The Use of Social Media as a Water Tourism Destination Promotional Media at Banjar Hot Spring: Digital Marketing Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed at exploring how social media was used to promote a tourist destination and how tourists perceive the related content of the social media. The study was conducted at the Tourism Department of Buleleng Regency and the tourism site of Banjar Hot Spring. To meet the first research objective, data were collected from three officers and a head of marketing division. The participants were recruited using purposive sampling technique with the criteria of having involvement in the management of social media. Data were collected using observation, interview, and focus group discussion. The findings suggested that the Tourism Department has demonstrated an optimal utilisation of social media to promote Banjar Hot Spring. However, the use of story telling and type writing may enhance the performance of social media. The second data analysis revealed that tourists perceived the social media was satisfactory.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0, the inevitability growth of information and technology is evident (Becken, 2014; Mugagga & Nabaasa, 2016). From a business perspective, technology advances have indeed impacted the way business or transaction is executed. The rapid changes of how businesses are operated seems to be unstoppable. Thus, both service providers and customers are forced to engage in the necessity to formulate and implement new strategy and adjustment. It is not only with regard to the way customer purchase a product or service, but also how business firms deliver their service (Christou & Chatzigeorgiou, 2020; Cusumano et al., 2015). That is, the interactions between customer and service provider have been moving from direct to indirect contact. Although, this may not reflect that customer completely left the physical stores (Pauwels & Neslin, 2015; Rahman et al., 2018). Social media is a platform that can facilitate business firms to communicate their products and services to a much wider audience in a significantly shorter time. It is effortlessly observable that products and services are mostly delivered via social media thus, minimize the direct or personal contacts between seller and buyer (Brennan et al., 2012; Spyridou, 2017). By the same token, service providers put a consistent effort to
advance its technology adaptability and ability in order to meet their customers or potential customers effectively (Alalwan et al., 2017; Jie et al., 2015).

With the changes of customer-service provider interaction, how customer make online buying decision and how they responds and evaluates the product or service they consumed also differs from the traditional way (Prasad & Aryasri, 2009; Zeithaml, 2002). Indeed, people tend to regard social media as an important platform to purchase products or services (Alalwan et al., 2017; Sung & Kim, 2014). In fact, social media has been said to be a powerful virtual promotional tools (Cleave et al., 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2015). It can build potential customers’ intention and buying decision and make repeat order. The importance of social media for promotion and marketing is also highlighted in the tourism context. Previous research has extensively dedicated to understand the significant role of social media in encouraging tourism (Alghizzawi et al., 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017). Thus, it is essential for tourism organisations including The Governments’ Tourism Department to evaluate the use of social media to increase tourists’ visit to a destination. In a similar fashion, it is also imperative to explore how tourists perceive the information provided on social media about tourist destination. It was apparent that these have been lacking within the Tourism Department of Buleleng Recidence which thereby this research was conducted.

The use of technology in this term is the main option in spreading information about current tourism condition in Buleleng. The use of technology especially mobile phone based technology at this moment is the most significant one in terms of its development (Lee & Lee, 2015; Widiantika et al., 2019). Another research stated that at least three million photos are uploaded on Flickr, five million posts are uploaded on Twitter, and millions of blogs are registered every day (Leung, X.Y. et al., 2015). This fact shows that the use of social media will be helpful in promotion in this era. This statement is supported by several findings in technology researches, especially social media which is not only as a source of information for tourists, but also as a marketing media for policy makers and service providers (Leung, X.Y. et al., 2015). Buleleng Tourism Department has three platforms to share information besides website. The platforms are Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube. Based on the data of their official Youtube channel, which is “@Yuk Ke Buleleng”, the first video was uploaded in 2017. It has two thousand subscribers. Their Instagram account @Yuk Ke Buleleng and Facebook account @Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Buleleng was also made in 2017 and have more than 2000 followers.

The making and the use of social media by Buleleng Tourism Department was started from 2017 based on the data that the numbers of visitors in 2017 and later has been increased compared to before the use of social media. Quoted from official website of Buleleng Tourism Department, the number of visitors to Banjar Hot Spring was around 73,711 people in 2016. Meanwhile in 2017, the number of visitors was increased to 140,059 people. It showed that the improvement of the visitors at least was influenced by the use of social media as a media to share the tourism information in Buleleng. On the result of pre-observation to find out the social media management which was conducted in July 2021 at Buleleng Tourism Department, the researcher found out that the uploaded contents were not balance between photos and videos. In this research, the researcher aimed to analzye: 1) “How social media is used and managed by Buleleng Tourism Department to promote the tourist destination?” 2) How do tourists perceive the information about Banjar Hot Spring on the social media? The contribution of the study helps the government to develop an effective social media strategy in order to increase the number of tourist.

