

Communicating Natural and Cultural Tourism Destination of North Sulawesi as an Identity

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ABSTRACT

Digital campaigns can help the sector of tourism and attract potential tourists' attention. This research aims to analyze the digital tourism campaign of the natural and cultural North Sulawesi contents. A qualitative approach is used through in-depth and semi-structured interviews with local government, private business sector, tourists, and social media contents analysis. Coding and categorization were conducted based on the concepts and dimensions of culture. The findings show that nature and culture were integrated into the brand-building process of tourism destination. North Sulawesi's cultural and natural identities were reflected in the campaign. Social media's utilization and optimization are to disseminate information by tourism destination stakeholders. The information conveyed was in activities, government news, the latest information updates on current issues, and consumers' testimonies on social media. However, there is still a lack of content. The private sectors of hotels and tour travel agencies have taken advantage of social media as digital marketing communication. In contrast, restaurants and traditional cake sellers still use conventional marketing types instead of using social media. The coronavirus pandemic has caused various corporate sectors to significantly impact the hotel business, hospitality, and travel tour agencies. As a sample in this study, there is still a foreign language capability and understanding inadequacy from some private sectors. This research expects to help local governments and the private sector planning promotional activities, optimizing social media as digital marketing to attract tourists' attention and build a brand identity for North Sulawesi destinations.

Keywords: Marketing communication; Natural and cultural identity; North Sulawesi; Social media campaign; Tourism destination

Introduction

Marketing a city or a province to potential visitors is an exciting communication activity. Many articles have discussed city branding to attract tourism. Similarly, a study analyzes the optimal use and importance of digital marketing communication for North Sulawesi tourism destinations' identity (Wall & Mathieson, 1982). Tourism is identifiable with an escape from work activities and leaving home for a short time to do temporary travel activities at a temporary residence to find other facilities or new pleasant environs. Indonesia's beautiful natural potential, biodiversity, and diverse culture generate many descriptions for the country. It seems that from year to year the tourism sector had increased quite significantly. The Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia (2021) noted that in 2019, there were 10.71 million visits from January to August. The number of foreign tourist visits in 2019 was 16,106,954, increasing by 1.88 percent (BPS, 2021). Of the 1,380,000 foreign tourists visiting in December 2019, 239,800 visits were from Malaysia, followed by 207,300 visits from Singapore and 154,200 trips from China.

Dispersed tourist destinations throughout Indonesia contribute to the growth of other sectors outside of tourism. The types of tourism that Indonesia are cultural, agricultural, marine, natural reserve, and culinary tourism. Developing tourism requires a strategy, especially in the promotion. Today, we use digital marketing social media. The dissemination process ensures a stable flow to the tourist and shapes social media into a marketing strategy that includes all audiences or potential tourists using social media (Castro et al., 2017).

North Sulawesi, a province located at the northern tip of Sulawesi Island with its capital city in Manado has various types of tourism with the potential for extraordinary natural beauty. The local government (2020) stated that North Sulawesi's culture is rich in natural resources, underwater beauty, lakes, mountains, the culture of its people, arts, and culture. Social media has many

benefits. Ćiriković (2014) stated that creativity and innovation are needed and very important to respond to potential tourists, and these are the characteristics of tourism products. Mosca et al. (2016) suggested that the technique for creating and expanding place positions is by branding destinations.

This article explicitly analyzes social media use in the tourism industry community at the local level making it different from various previous studies and highlights the tourism campaign in North Sulawesi by using digital media. (Gashi & Ahmeti, 2021) Media have a relatively substantial impact. Social media as a platform for marketing and commerce are looking for connections and expanding digital marketing, especially in tourism. Moreover, most people rely on the internet to access data and plan trips (Xiang et al., 2014). With the current network that everyone can access, specifically in travel planning and mobility, tourists can obtain consumer data. The right digital tourism campaign strategy will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the progress of tourism. Roque & Raposo (2015) also perceived social media's critical role as a communication and marketing tool in tourism.

