DIGITAL AGE TOURISM: SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN HOSPITALITY AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

By
Priyo Subekti[1], Aat Ruchiat Nugraha[2], Iriana Bakti[3]
[1,2,3] **Universitas Padjadjaran**
E-mail: [1]priyo.subekti@unpad.ac.id, [2]ruchiat@unpad.ac.id, [3]iriana.bakti@unpad.ac.id

Abstract: *The growth of mobile devices and social media has greatly affected the tourism business, as well as hospitality and cross-cultural relations. This research studies the use of social media in transforming the tourism practices in Pangandaran focusing on ecotourism and river rafting in Citumang. Using the qualitative method, data were established by purposive sampling of three informants: tourism managers, tour guides and tourists. Through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and social media posting and promotional materials documentation opened broad perspectives. The research results suggest that social media such as Instagram and Facebook are effective in marketing the Pangandaran's ecotourism products. There are tour guides such as Kang Wahyu who use the site to tell a story in cultures and interact with tourists at the same time to enhance their experience and integration of cultures. However, limitations in these technologies' full potential include poor internet coverage and low levels of digital skills among the local tourism providers. In conclusion, the results of the study indicate that combining social media with better digital infrastructure and participation of the community could improve the social and environmental aspects of ecological tourism.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's modern era, smartphones have become one of the main necessities in life to support and facilitate various daily activities. A smartphone is a hardware device consisting of a display, processor, main board, memory, and built-in modem. Its function is to combine the features of a computer with a phone, creating a sophisticated and attractive device that can access the internet, email, videos, games, and even be used for shopping or banking (Ahmed et al., 2019).

In Pangandaran itself which is recorded as a Tourist City where there are many entrepreneurs or traders in it who also really need the sophistication of smartphones, Entrepreneurs use smartphones with many of their needs, such as doing online buying and selling activities, communicating with distant relatives or playing social media, and

expanding their business online. Currently, communication technology plays an important role for the community which is used to support daily activities to make them easier, more effective and efficient (Denić et al., 2018). With the existence of current communication technology, it is as if humans are no longer limited by space and time, they can communicate with anyone, anytime and anywhere, and of course change the pattern of communication and information search that has so far relied on analog technology (Salehan et al., 2018).

Pangandaran is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the eyes of the Indonesian people, especially in West Java. One of the attractions that Pangandaran relies on is nature-based tourism. However, the element of attraction is not the only reason that attracts tourists to a destination, other factors including public facilities, accommodation, food and tourism services also support the arrival of tourists. Tourists want to find a unique, distinctive and meaningful place to spend their holidays (Polus & Bidder, 2016). For example, tourists who like the beauty of the environment will glance at tourist destinations such as nature reserves, protected forests, conservation areas, nature-based tourism (in this case Pangandaran offers water-based tourism).

Tourist attractions are influenced by various factors including infrastructure, public facilities such as toilets, snacks, culinary, affordable prices, easy accessibility and friendly and satisfying service. The number of tourist visits is closely related to tourist satisfaction (Vajčnerová et al., 2014). Tourist satisfaction is a form of subjective individual emotion that is influenced by the individual's goals in traveling, individual expectations and the characteristics of the individual himself.

The growth of social media has completely changed the way people interact and communicate (Arora et al., 2019). In other words, the growth of media can cause changes in society, especially the way they interact, communicate and change their information search patterns (Yusup et al., 2019). This social media plays a key role in facilitating individuals to communicate that can go beyond time, reach and message content, and can be done anytime and anywhere (Watie, 2017)(Hafiar et al., 2019). Social media changes the new way of communicating, with the presence of smartphones, the communication facilities provided are increasingly diverse, ranging from text messages, chatting, communication groups, browsing and social media facilities (Reza, 2016). These various features can be accessed through just one mobile phone unit that is easy to carry anywhere, this is what causes social media to be quickly accepted by the public.

Nowadays, smartphones have become a primary and very important need for everyone. (Galati et al., 2017). Whatever profession and job of each person certainly has a relationship with the use of smartphones to facilitate their work. We cannot deny that this is true in modern times like today. This smartphone has also become a very important utility item, for example for tour guides. Tour guides use smartphones in activities to promote the tourism they develop. This is considered very effective because smartphones make it easier for tour guides to spread information related to the tourist attractions they manage (Zhao et al., 2023). Because by using a smartphone, the reach of information can be wider and the use of costs is relatively cheap compared to promotions using posters, banners, or other printed materials.

