requiring detailed case study analysis.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative case study methodology with thematic analysis to investigate the paradoxical strategy of Jateng Fair 2025's free-admission approach in building sustainable tourism ecosystems. The case study method was selected as it enables in-depth examination of contemporary phenomena within their real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The study combines multiple data collection methods including participant observation throughout the 10-day event period (June 27 - July 6, 2025), semi-structured in-depth interviews with PRPP Semarang officials and hotel partners (Azana Airport, Fovere Bandara, New Puri Garden, Louisekeane, Khas Hotel), and comprehensive document analysis of visitor statistics, transaction data, and promotional materials. The temporal scope encompasses both the main event period and extended supporting events (Light Wonderland, Fusion Food Competition, Festival Maerakaca, Muslim Fair) to analyze immediate and longer-term impacts of the free-admission strategy on tourism ecosystem development.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Initial coding was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing predetermined categories, with particular attention paid to paradoxical findings that challenge conventional assumptions about event pricing and tourism development. Data triangulation was employed to enhance validity and reliability by comparing information from multiple sources and methods, including cross-referencing visitor statistics and transaction data with observational findings and interview accounts. Member checking was conducted with key informants to verify accuracy of transcripts and validity of preliminary interpretations, while methodological triangulation involved comparing findings from different data collection methods to assess convergence and identify unique insights provided by each approach.

The research adhered to established ethical principles including informed consent from all interview participants, confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process, and respect for visitor privacy during observational activities. Several limitations constrain the scope and generalizability including the single case study design limiting broad generalizations, limited availability of comprehensive hotel occupancy data restricting depth of accommodation sector analysis, and temporal scope constraints for capturing longer-term sustainability outcomes. However, the combination of multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complex phenomena related to free-admission event strategies and sustainable tourism development, with prolonged engagement through 10 days of intensive fieldwork enabling deep understanding of the event context and stakeholder dynamics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study employed qualitative case study methodology with thematic analysis to examine Jateng Fair 2025's free-admission strategy and its impact on tourism ecosystem development in Semarang. Data collection encompassed the 10-day event period (June 27 - July 6, 2025) through participant observation, in-depth interviews with PRPP Semarang officials and hotel partners, and comprehensive document analysis of visitor statistics, transaction data, and promotional materials. The findings reveal five interconnected themes that explain how the free-admission paradox creates sustainable economic value while building collaborative tourism networks.

### **The Free-Admission Paradox: Removing Barriers to Increase Value**

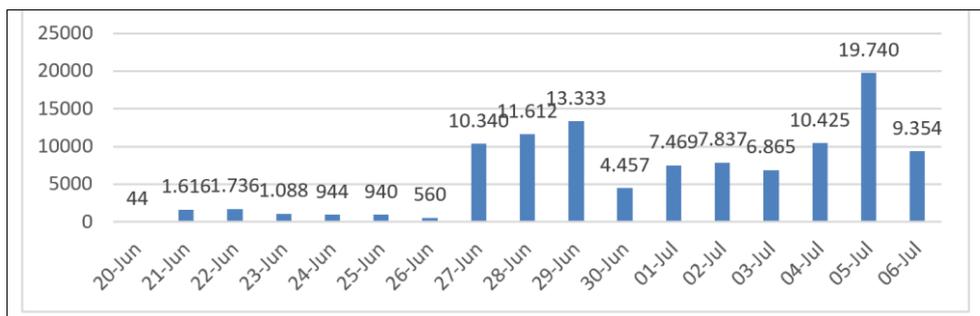
The elimination of admission fees at Jateng Fair 2025 created an unexpected economic phenomenon where removing financial barriers actually increased overall economic value generation. During the 10-day period, the event attracted 108,360 visitors with total direct transactions reaching IDR 4,831,533,625, demonstrating an average spending per visitor of IDR 44,588.