The use of digital marketing communications is an option for tourism destination stakeholders. However, unlike corporations, tourist destinations require collective understanding and participation in the stakeholder community to attract global tourists. This article's uniqueness is also the discussion of the community's involvement towards North Sulawesi destinations. It significantly influences cultural identity, natural potential, and diversity or identity with unique values. Wheeler et al. (2011) explain that destination branding that reflects the diversity of values, cultures, and local identities that make up the destination supports a more holistic approach and is considered a sustainable destination management philosophy. In addition to culture, this article focuses on natural aspects because Zenelaj and Pifti (2013) explain that environmental problems were related to humans where people tend to ask for more natural-themed holidays.

Many previous studies have discussed tourist destinations from different points of view. This article seeks to complete the concepts and contexts that were not the concern of the previous research on communicating North Sulawesi natural and cultural tourism destination as an identity. This article also adds to the study of community stakeholders responsible for tourist destinations such as the local government, individuals, small and medium enterprises, fisheries families, and tour-travel companies in attracting many tourists to come on vacation to North Sulawesi.

Literature review

Identity Theory

As Ting-Toomey (2009) explained, identity theory is how people from different countries with their cultural behavior see the world around them and communicate all factors influenced by intercultural communication. This research uses identity theory because each regional tourist destination in Indonesia has its own distinct identity. A community group's uniqueness relates to its culture and nature, and its identity deserves to be communicated to the public. North Sulawesi has a unique cultural identity that differentiates it from other regions in Indonesia and even in the Pacific Ocean Region. A cultural identity is a sociological group and an essential part of certain groups and individuals' psychology. In communication theory, identity consists of three cultural contexts: the individual, the community-not free from all actions or belonging to the people or public property, and the public. Identity is formed when a person socially interacts with other people in life. According to this theory, identity links individuals and society through communication that allows this relationship to occur. Naturally, identity is a "code" that defines a person's membership in a diverse community.

Brand Identity

Communicating a tourist destination as a product is basically an effort to build a brand. The North Sulawesi community builds its brand identity in market tourism of the world tourism industry. Therefore, brand identity is also a concept in this paper. Meaning and direction are characteristics of brand identity and the essential to a brand's strategic objectives (Aaker, 1996). The brand identity must be fundamental to the customer. Distinct identities are a feature of brand identity, namely, to be different from its competitors and show the vision that an organization will achieve (Wagner et al., 2009). The brand meaning becomes an identity that the company displays. Kapferer (2008) also stated that brand's communication, verbal or non-verbal, formal, or informal, and the many dimensions involved with the brand identity must be in sync with the brand's essence.

Intercultural Communication Theory

However, people who visit a tourist destination from other regions or other countries allow intercultural interactions between them and the local community. This perspective places intercultural communication as the basis for the discussion of this paper. According to Giri (2009), intercultural communication occurred and influenced each other's communication with backgrounds behind different cultures or tribes. People who have different cultural backgrounds (different races, ethnicities, or social economics, or mix according to all these disparities) meet at cultural events, beaches, hotels, or restaurants. Meanwhile, the messages of marketing communications delivered to potential tourists will experience diversity. Tourists and natives interact and communicate with their different place of origin circumstances.

Environmental communication Theory

Apart from the cultural aspects, it is essential to understand the natural aspects related to environmental communication. According to Milstein (2009), the environmental communication perspective is a field within the communication discipline and a meta field that crosses scientific disciplines. The assumption of environmental communication face-to-face communication, verbal or non-verbal, interpersonal or the public dimension can see human representations of nature. Natural communication can be seen from economic, social, and political interests. It will help shape everyone's communication in directions we are not aware of and can help humans see and connect through specific lenses to see nature. The relationship between nature and humans can be seen from cultural communication.

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach analyzes natural and cultural aspects as an identity put forward in North Sulawesi tourism's digital marketing communication activities. Because the community consists of government, private companies, individual tourist guides, fisheries, local transportation, stores, restaurants, tourists, and others, data were gathered through semi-structured and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, focus group discussion with the local government and experts, small and medium enterprises, and several tourists. Data were gathered from 27 participants, and all observations and interviews were conducted in North Sulawesi.