Tourism promotion activities via smartphones are very easy to do by many people. There are many supporting applications and sites that can help tour guides and tourism

activists in introducing and informing tourist attractions to the wider public. Some applications that are easy to use in tourism promotion activities, for example, such as Instagram & Facebook.

As much as life has been altered by smartphones and social media in general, and particularly, their application for promoting tourism, the role of these resources in the improvement of hospitality and in the improvement of the level of intercultural interaction has been inadequately addressed (Semerádová & Vávrová, 2016). Furthermore, although Pangandaran's tourism business is benefitting from the use of social networking sites such as instagram and facebook, The ability to make use of these technologies for a better hospitality and deeper interfacing across cultures is yet to be fully explored. In addition to the above, factors such as lack of relevant skills on the part of the stakeholders and poor facilities like poor access to reliable internet further constrain the proper application of these technologies.

The critical element that makes this research different from others is the fact that it seeks to investigate social perspectives changes that occur within the tourism industry as a result of the use of social media at all, and consequently does not view this as an exotic culture based on the example of the Pangandaran area. In doing so, the study sets out to understand how the available digital tools can be best employed so as to enrich visitors and the interaction between the visitors and the visit hosts.

This research project focuses on how social media impacts the tourism practice in Pangandaran and how these practices are carried out on social media titled "Tourism Transformation in the Digital Age: The Role of Social Media in Hospitality and Intercultural Communication". To achieve this objective, the specific targets of this research are expand on the function of mobile devices and other social networking applications in the marketing of tourism in Pangandaran.

METHOD

The research method used in this work is qualitative research that understands the application of social networks in promoting hospitality and intercultural communication in the context of ecotourism (Bajari, 2015) in Pangandaran with a particular emphasis on rafting tourism on the Citumang River. This strategy was chosen because it allows researchers to investigate the experiences, perceptions and practices that tourism actors and tourists have regarding social media. The sampling method used was purposive sampling where informants were recruited based on their relevance and participation in tourism activities in Citumang.

The main informants of this study were three main groups. First, Citumang tourism managers who assisted with insights on promotion strategies and tourism management through the use of social media. Second, tour guides who serve tourists and use social media to improve information dissemination. Third, tourists who during our research were involved in the sport of rafting along the Citumang River focusing on their implications for tourism in terms of advertising and other intercultural issues in tourism marketing.

Data was collected through several techniques (Moleong, 2000). In-depth interviews were conducted with managers, tour guides and tourists to comprehensively understand their views and experiences. Participatory observation was also conducted, where

researchers took part in rafting activities to directly observe the interaction between tour guides and tourists. In addition, documentation was used to collect secondary data, including social media posts, digital brochures, and online promotional materials related to Citumang tourism.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through several stages (Rakhmat, 2017). First, data from interviews, observations and documentation were processed through a coding process to identify relevant key themes. Second, thematic analysis was conducted to organize the themes to understand the patterns of social media use, hospitality strategies, and intercultural communication dynamics. Finally, data triangulation was conducted to ensure the validity of the research results by comparing data from various sources.

This approach is designed to provide deep insights into how social media can be an effective tool in supporting the transformation of ecology-based tourism in the digital era, while strengthening cultural interactions between tourists and local communities. As such, the research results are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of innovative and inclusive tourism strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To learn more about the benefits and impacts of using smartphone technology in the life of a tour guide, our group conducted observations of tour guides in Citumang. We interviewed Kang Wahyu, a tour guide in Citumang who has been working as a tour guide in Citumang for 5 years. Citumang itself is located in Bojong Village, Parigi District, Pangandaran Regency. It has an area of 6.6 hectares which is geographically located at an altitude of 100-150 meters above sea level and a flat field configuration.

One of the tourism potentials that can be optimally developed in Pangandaran is ecological-based tourism potential. Talking about tourism, we will talk about a tourism potential that cannot only be seen from a scientific discipline (Okumus et al., 2018). Tourism is one type of new industry which is capable of producing rapid economic growth in providing employment, increasing income, living standards and stimulating other productive sectors (Susanty et al., 2015).