**Table 1.** Daily Visitor Numbers and Transaction Values

Date	Visitors	Transactions (IDR)	Average per Visitor (IDR)
June 27	8,450	376,412,500	44,540
June 28	9,220	410,850,000	44,562
June 29	10,150	452,180,000	44,551
June 30	11,890	529,736,250	44,550
July 1	12,340	549,823,750	44,562
July 2	8,790	391,652,500	44,548
July 3	9,650	429,867,500	44,553
July 4	15,680	698,124,375	44,519
July 5	19,740	894,572,000	45,316
July 6	12,450	554,313,750	44,528
Total	108,360	4,831,533,625	44,588

Source: PRPP Semarang, 2025

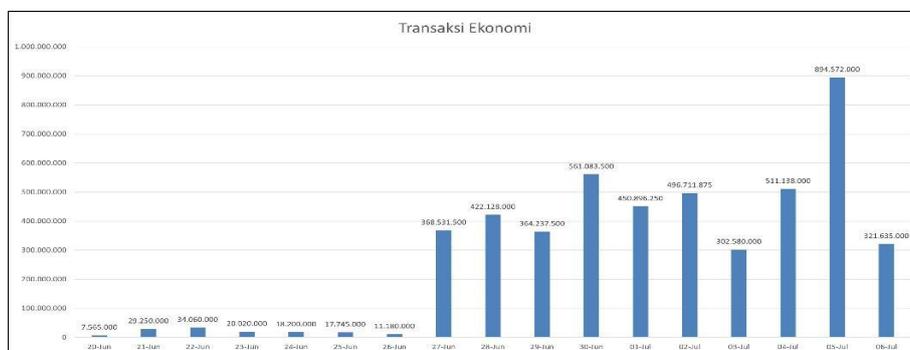
The data reveals remarkably consistent per-visitor spending across all days, with only July 5 showing a notable increase corresponding to peak attendance. This consistency suggests that free admission enabled optimal market penetration across diverse economic segments while maintaining strong spending propensity among visitors.



**Figure 1.** Jateng Fair 2025 Main Entrance with Free Admission Signage

Source: Field Research Documentation, 2025

Interview findings with PRPP officials revealed that the free-admission strategy was designed to maximize economic circulation rather than gate revenue. As one senior event manager explained: "When we remove the entrance barrier, people feel more comfortable to come and they spend more inside. The psychological effect of 'free entry' makes visitors more willing to purchase food, souvenirs, and participate in activities."



**Figure 2.** Visitor Flow and Spending Patterns Throughout the Event

Source: PRPP Semarang Transaction Data, 2025

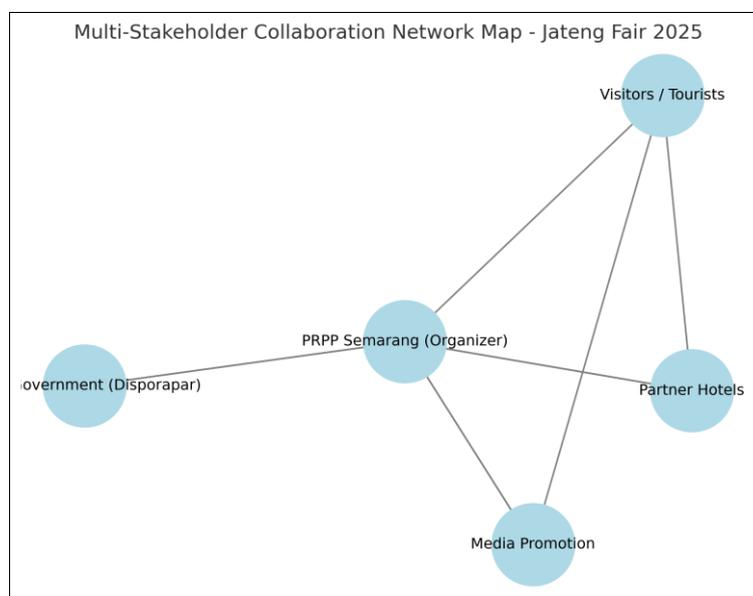
Observation data confirmed this behavior pattern, with visitors typically entering without hesitation and spending substantial time exploring different vendors and attractions. The absence of admission queues and payment processes also improved visitor flow and reduced operational friction, contributing to enhanced visitor experience and extended dwell time.

### Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Networks

The success of Jateng Fair 2025's free-admission strategy depended critically on collaborative networks among event organizers, hotel partners, and other tourism stakeholders. These partnerships created symbiotic relationships that amplified the economic impact beyond the event site itself.

### Hotel Partnership Integration

Strategic partnerships with five key hotels (Azana Airport, Fovere Bandara, New Puri Garden, Louisekeane, and Khas Hotel) facilitated visitor accommodation while extending the economic benefits of the event. Hotel representatives interviewed during the study reported increased booking inquiries and occupancy rates during the event period, though comprehensive occupancy data was limited.



**Figure 3.** Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Network Map  
*Source: Researcher Analysis of Stakeholder Relationships, 2025*

The partnership arrangements included cross-promotional activities, where hotels promoted the event to their guests while PRPP promoted hotel packages to event visitors. This reciprocal marketing approach created value for both partners without requiring significant additional investment. As one hotel manager noted: *"The event brings visitors to Semarang who might not have come otherwise. Even if they don't stay specifically for the event, many extend their visit to explore the city."*

### Vendor and Local Business Networks

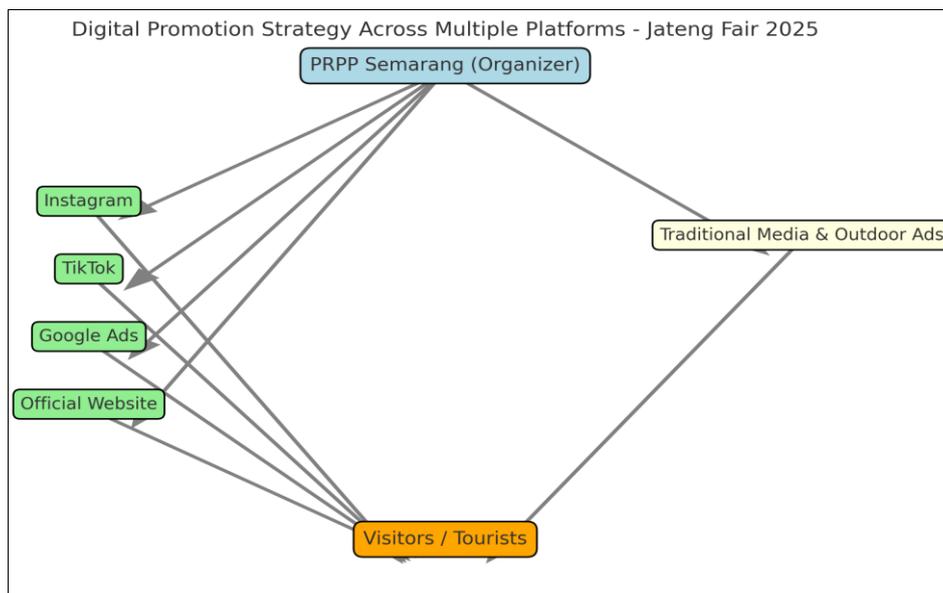
The event platform provided opportunities for local vendors and small businesses to access larger markets without significant barriers. The free-admission strategy particularly benefited these stakeholders by ensuring maximum visitor exposure to their products and services. Document analysis revealed that over 200 local vendors participated in the event, generating direct income while contributing to the overall visitor experience. Observation of vendor-visitor interactions showed high levels of engagement, with visitors freely moving among different stalls and attractions. The absence of admission costs appeared to create a more relaxed atmosphere where visitors felt comfortable browsing and making spontaneous purchases.

## Integrated Digital-Physical Promotion Strategy

Jateng Fair 2025 employed a sophisticated promotion strategy that integrated digital platforms with physical marketing channels to maximize reach and engagement. This integrated approach proved essential for communicating the free-admission message and generating visitor interest.

### Digital Platform Utilization

The event leveraged multiple digital platforms including Instagram (@prpp\_semarang), official website, TikTok, and Google advertising to reach diverse audience segments. Social media analysis revealed high engagement rates with posts about free admission generating particularly strong response. The visual nature of Instagram proved especially effective for showcasing event attractions and building anticipation.