The secondary data were drawn from the government or the North Sulawesi Tourism Office and representatives from each private-sector association such as hotels, restaurants, tours & travel agencies, and Small Medium Enterprise as traditional food sellers. Secondary data were obtained from official documents, tourist vlogs, electronic newspapers, e-WOM, and statistics.

Coding and categorization were carried out on all verbatim interview transcriptions and secondary data from various documents. The analysis is also carried out directly to interpret the meaning and understanding of each stakeholder statement and testimony and presented in the interview excerpt. Various terms that arise related to the concept of "natural" and "cultural" are analyzed by grouping each tourism concept. "Natural" identities are determined by coding such as "beach", "beach party", "white sand", "clean beach", "boat", "speed-boat", "releasing turtles", "grilled fish", "boat races", "ornamental", and others. "Cultural" identities are determined by coding such as "Manado fashion show," "Manado language," "Manado culinary," "Manado customs," "Kulintang music," "Manado girl," "Tomohon party," or "Bunaken party."

Result and Discussion

Communicating Natural Identity

Like other islands in Indonesia, North Sulawesi's nature is captivating, from the coast to the mountains. The rich nature and agricultural life are being promoted as agro-tourism to attract travellers from worldwide. Agro-tourism means a tourist attraction consisting of a combination of plantation or agriculture with tourism. This sub-sector mainly relies on agricultural business as a tourist attraction packaged as a tourist destination for tourists. One of the areas that have agro-tourism potential in North Sulawesi Province is *Modoinding* District. It is known as a vegetable centre in Eastern Indonesia and produces high-quality vegetables and fruits. The Ministry of Agriculture's Director General of Horticulture, PrihastoSetyanto said (*Tribun*, 2019):

"The largest production center in the developing eastern part of Indonesia is in *Modoinding* District, South *Minahasa*. The types of grown vegetables consist of potato, carrots, leeks, pumpkins, tomatoes, shallots, and excellent quality garlic. *Modoinding* was recorded as the largest agro-tourism district in Sulawesi Island, the 9th largest in Indonesia, and the highest quality vegetable producer."

North Sulawesi has many diverse natural attractions, and there are also activities at each natural tourist spot. Famous for the beauty of marine tourism, such as *Bunaken*, which has been worldwide. One of the Super Priority Destinations is *Likupang*. The potential that exists in *Likupang* is the beach, sea, savanna, beaches with white sand, including Tanjung Pulisan, Pall Beach, and hills that are still green and beautiful which are called tropical paradise. Regarding the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) budget plan, the *Likupang* development requires cross-ministerial of the Indonesian government to pursue the goals. The Minister of Tourism of Republic of Indonesia, Arief Yahya (2019) said:

"Encouraging the acceleration of the development of tourist attractions and basic utilities in *Likupang*, North *Minahasa*, North Sulawesi as an SEZ, which was targeted for completion in 2020. *Likupang* must achieve quick wins in the field of destinations, including the widening of Girian infrastructure in *Likupang* and development of natural Wallace Conservation attractions."

The natural beauty of North Sulawesi is an identity that is built and maintained to be communicated throughout the world (see Figure 1). After being designated as the "rising star" of Indonesian tourism, North Sulawesi Province developed its underwater potential. The number of visits in North Sulawesi has increased because North Sulawesi has held international events. This rising business was undoubtedly the result of all stakeholder communities' hard work in communicating the tourism aspects. Internal collaboration of community has successfully organized many international-class events. In this case, North Sulawesi's identity, which has outstanding tourism attractions, will be better known globally through digital campaigns. Head of the Maritime Tourism

Development Acceleration Team of the Ministry of Tourism, DwisuryoIndroyonoSoesilo (2019), said:

"Shining star has become the nickname for North Sulawesi in the world of tourism. An international event was held in Manado, such as several summits attended by six Presidents, the World Ocean Conference (WOC), which brought together 48 countries and Sail *Bunaken*, which won two world records, in the Guinness Book of Records. With the existence of the *Lion Air* charter flight to Manado, the rate of Chinese tourists visiting Indonesia increases every year."