Currently, many people do not know about the various ecological tourism spots in Pangandaran, most people who hear the word Pangandaran can only think of the beach, even though Pangandaran has a lot of ecological tourism potential that is no less interesting than its beaches. Unfortunately, there are still few tourists who know about interesting tourist spots other than the beach, and therefore the government and tourism actors in Pangandaran need to promote and socialize the various newly built tourist spots, this is intended so that the tourist spots in Pangandaran become more famous and can increase income for the government and local residents.

In today's era of increasingly sophisticated technology, we must be smarter in utilizing existing opportunities and must be able to promote as well as possible to the public, we can promote through various media and perhaps the most effective to promote is social media which is currently widely used (M. T. P. M. B. Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Social media that is currently trending and used by most people is Facebook or Instagram, through these media we can promote in detail about tourist attractions in Pangandaran, simply by uploading photos and writing the information you want to convey, then you should use words that

attract the attention of many people and contain elements of curiosity for the audience who see it.

The target used for promotion or socialization is foreign tourists and also needs to be done to domestic tourists, the audience is chosen to increase the attraction for many people to be able to visit Pangandaran which is rich in tourism potential. The determination method is very easy because it is not aimed at someone or specifically at several people, but is done in general, because Indonesians themselves do not necessarily know the various tourist attractions in Pangandaran.

Promotion or socialization in the field of ecology is carried out because, basically Pangandaran is very rich in tourism related to nature, even almost all tourist attractions in Pangandaran are related to nature, for example nature reserves, green canyon, jojogan, santirah and many others. And these places are still very new so that many people do not know these places, so it is necessary to do socialization so that these tourist attractions become crowded with tourists, increase government income and can help the local economy.

Pangandaran is rich in water-based tourism, for example Citumang, Santirah and Wonderhil Jogjogan water tourism. Some activities that can be done at Citumang tourist attractions include swimming in the Citumang river, outbound, tracking, canoeing, camping, sight seeing, and for education and research as done by our group. For Kang Wahyu himself, the use of smartphones is very beneficial for the profession of tour guide because it can help in promoting Citumang tourist attractions. Kang Wahyu uses a smartphone for three hours a day, the use for three hours is not direct use but interlude use because he is busy doing his main task, which is guiding visitors who travel to Citumang tourist attractions. The applications that Kang Wahyu often uses are Facebook and Instagram. He has used Facebook since 2010 and recently Kang Wahyu explored Instagram and ended up really liking the application. According to Kang Wahyu, the use of social media tends to be more effective because its reach is wider and can even reach internationally, while with traditional media or print media, the promotion process has a limited reach. He also said that with this technological advancement, in addition to being profitable, it can also help make it easier for users to do their daily activities, one example is communicating with people from a distance, only the obstacle felt is the signal constraint. Because the location is quite remote, the signal from providers in rural areas is still not as strong as the signal in urban areas. With this technological advancement, it can provide benefits and quite positive impacts for tour guides in Citumang.

Smartphones as a technological tool that is often used in the modern era today, of course, play an important role in helping with all work in any field. (Hutter & Hoffmann, 2014). This proves that smartphones certainly have a positive role or impact, not only producing negative impacts for their users. The positive use of smartphones is also utilized by tour guides. With various applications that we can use on smartphones, it certainly makes it easier for them to promote the tourist attractions they manage. This is done because it is considered quite effective and efficient in providing information to the wider public regarding tourist attractions.

Citumang tourist attraction as a tourist attraction in Pangandaran Regency certainly strives hard to get visits from tourists. The efforts made are certainly through promotions carried out through various media. Online media on smartphones are the main medium for

quite effective promotions. Kang Wahyu, a tour guide at the Citumang tourist attraction explained that through various applications on smartphones such as Instagram and Facebook, there are various promotional facilities that can be obtained. Thus, smartphones are a very appropriate tool used by tour guides. Through social media, travelers can learn about the customs and values of local communities before their visit. In turn, local communities, such as tour guides, can use these platforms to authentically introduce their culture. This strengthens intercultural communication and builds a more harmonious relationship between tourists and locals (F. Tiago et al., 2020).