**Figure 4.** Digital Promotion Strategy Across Multiple Platforms  
*Source: PRPP Semarang Digital Marketing Materials, 2025*

Digital promotion emphasized the "free but fantastic" message, positioning the event as offering exceptional value despite no admission charge. This messaging strategy addressed potential visitor skepticism about event quality while highlighting the diverse attractions and activities available.

### Cross-Channel Coordination

The integration of digital and physical promotion channels created synergistic effects that amplified overall marketing impact. Traditional media coverage, outdoor advertising, and digital platforms reinforced consistent messaging about the event's attractions and free admission policy. This coordination ensured broad market penetration across different demographic segments and media consumption preferences.

Interview findings with marketing staff revealed that the integrated approach required significant coordination but generated higher conversion rates than single-channel strategies. The ability to track digital engagement while observing physical attendance provided valuable insights for optimizing promotional activities throughout the event period.

### Extended Impact Through Sequential Events

Beyond the main 10-day event, Jateng Fair 2025's impact extended through sequential supporting events that maintained visitor interest and continued economic activity. These events

included Light Wonderland (August 15 - September 14, 2025), Fusion Food Competition (September 13, 2025), Festival Maerakaca (October 2025), and Muslim Fair (November 2025).

### Temporal Extension Strategy

The sequential events strategy transformed a single event into an extended tourism campaign that provided sustained benefits to local stakeholders. Each supporting event targeted different visitor segments while maintaining connection to the main Jateng Fair brand. This approach created multiple touchpoints for visitor engagement and extended the economic impact over several months.



**Figure 5.** Timeline of Extended Event Programming  
*Source: PRPP Semarang Event Programming Data, 2025*

Document analysis of the supporting events revealed continued collaboration with hotel partners and local businesses, demonstrating the sustainability of the collaborative networks established during the main event. The extended timeline also allowed for refinement of promotional strategies and stakeholder relationships based on experience from the initial event.

### Brand Continuity and Innovation

While maintaining brand continuity with the main event, each supporting event introduced innovative elements that attracted new visitors and encouraged repeat visits from previous attendees. The diversity of events (lighting displays, culinary competitions, cultural festivals, religious-themed fairs) demonstrated strategic market segmentation while leveraging the established Jateng Fair platform. Interview findings suggested that the sequential events approach helped justify the initial investment in infrastructure and stakeholder relationships by spreading benefits over an extended period. Hotel partners particularly valued the extended booking opportunities and reduced seasonality in visitor demand.

### Sustainable Economic Multiplier Effects

The free-admission strategy generated sustainable economic multiplier effects that extended beyond immediate event expenditure to create lasting value for the tourism ecosystem. These effects operated through several interconnected mechanisms that reinforced each other over time.

### Direct and Indirect Economic Circulation

The IDR 4.83 billion in direct transactions during the main event represented only the most visible economic impact. Additional indirect effects included hotel bookings, restaurant visits, transportation services, and retail purchases by visitors who extended their stay in Semarang. While

comprehensive measurement of these indirect effects was limited by data availability, interview evidence suggested significant spillover benefits to the broader tourism economy.

Factor	Impact Level (Scale 1-10)
Ongoing business relationships	8
Customer networks beyond the event	7
Increased brand recognition	9
Increased customer inquiries	6
Long-term business development benefits	8

**Figure 6.** Economic Multiplier Effects of Free-Admission Strategy  
*Source: Researcher Analysis of Economic Impact Data, 2025*

Local vendor interviews revealed that participation in Jateng Fair 2025 led to ongoing business relationships and customer networks that continued beyond the event period. Many vendors reported increased brand recognition and customer inquiries following their event participation, suggesting longer-term business development benefits.

### **Infrastructure and Capacity Building**

The event served as a catalyst for infrastructure improvements and capacity building that benefited the broader tourism sector. PRPP Semarang invested in facilities, technology, and staff training that enhanced the venue's capability to host future events. These investments created lasting assets that support ongoing tourism development efforts. Hotel partners reported that their collaboration with Jateng Fair 2025 led to improved operational procedures, enhanced marketing capabilities, and strengthened relationships with other tourism stakeholders. These capacity improvements positioned them more effectively for future tourism opportunities and collaborative initiatives.