Figure 1. Natural identity campaign of North Sulawesi on social media

Communicating Cultural Identity

The cultural dimension becomes an identity communicated in tourism campaigns on social media, both by individuals, hotels, restaurants, cafes, tours, travel agencies, and local government. As is natural, North Sulawesi is also very rich in culture, with a blend of East Asian, archipelagic communities, and a cross-cultural with Europe, primarily the Dutch and the Spanish. However, in communicating the destination, North Sulawesi always combines natural beauty and cultural wealth. Districts and cities in North Sulawesi organize cultural tourism festivals filled with cultural activities to introduce the extraordinary potentials of North Sulawesi.

Manado Fiesta

The Manado Fiesta is a series of cultural diversity activities, consisting of seven potential charms of Manado City tourist attractions (Fish & coral, Food, Fashion, Flying, Faith, Fair & Fantastic people). Having the meaning of celebrating the richness, diversity of arts, and culture of the city of Manado, the Manado Fiesta is considered as a creative expression for Manado city resident. The government officer said, "The Manado Fiesta provides a platform for collaboration and the opportunity to connect all city constituents to foster an attitude of tolerance for the values of tolerance."

Tomohon International Flower Festival

The *Tomohon* International Flower Festival has been held annually since 2008 as a cultural event. The Tomohon City holds a flower parade that passes through the protocol route, where vehicles, Bendi motorcade, and Cattle *Pedati* are decorated or modified with flowers, which are hereditary

assets owned by the citizens. The symbol as an identity of *Tomohon* people was the flower, as an image to promote *Tomohongirls'* beauty and the culture. Cultivating flowers has become a way of life in people's lives in general. The *Tomohon*major said:

"This activity aims to increase the flow of tourist visits, both domestic and foreign. The City of *Tomohon* and the Province of North Sulawesi and Indonesia will be increasingly recognized worldwide and become one of the main tourist destinations."

Enchanting Lembeh Strait Festival

*Lembeh*Strait is also a cultural event known as marine charm and one of the marine tourism destinations in *Bitung*, North Sulawesi. This festival was usually enlivened by competitions such as ornamental boats and a 10 km run, cultural arts performances, coral planting, and jet ski attractions. At several diving points and beautiful coral areas, diving is allowed. One of the super-priority destination SEZs is the *Bitung* area, with various facilities for tourists. It is home to nudibranchs, flamboyant squid, mimic octopus, all kinds of small fish, seahorses, squid, sea snails, crustaceans, and many other types. It has become a destination for underwater photography by astonished photographers. The city of *Bitung* is on the Pacific's gateway, making *Bitung* very strategic internationally.

"*Lembeh* Strait has tropical underwater life, with the most colorful and beautiful creatures. It becomes a destination for underwater photography. This strait is famous for its beautiful underwater wonders."

Bunaken Enchantment Festival

One of the annual agendas listed in the Calendar of Events (CoE) is the *Bunaken* Festival. *Bunaken* Marine Park is one of the most famous beautiful underwater park tourist destinations in Indonesia. The festival aims to maintain local tourism's sustainability and improve *Bunaken* Island's economic welfare. It was usually held in three different places: *Bunaken* Island, Manado Town Square, the boulevard and usually performed with various district/city cultural activities and attractions. This event was a colorful decorated traditional boat competition, fishing tournaments, cultural carnival competitions, *Kolintang* competitions, *Maengket* competitions, cooking fish with foreign tourists, and regional superior products exhibition, "The *Bunaken* Enchantment Festival intends to preserve aquatic natural resources, and cultural arts manifested through festivals." Cultural events initiated and presented to tourists are created based on the local North Sulawesi culture (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Cultural identity campaign of North Sulawesi on social media