2. METHODS

This research used descriptive study which is divided into three types; observational study, survey, and case study. Qualitative analysis is aimed to describe a phenomenon deeply which is also a kind of research that learns about a phenomenon descriptively (Creswell, 2014; Nassaji, 2015). Furthermore, Nassaji stated that this kind of research explores process, event, activity that are followed by discussion. This research was designed to analyze the use of social media management to improve the number of visitors to Buleleng and tourists' response towards the tourism information that is uploaded on the social media. This research was conducted in two places which are Buleleng Tourism Department on Kartini Street, Singaraja, Bali and Water Tourism Destination Banjar Hot Spring in Banjar, Banjar Village, Banjar District, Buleleng. This research used observation data and deep interview as data collection method. Qualitative research used triangulation data in validating research findings since it used three different sources such as observation form, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and deep interview result. It also used repetition method (stability) to find data reliability. The research instruments that were used are observation form, camera, and online meeting applications. The researcher analyzed the data which was collected from observation form, deep interview with media team and head of marketing division in Buleleng Tourism Department, and FGD result through online meeting with their media team, and added
by open-ended questions result by tourists who have visited Banjar Hot Spring. In this research, the researcher used Qualitative Analysis as the data analysis. Qualitative Analysis is data that is collected through process and procedure. This method is aimed to describe something in detail through deep interview and observation (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). The data result was reported in form of explanation, people’s interpretation, and situation investigation. There are four models of interactive process in analyzing data including data reduction, data presentation and conclusion (drawing / verifying) (Alhojailan, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The researcher interviewed three interviewees who are media team and head of marketing division in Buleleng Tourism Department. The interviewees gave various answers. The water tourism destinations which were uploaded by media team are Banjar Hot Spring, Banyuwedang Hot Spring, Sanih Spring, Sekumpul Waterfall, Tirta Bhuwana Waterfall, Les Waterfall, and Gili Puthi Sumberkima. It is in accordance to water tourism destination according to the experts. The tourism business provision of water tourism destination is a business that involves water such as sea, river, lake, swamp, and reservoir. The first interviewee answered that in managing the social media content, he focused on the use of photo because it is more interesting for audiences. The second and the third interviewee stated that they use both of photo and video with interesting caption for audiences. It was related to a statement by previous study which stated that in promoting tourism, there is a uniqueness related to finding process, identifying, responding, and anticipating consuments by combining promotion, price, access message and branding in order to encourage buying behavior to make the consuments satisfied by presenting the strengths of the tourism destination itself (Hasan, 2015). The combination of promotion, price, and access message and branding in this situation is Buleleng Tourism Department media team have optimized promotion in informing price, access, and brand (place name, business name) which will be sold to people, so that they will be interested to come for a visit.

The first interviewee explained that his chosen platform in sharing the promotional content is Instagram, meanwhile the use of Facebook for him is only focused on elder audience (above 30 years old). The third interviewee is more focused on Facebook platform only and the second interviewee focuses on the use of Instagram in daily basis. One of the important keys in bringing tourism destination success is technology and it is very influenced by innovation rate (Gomezelj, 2016; Hasan, 2015). With a better innovation of providing communication, transportation, and security, it will be a strong stimulus for tourists to visit the destination. In digital marketing theory, it is also mentioned that digital marketing is able to cover the larger market with the help of technology (Goldman et al., 2021; Suhada et al., 2017). The next finding which became the researcher’s focus is about Buleleng Tourism Department media team’s performance based on interview result, they emphasized that the promotional content management cannot be separated cooperation between internal side (Buleleng Tourism Department) and external side (the tourism destination’s administrators and tourists). As explained by the interviewees about health protocol implementation which is implemented in each water tourism destination as one of security and convenience rules so that they are able to be visited during the pandemic. The health protocol implementation is not only emphasized by government through Tourism Department, but also public’s awareness to implement health protocol when travel, so there will be a good collaboration between government and public.

In online tourism digital marketing strategy, the product/business provider should be facilitated by a group of people who have long term (Hasan, 2015; Rotich & Mukhongo, 2015). Based on the theory, Buleleng Tourism Department in the use of social media management has done at least three of five total strategies such as Recognition about the change of conventional method pattern to digital mode by using technology in terms of the use of Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube. Next is Collaboration with Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) to make sure about the strength in promoting and distributing. The third one, Identification related to government and commercial sector’s role as the administrators of water tourism destination and tourism industry including tourist as indirect promoters, and the appropriate mechanism and responsive for various entities involvement (Hasan, 2015). Moreover, Buleleng Tourism Department actually has several social media accounts as promotion media like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Youtube, and Website. All of social media management such as Instagram and Facebook is already optimal, based on open-ended questions result through google form. However, the researcher found out that the use of Website as an information media is not optimal yet. Based on the interview result, all of the interviewees explained that there is no requirement on the number of uploads that must be achieved every day. It also gave bad feedback from tourists towards Buleleng Tourism Department’s good
achievement in managing social media. Although it has been previously discussed about the good social media management, the result also showed that promotional content management on Buleleng Tourism Department’s social media is still lacked. The common mistakes that should be avoided by business activists in terms of tourism are first, ignoring digital marketing performance measurement (Tyrrell et al., 2013; Wut, T. M. et al., 2021). There are many tourism administrators who promote their business through online, but forget to analyze the number of their digital marketing performance. So that the media team does not aware about audience’s awareness towards their brand, the number of visitors on their website, and how many advertisements that have been clicked in search engine. Second, social media administrators ignore about Story-Telling and Copywriting which are ways to create an interesting content with persuasive language style that will attract audience’s interest to visit or looking at their products or services. It was explained through tourist responses which became the respondents of this research when they were asked about less attractive contents found on Buleleng Tourism Department’s social media. The tourist responses were about the low quality of photo and video, less variety and less massive of shared information.