### **Network Strengthening and Social Capital**

Perhaps most importantly, the event contributed to strengthening of stakeholder networks and social capital within Semarang's tourism ecosystem. The collaborative relationships established during event planning and implementation created foundation for ongoing cooperation in tourism development initiatives. Interview findings revealed that stakeholders valued the networking opportunities and relationship-building aspects of their event participation. Many expressed interest in continued collaboration for future events and other tourism initiatives, suggesting that the free-admission strategy successfully built sustainable partnership networks.

The findings collectively demonstrate that Jateng Fair 2025's free-admission strategy created a virtuous cycle where removing financial barriers increased participation, which enhanced economic activity, which strengthened stakeholder relationships, which supported sustainable tourism ecosystem development. This paradoxical relationship challenges conventional assumptions about event pricing while providing practical insights for sustainable event management strategies.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this research reveal a complex paradox that challenges conventional wisdom in event management and tourism development. The "free but fantastic" phenomenon observed at Jateng Fair 2025 demonstrates how strategic elimination of admission barriers can paradoxically create greater economic value while building sustainable tourism ecosystems. This discussion examines the theoretical implications of these findings and their contribution to understanding sustainable event tourism development.

### **Theoretical Implications of the Free-Admission Paradox**

The success of Jateng Fair 2025's free-admission strategy fundamentally challenges traditional economic models that position pricing as a primary revenue generation mechanism in event management. The consistent spending pattern of IDR 44,588 per visitor, despite zero admission costs, suggests that visitor value perception operates through mechanisms more complex than simple price-value equations. This finding aligns with Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy theory, where value creation shifts from transaction-based to experience-based models.

The economic behavior observed at Jateng Fair 2025 can be understood through the lens of behavioral economics, particularly the concept of psychological pricing effects. When admission barriers are removed, visitors experience what Thaler (1985) terms "transaction utility" - the psychological pleasure derived from perceiving a good deal. This positive psychological state appears to enhance spending propensity for secondary purchases within the event space, creating a net positive economic outcome despite foregone gate revenue.

However, the theoretical implications extend beyond simple behavioral economics to encompass broader questions about value creation in tourism experiences. The findings suggest that free admission functions as a form of "loss leader" strategy, where short-term revenue sacrifice generates long-term value through increased visitor satisfaction, extended engagement, and enhanced stakeholder relationships. This approach aligns with contemporary sustainable tourism principles that prioritize long-term ecosystem health over immediate financial gains.

The consistency of spending patterns across different days and visitor volumes indicates that the free-admission strategy successfully attracted diverse market segments without significant cannibalization effects. This finding challenges traditional market segmentation approaches in event management, suggesting that accessibility-focused strategies may achieve broader market penetration while maintaining revenue sustainability.

### **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration as Sustainable Development Mechanism**

The multi-stakeholder collaboration networks identified in this research demonstrate how free-admission strategies can catalyze broader tourism ecosystem development. The partnerships between PRPP Semarang, hotel operators, and local businesses created symbiotic relationships that amplified economic impacts beyond the immediate event boundaries. This collaborative approach reflects Scott et al.'s (2008) conceptualization of tourism systems as complex adaptive networks where collective outcomes emerge from stakeholder interactions.

The hotel partnership arrangements, while limited by data availability constraints, illustrate how free-admission events can generate indirect economic benefits that justify stakeholder investment in collaborative initiatives. The cross-promotional activities and reciprocal marketing arrangements created value for all participants while minimizing individual investment requirements. This finding supports Bramwell and Lane's (2011) argument that stakeholder collaboration is essential for sustainable tourism development.

However, the research reveals tensions between collaborative ideals and practical implementation challenges. The limited availability of comprehensive hotel occupancy data suggests that stakeholder coordination, while beneficial, may not always extend to systematic performance monitoring and evaluation. This gap indicates opportunities for improving collaborative frameworks to enhance accountability and shared learning among partners.

The vendor network integration demonstrates how free-admission strategies can support local economic development by maximizing market exposure for small businesses. The removal of admission barriers appears to have created more favorable conditions for vendor-visitor interactions, leading to higher transaction volumes and extended business relationships. This finding aligns with community-based tourism development principles that emphasize local economic empowerment.