Communicating by the Community

Healthy Travel Campaigns

The North Sulawesi tourism community understands the public's concern about the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the hotel industry message contents seek to offer healthy travel campaigns and educate the public for maintaining health. The hotel occupancy rate during a pandemic has completely decreased (Romagosa, 2020). In the meantime, the evidence we have is the closure of most of the world tourism destinations, which include small and large companies indirectly or directly associated with air transportation such as hotels, travel agencies, cruises, and cultural, recreational activities. The sales manager of Hotel Sutan Raja Manado said:

"With the existence of Covid-19, it has an impact on North Sulawesi tourism, especially during the pandemic, in which the hotel has experienced a lower rate, a decrease in its occupancy. However, Hotel Sutan Raja Manado always puts forward healthy travel campaigns in holding all events."

The hospitality industry, tour and travel, and destination networks have come together to voice the message of healthy travel campaigns. Hence, tourists have the confidence and awareness to follow proper health protocols. As a comparison, in various world tourist destinations, there has been a drastic decline. Many hotel owners, especially individual ones, have closed their hotels and converted their properties to survive amid the pandemic (Hao et al., 2020). The Sutan Raja Manado Hotel sales manager said, "This pandemic has impacted our hotel significantly, we were closed for three months without receiving guests, and all employees who were sent home were not allowed to come to the office".

Language in Intercultural Interactions

The local government conducts community empowerment or capacity building to improve communication skills in many languages such as English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and others. Intercultural interactions and transactions occur between visitors and communities so that mutual understanding between cultures can be achieved. Hotel staff makes gestures or non-verbal communication as their way of communicating. Procedural, behavioral and linguistic, non-verbal and verbal, direct and indirect actions are a combination of emerging hospitality languages (Blue & Harun, 2003). The sales manager of the Sutan Raja Manado hotel said:

"So far, hotel workers at Sutan Raja Manado can only speak English. However, hotel staff communicates with Chinese tourists with the assistance of tour-and-travel staff who can speak Mandarin. On the one hand, the Sutan Raja Manado hotel employees try to interact non-verbally with the tourists as a way of communication when their limited Chinese language skills are still lacking."

Culinary as Manado Food Culture

Food or culinary is the most crucial mainstay for visitors to North Sulawesi. Consumers who have the experience of enjoying the most delicious food in their lives would want to come back to Manado. Hotels, small restaurants, and cafes scattered in the North Sulawesi region serve cuisine. For example, the Sutan Raja hotel has culinary and trips-to-the-island packages offered to foreign tourists. However, most visitors already have tour packages or itineraries based on their tour-and-travel agencies. Sutan Raja Hotel usually offers tour packages and collaborate with many small and medium enterprises as destination communities. The sales manager said:

"Tourists, especially from China, fully book all hotels in Manado. Hotel Sutan Raja Manado once offered trip packages to Bunaken Island and dinner packages at affordable prices because they are fond of culinary delights. Sometimes the tour-and-travel division included a North Sulawesi travel package. The culinary visit points have been prepared with Manado specialties menu."

In traveling, it is compelling to try and buy traditional food or cakes. The home food industry community is strongly influenced by meeting tourist preferences. Besides, hospitality and positive feedbacks from satisfied customers after making purchases are essential (Keh et al., 2013). Citizen of Manado shows expressions of positive emotions, helpfulness, and physical attractiveness. Rombot (35-year-old), a traditional cake seller, said, "Judging from the reactions of the tourists, they were so happy and excited. Therefore, tourists love to ask questions about the cakes on display."

Panada is one of the traditional cakes typical of North Sulawesi. The foreign tourists' favorite is promoted through social media. Likewise with smoked and ready-to-pack skipjack tuna, Manado porridge, various types of other Manado specialties. In the social media campaign, everything is mentioned for customers to feel comfortable at home. The indicator that needs to be considered is the cleanliness of places, cakes, and how baking utensils are maintained to be clean and hygienic. Mandagi (29-years-old), a traditional cake business owner, said:

"Foreign tourists prefer to buy panada cakes; panada cakes are among the legendary typical cakes from North Sulawesi. The shape and contents are soft fried bread and an attractive color containing skipjack tuna, which is also one of the popular processed fish in North Sulawesi."