Performance management of Buleleng Tourist Department media team is not optimal yet. There is no quality control and target that should be achieved by them every day caused their performance was not optimal in 2021. Besides that, the head of marketing division also explained that he does not give them target that should be uploaded every day. Thus, the researcher recommended in this research about the importance of quality control that should be done regularly before uploading a content to social media in order to minimize netizen’s dissatisfaction. Based on the tourists’ response who have visited Banjar Hot Spring, most of them got the information about the tourism destination on Instagram (63,2%) followed by Facebook (18,4%). It is related to a statement by previous study which stated that, the main goal of digital marketing should be attracting consuments and potential consuments quickly with the help of technology (Pantano & Priporas, 2016; Wut, T. M. et al., 2021). The use of several social media platforms by Buleleng Tourism Department media team is also mentioned in six types of digital marketing, two of them are the used of Website and Social Media Marketing which are not optimal yet (Wut, T. M. et al., 2021). Buleleng Tourism Department media team used Website only as an information media and company professionalism mark in business (McIntosh, 2013; Wut, T. M. et al., 2021). The website management should be able to be a tourism promotion media. However, most of the uploaded contents on their website are about their official activities which are not related to tourism. The information about tourism on their website is less than their official activities information. Search Engine Marketing should work appropriately if the uploaded contents are about tourism, because two types of social media marketing that are used by Tourism Department are Facebook and Instagram which can be used to share the information on website. The function of website is more than just an information media, not a social media but the use of website as a promotion media should be optimized by Buleleng Tourism Department media team.

The tourists’ response about the information that they got from Buleleng Tourism Department’s social media account are various, start from location, facilities, entrance ticket price, water tourism destination around Banjar Hot Spring, the benefit of hot spring for health, readiness in New Normal era, its history, and short profile. Based on those various answers, the provided information about Banjar Hot Spring by Buleleng Tourism Department is accurate. It is also supported by their responses about interesting promotional contents provided on Buleleng Tourism Department’s social media, such as facilities that are captured in photo and video and also the short description about Banjar Hot Spring. The respondent tourists felt helped by the provided information on Buleleng Tourism Department’s social media. This research result is related to a research by previous study which stated that, marketing defines as an important factor in fulfilling consuments’ needs, so the marketing activity should focus on consuments’ satisfaction since their perspective towards the business will make it survive for a long period of time (Subianto, 2007).

The use of internet technology becomes one of good strategies in promoting Wonderful Indonesia and digital marketing communication in terms of digital marketing which can contribute to purchase quantity improvement or the use of service (Permatasari, 2019; Ramadhayanti, 2019). In this discussion, the researcher concluded that with the complete information that has been mentioned before, it has directly fulfilled the tourists’ satisfactions who have visited Banjar Hot Spring. Despite the ability to explore and describe the phenomenon being studied, there are several limitations of this research. First, due to the nature of a qualitative study, the findings are not readily available for generalisation with wider population. With small sample size and the method used, the results of this study is specific to the scope and characteristics of subjects and location. Generalisation largely is sought through the use of statistical tool (Vasileiou et al., 2018). That being said, similar research in different atmosphere may result
differently. Second, the qualitative study may draw question on ambiguitis (Dawson & Henley, 2012). That is, the interpretation of the findings is highly subjective to the researcher own understanding.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has focused on understanding how social media used to promote a tourism destination. First, it revealed an optimal degree of utilisation of social media as one of the promotional tools by Buleleng Tourism Department. That is, the water tourism destination of Banjar Hot Spring has been extensively promoted mainly via Facebook and Instagram. Although it has displayed the complete information, the way and the frequency it is shared need improvement. For example, The Buleleng Tourism Department can use story telling and copy writing in delivering the content of the post. As such, the post will be more interesting and vary. Furthermore, in order to maintain consistency of posting information, it would be an advantage to create a schedule to post information. Second, tourists have reported that the information posted by the Buleleng Tourism Department on social media were satisfactory. That is, the posts were informative, interesting, and useful. Thus, Buleleng Tourism Department should address the “how” questions in order to improve the utilisation of social media in promoting the tourism destination. The limitation of the study present research offers an avenue for future research for example to examine the impact factor of the use of social media as promotional tool and to quantitatively investigate the impacts of social media on intention to travel.

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