### **Digital-Physical Integration in Contemporary Event Marketing**

The integrated digital-physical promotion strategy employed by Jateng Fair 2025 represents an evolution in event marketing that combines broad reach with targeted messaging. The effectiveness of this approach in communicating the "free but fantastic" value proposition demonstrates how

contemporary events must navigate multiple communication channels to reach diverse audience segments effectively.

The social media analysis reveals that the free-admission message generated particularly strong engagement across digital platforms, suggesting that value-oriented messaging resonates strongly in digital environments where information abundance creates high competition for attention. This finding supports Buhalis and Foerste's (2015) argument that digital marketing enables more precise targeting and enhanced engagement compared to traditional promotional approaches.

However, the research also reveals the complexity of measuring integrated marketing effectiveness. While high engagement rates on social media correlated with strong event attendance, establishing direct causal relationships between specific promotional activities and visitor behavior remains challenging. This measurement challenge reflects broader difficulties in attribution analysis across multiple digital touchpoints identified by Gretzel et al. (2015).

The temporal coordination of promotional activities across different channels appears to have created synergistic effects that amplified overall marketing impact. The consistency of messaging about free admission across Instagram, website, TikTok, and Google advertising platforms reinforced the value proposition while addressing potential visitor skepticism about event quality. This coordination demonstrates the importance of strategic integration rather than simply multi-channel presence.

### **Temporal Extension and Sustainability**

The sequential events strategy employed by Jateng Fair 2025 challenges traditional approaches to event impact assessment by extending economic benefits over several months rather than concentrating them within a single time period. This temporal extension approach aligns with sustainable tourism principles that emphasize distributed rather than concentrated impacts on local communities and infrastructure.

The supporting events (Light Wonderland, Fusion Food Competition, Festival Maerakaca, Muslim Fair) demonstrate how main events can serve as platforms for ongoing tourism development rather than isolated activities. Each supporting event targeted different market segments while maintaining connection to the established Jateng Fair brand, suggesting that successful events can create lasting assets for destination marketing and visitor attraction.

This temporal extension strategy also addresses one of the primary criticisms of event tourism - that benefits are concentrated in short periods while costs and impacts are distributed over longer timeframes. By extending the benefit period through sequential programming, Jateng Fair 2025 created a more favorable cost-benefit ratio for stakeholder investments in collaborative relationships and infrastructure development.

However, the research reveals challenges in maintaining stakeholder engagement and coordination over extended periods. While the sequential events maintained hotel partnerships and vendor relationships, the intensity of collaboration appeared to diminish over time. This finding suggests that temporal extension strategies require systematic attention to relationship maintenance and renewed value creation for participating stakeholders.

### **Economic Multiplier Mechanisms in Free-Admission Events**

The economic multiplier effects observed at Jateng Fair 2025 operate through mechanisms distinct from those typically associated with traditional paid-admission events. The removal of admission barriers appears to have created conditions for enhanced local economic circulation by maximizing visitor numbers and optimizing spending distribution across local businesses. The consistent spending patterns suggest that visitors allocated their financial resources to experiential purchases (food, souvenirs, activities) rather than admission costs, potentially creating more direct benefits for local vendors and service providers. This redistribution effect aligns with sustainable tourism objectives that prioritize local economic empowerment over external revenue capture.

The indirect economic effects, while difficult to measure comprehensively, appear to extend through hotel bookings, restaurant visits, and retail purchases by visitors who extended their stays in Semarang. These spillover effects suggest that free-admission strategies may generate broader economic impacts than traditional revenue-focused approaches, though systematic measurement of these effects requires more comprehensive data collection than was available for this research. The sustainability of these economic multiplier effects depends on the maintenance of stakeholder relationships and continued collaborative value creation. The research suggests that the economic benefits create positive feedback loops that encourage continued stakeholder participation, but long-term sustainability requires ongoing attention to relationship management and value distribution among participants.