In marketing this traditional cake home industry business, the community uses conventional media to approach the covered local market directly. It has been implemented for a long time and helps this traditional cake business attract customers and survive (Madondo et al., 2019). However, the tourism destination community use online digital media such as Instagram, YouTube, blog, and Facebook to attract tourists.

For tourists, the place to enjoy culinary delights is at high-priced restaurants in hotels where they stay and in small seafood restaurants widely scattered in the city of Manado. Tourists want fresh and healthy culinary and fresh fish caught from the sea. The key was to get a quality fresh fish supply source. Usually, the restaurant and a reseller are the sources of its fish supply. With its long-standing, this restaurant proves its quality, and nobody would doubt the food. The following is a passage from the restaurant owner interview:

"There are two types of fish supply sources, from fish resellers and cultivating fish rearing. Due to waiting for fish harvesting, it would take quite a long time. This grilled fish business is well known because it has been around for 11 years. The quality of the fish is always fresh, and it is the best for the customer. To be more specific, the fish is always taken from the lake, or it is still alive when a customer orders, and then the fish will be prepared for cooking."

Communicating Identity in Fashion

Dress or fashion is a form of nonverbal communication for a person or community regarding their cultural identity background. All attributes in the dress that are worn are expressions and communication between a person and another. The typical Manado or North Sulawesi dress has become the region's official identity to other communities and global citizens. The city of Manado

shows diversity, cultural beauty, tolerance, fashion, culinary delights, comfort, and safety to be integrated and exhibited through fashion parades seen by visitors regularly.

The description of typical Manado clothes is reflected in the clothes and pants. It is taken from Minahasa traditional clothes which consist of several accessories, motifs, and patterns from other regions such as Gorontalo, Bantik, Borgo, Sangihe Talaud, and BolaangMongondow as symbols of diversity and regions' multiculturalism. These sub-ethnic elements are combined for a harmonious performance and serve as a cultural symbol with modern nuance.

Social media campaign featuring Manado dress communicates culture as community identity. The Manado dress features four different styles that are designed based on their purpose and function, namely, the development style for modern variations with silver designs, elegant styles with gold designs, simple styles worn by the public with red designs, and standard styles for the North Sulawesi community with blue designs. Some foreign and domestic tourists try to wear Manado clothes when they tour the city and visit agro-tourism destinations. Tourists also try to wear a Manado dress when watching the Manado Fiesta parade. Jisun (27-years-old), a tourist from South Korea, said: "I like wearing Manado clothes because besides liking Manado cuisine, I feel closer to the culture of this tourist destination. I also bought some skipjack smoked fish to bring as souvenirs to my family and friends in Seoul."

Fashion festivals are routinely held in the Manado Fiesta with several diverse activities such as the Fisco (fish and coral) carnival and fashion show. The story behind the magnificent carnival dress was created by Stefi Rico Koraag, a carnival model and choreographer. Koraag, a Manado fashion designer, is always involved in the production process until the costumes are ready to be used for the parade. Cultural themes must appear in the design, such as fish and coral, as a symbolic parade of the tourists and the destination community harmony. Manado is symbolized as a common home for natives, indigenous, and tourists or immigrants. Fashion also lifts the underwater potential of Ocean Park through decorated vehicles. Koraag (39-years-old), a costume designer for the carnival parade on Instagram @manadofiestaofficial said, "I designed, sew, and assemble fashion as a culture in Manado fiesta. I pay attention to cultural symbols and predominantly use the theme of fish and coral or maritime as the identity of North Sulawesi in the Pacific Ocean community."