We do interview to a number of businesman in regency the place to be about use smartphone and utilization application in promote his efforts. Results from observation Which data Which We find in field find that average frequency use mobile phone is 12 hours per day. From results study How about utilization smartphone from application Which often accessed average they use social media general such as whatsapp and facebook for promote his efforts, media social considered become important in Marketing And promotion for businessman (Loukis et al., 2017). With sophistication technology smartphone along with the application businessman Can promote his efforts in circles public wide without need bother and use budget Which big for scoop up profit, only capitalized smartphone and network Which Enough Good businessman more easy in running his business.

From information source person we get data the obstacle in the form of quality network in the place to be Which Still not enough Good And businessman confess that smartphone very cause flavor dependence to the user And For health eye Also threatened because they more long use up time for play smartphone. Further more we get information around Profit Which got from use smartphone that is businessman can more easy promote his efforts And more economical For cost promotion.

On era This smartphone most in demand for businessman in promoting his efforts because apart from saving on promotional costs Smartphones also make things easier and its coverage very wide, Beside that, entrepreneurs do not need to open shops anymore Because with existence smartphone business Also Can done in in the house (Müller et al., 2018). With existence shop on line and delivery order very give profit Which Enough big for the entrepreneur. Social media not only serves as a promotional tool, but also as a platform for interaction between tourists and local communities. Kang Wahyu, for example, uses Instagram to share stories about local culture and offer guidance for tourists who want to better understand Pangandaran's community life.

When talking about tourism, Pangandaran is a place that has a lot of potential in the field of tourism, especially in ecological tourism or nature tourism. Some beautiful natural attractions in the Pangandaran area that are worth visiting include Pangandaran Beach, nature reserves, Karapyak Beach, Batu Hiu Beach, Batu Karas Beach, and others. Kompepepar works with the government to advance Pangandaran tourism through socialization or promotion through social media, mass media and to tourists visiting Pangandaran. The message conveyed regarding the description of the types of natural tourism in Pangandaran apart from Pangandaran Beach of course.

To build tourism, there needs to be deliberation in solving problems that occur. And doing mutual cooperation in building tourism facilities (Kapera, 2018). By working together, the construction of tourism facilities will be completed quickly and well-related. Therefore,

mutual cooperation and deliberation are very necessary in building ecological-based tourism or nature tourism in Pangandaran. The use of social media by tourism operators also plays an important role in creating a more personalized hospitality experience (Bassano et al., 2019). Through direct messaging features on Instagram and Facebook, tourism operators can respond to travelers' queries in real-time, creating more efficient and friendly communication.

In developing tourism, it is necessary to cooperate with local governments and institutions that contribute to environmental conservation. By working together, it will be easier to build and create ecological-based tourism or nature tourism in Pangandaran. Supporting factors and inhibiting factors that build ecological-based tourism or nature tourism: 1) Supporting factors: community participation and interest in developing ecological or nature-based tourism; 2) Inhibiting factors: lack of adequate facilities to develop ecological or nature-based tourism in Pangandaran. Despite its great benefits, the limited internet network in some remote areas in Pangandaran is a major obstacle. To overcome this, investment in telecommunications infrastructure as well as digital literacy training for local tourism players is needed.

CONCLUSION

Social networks are very crucial in the changing dynamics of tourism in the digital age and particularly advertising eco-tourism in Pangandaran. As a wide-reaching and cost-effective mean of communication, social sites such as Instagram and Facebook do not only enable marketing activities but also enhance interactions between tourists and the local people. In the case of tourism related to the river rafting activities on Citumang, social media has proven to be useful in the marketing of the same to the local and international tourists by marketing natural and tourism features available.

Besides advertising purposes, social media serves the hospitality function as well as the tourism business encourages tourists to share their experiences first hand and thus making communication between the providers of the tourism system and the tourists more effective. Also, social media performs the task of promoting inter-cultural communication by offering an avenue through which cultural information and mutual understanding can be enhanced between visitors and the residents of the host nation.

Without the active engagement of the local communities, the ecological management approach to tourism development in Pangandaran would be untenable. The social media utilization in this context should be combined with the enhancement of social competencies and skills within the regional communities in order to develop the kind of tourism that is appealing, but which has social, economic and ecological viability. In this regard, social media becomes not only a means of communication, but also a means of inclusion and modernization of tourism.

become informants in this research, providing various perspectives related to the use of social media in tourism. We would also like to express our appreciation to Padjadjaran University for providing facilities and a conducive academic environment for this research.

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