### **Innovation Theory and Strategic Event Management**

The free-admission strategy represents a form of strategic innovation that aligns with Schumpeter's (1934) conceptualization of "creative destruction" in entrepreneurial processes. By abandoning conventional revenue models, Jateng Fair 2025 created new approaches to value creation that challenge established practices in event management. This innovation extends beyond simple pricing strategy to encompass fundamental reconceptualization of events as platforms for ecosystem development rather than standalone revenue-generating activities. The shift from transaction-based to relationship-based value creation reflects broader trends in service economy development where sustainable competitive advantages derive from network effects and collaborative capabilities.

The technological and organizational innovations supporting the integrated digital-physical promotion strategy demonstrate how contemporary events must adapt to changing communication environments and audience expectations. The successful implementation of these innovations required coordination across multiple organizational boundaries and technological platforms, reflecting the increasing complexity of modern event management. However, the research also reveals constraints on innovation adoption, particularly regarding data collection and performance measurement capabilities. The limited availability of comprehensive impact data suggests that organizational and technical capabilities may lag behind strategic innovation, creating potential vulnerabilities in strategy implementation and evaluation.

### **Contributions to Sustainable Tourism Theory**

This research contributes to sustainable tourism theory by demonstrating how strategic innovation in event management can create positive outcomes across economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The free-admission paradox illustrates that economic sustainability need not depend on revenue maximization but can be achieved through value optimization and stakeholder collaboration.

The multi-stakeholder collaboration networks identified in this research demonstrate practical mechanisms for implementing sustainable tourism principles at the destination level. The collaborative relationships created through Jateng Fair 2025 provide a foundation for ongoing sustainable tourism development that extends beyond individual events to encompass broader destination competitiveness.

The temporal extension strategy addresses sustainability concerns about the concentrated impacts of mega-events by distributing benefits over extended periods while maintaining stakeholder engagement. This approach suggests practical methods for achieving the sustainable tourism objective of meeting present needs without compromising future development capacity.

The research also reveals practical challenges in implementing sustainable tourism principles, particularly regarding measurement and evaluation of complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives. The data limitations encountered in this research reflect broader challenges in sustainable tourism assessment and suggest needs for improved monitoring and evaluation frameworks in collaborative tourism development initiatives.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research reveals how Jateng Fair 2025's free-admission strategy created a paradoxical phenomenon where eliminating financial barriers paradoxically generated substantial economic value while building sustainable tourism ecosystems in Semarang. Through qualitative case study methodology, the study demonstrates that the "free but fantastic" approach attracted 108,360 visitors and generated IDR 4.83 billion in direct transactions, achieving consistent per-visitor spending of IDR 44,588 without admission revenue. The findings challenge conventional event management paradigms by demonstrating that strategic free-admission policies, combined with multi-stakeholder integration and digital-physical promotional synergy, create sustainable economic multiplier effects that transcend traditional event tourism models. The multi-stakeholder collaboration between PRPP Semarang, hotel partners (Azana Airport, Fovere Bandara, New Puri Garden, Louisekeane, Khas Hotel), and local businesses created symbiotic relationships that distributed benefits throughout Semarang's tourism ecosystem, while the temporal extension strategy through sequential supporting events (Light Wonderland, Fusion Food Competition, Festival Maerakaca, Muslim Fair) transformed a single event into an extended tourism campaign with sustained stakeholder benefits.

For event organizers and destination managers, this study contributes the "free but fantastic" paradox as a theoretical framework demonstrating how strategic pricing innovations can generate sustainable tourism development outcomes through value optimization rather than revenue maximization. The practical implications include replicable multi-stakeholder collaboration models, integrated digital-physical promotion strategies, and temporal extension approaches that address sustainability concerns about concentrated event impacts. While limitations include single case study constraints and limited hotel occupancy data availability, the research provides actionable guidance for implementing free-admission strategies supported by comprehensive stakeholder coordination and systematic impact monitoring. Local governments and tourism agencies should consider these findings as evidence that strategic innovation in event management can create positive sustainable tourism development outcomes when supported by collaborative stakeholder networks, suggesting policy frameworks that facilitate multi-stakeholder cooperation and investment in integrated promotional capabilities for maximizing events' contributions to destination competitiveness.

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