Community Official Campaigns

The government certainly has a significant duty and responsibility to carry out specific jobs, develop and control government affairs in the tourism sector. In this study, researchers conducted interviews with the North Sulawesi tourism office. Based on the interviews, the tourism department conducts hotel and restaurant reviews and controls. During the Covid-19 pandemic conditions, the tourism department urges the tourism sector stakeholders to implement hygiene, health, safety and environmental sustainability certifications in all hotels and restaurants to minimize the potential virus transmission. This step is also a strategy to rebuild the tourism sector's safety image during the pandemic. The first aspect is policies and supervision in restaurants or culinary tours related to food and beverage hygienic issues, including the service to customers. The following is the marketing head of the North Sulawesi Tourism Office response:

"Specifically, the supervision includes conducting periodical control one or two months, holding discussions, and direct visits to hotels and restaurants. There are service standards reviews from hotels and restaurants for technical matters. Second, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a national policy issued by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia specifically for hotels and restaurants to get a certification called the CHSE. CHSE stands for Cleanliness, Health,

Safety, and Environment Sustainability, so there is a third party referred to by the Ministry who conducts curation and verification for the certification."

Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME)s have an essential role in domestic economic activities where SMEs themselves employ 96.2 percent of the workforce and contribute more than 99.9 percent of all enterprises (Tambunan, 2011). The economy in each country is played by small to medium enterprises, which has a massive role, especially in Indonesia. Small-medium enterprises even emphasize their role in improving the structure of the country's economy. Cooperation between the government and small-medium enterprises can advance the enterprises in developing tourism objects and those around them. The relationship between tourism and small-medium enterprises runs linearly. If tourism advances simultaneously, small-medium enterprises will automatically increase, as the head of marketing of the North Sulawesi Department of Tourism said:

"Tourism is not an independent sector, tourism support consists of transportation, agriculture, trade, and accommodation. It will run linearly, if tourism increases, the small-medium enterprises will be lifted. Small Medium Enterprises are the forerunner of the creative economy."

North Sulawesi is one of Indonesia's provinces with beautiful natural beauty. Tour packages in North Sulawesi that has many exciting spots for foreign and local tourists are also offered to support the tourism sector. Regarding the North Sulawesi tour package initiated for tourists, the head of marketing of the North Sulawesi Department of Tourism explained:

"Technically, it is not the government that sells tourism. The tourism office's role is to prepare facilities and infrastructure at the destinations and making policies that support tourism. It is business operators who sell to local and foreign tourists."

The development of the internet in the era of digitalization is currently experiencing a significant increase. Various websites have their functions and features and are used for digital tourism campaigns. For the digital tourism marketing strategy, the Tourism Department uses the website and keeps making improvements and updates (Howison, Finger & Hauschka, 2014). Ease of navigation and complete functionality, including online booking, drive potential customers' online decision-making. Tourism operators must build awareness of effective online marketing in an increasingly online and connected world. The North Sulawesi Tourism Office is developing a self-made application, where the application informs local and foreign tourists on destinations, hotels, and restaurants in North Sulawesi. The head of marketing of the North Sulawesi Department of tourism said:

"Now the website has been launched and operates but requires the Tourism Office to update due to the pandemic. The Department has a digital tourism marketing strategy using the website, social media, and plans to create an application called Pasiarjo; this application makes the tourist destinations, hotels and restaurants be more easily accessed. The Pasiarjo application that the Tourism Office will make will cover features such as destinations, hotels, and restaurants and is currently in the development stage."

Social media channels are very influential in increasing tourism in an area, especially North Sulawesi Tourism. They are strategic tools that play a vital role in hospitality and tourism management, especially in business management, promotion, and research functions factors (Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013). The Tourism Office uses the Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram channels to promote the natural beauty of North Sulawesi to the world. The North Sulawesi Tourism Office believes that Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are the proper channels

to reach the audience, compared to Twitter in which fewer residents in North Sulawesi use. The head of marketing of the North Sulawesi Department of tourism explained:

“For now, the Tourism Office uses Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. These three social media are considered the most effective and prioritized. For Twitter, the audience or users at Manado are probably still lacking.”

Using social media promotes tourism destinations to attract potential local and foreign tourists. Governments and businesses would need professional marketing expertise through social media. The North Sulawesi Department of Tourism needs a social media specialist to manage the North Sulawesi tourism digital account. The head of the North Sulawesi Department of Tourism has appointed a group of people who would manage the tourism social media accounts and make them more attractive. To encourage marketing and visual skills in creating content from North Sulawesi, the Department of Tourism provides teams with technology training to improve marketing skills and make content-creators produce eye-catching content. The North Sulawesi Department of Tourism stated:

"The Tourism Office created a team, and the person in charge is the head of the office, but the admin team was formed to manage social media. The basic skill is already there. However, in terms of design, eye-catching visuals certainly require special skills. Therefore, the Tourism Office encourages the social media admin team to participate in training and technical lessons”.

MM Tour and Travel utilizes social media such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and WeChat for promotion and information. The management of MM Tour and Travel has several divisions; each division manager will create content, share promotions or information through MM Tour and Travel social media, and the employees share the post. The operational manager of MM tour and travel explained:

"Regarding social media, MM Tour and Travel has social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and WeChat. Each division has a manager; usually the manager will create content, share information or promotion via social media, and other staff will share the post".

Tourists' Engagement

Tourists or international YouTubers deliberately create content about North Sulawesi. In the video, word-of-mouth marketing is shown orally, in writing, and electronically to communicate YouTubers' reviews of North Sulawesi tourism relating to travel experiences. A Korean YouTuber with the account “Jisun Day” came to North Sulawesi for a vacation. The account has 2.7 million subscribers. There is a 15:46 long video content titled "A Crazy Vacation in Manado that Makes Us Do Not Want to Return to Korea" from the uploaded video with 924,000 views, 41,000 likes, and 39,000 viewers comments. The content is about Jisun's activities while in Manado. The creator made several positive statements that it was so hard to leave Manado. Tourist attractions make tourists feel at home for an extended stay. There are statements in the video such as, "the video creator will come back to Manado again for sure. Manado is always remembered."

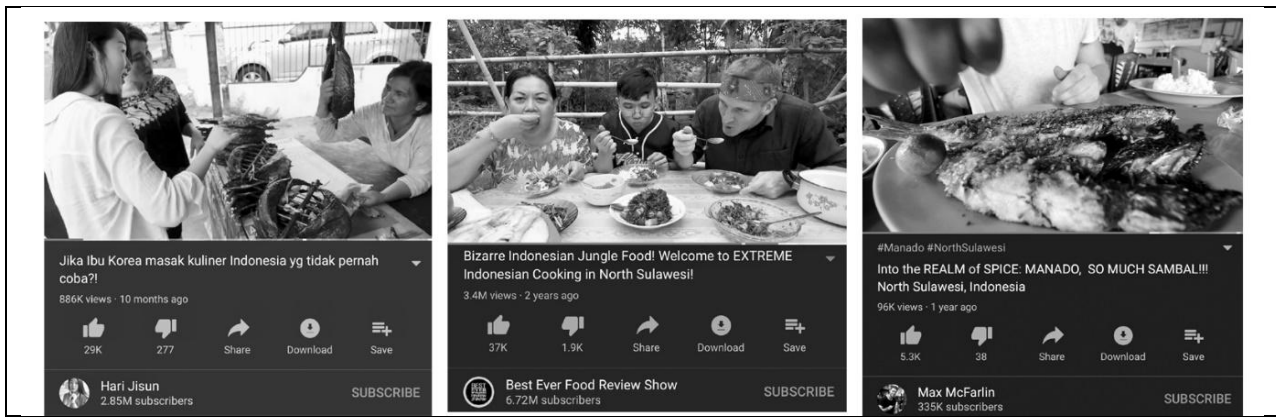


Figure 3. Tourists' engagement plays a role in communicating North Sulawesi's food culture to the world.

Social media such as YouTube are instrumental in sharing tourists' memorable experiences with friends and audiences worldwide (see Figure 3). Afterward, a YouTuber from the USA with the account "Max McFarlin" with 236,000 subscribers came to North Sulawesi for a vacation. Of the many videos uploaded by JMax, there is one video titled "Towards the real spice: Manado so much sambal." This video is 15:04 in length. The video has been viewed by 93,000 people, received 5,200 likes and got 1,000 comments. The scene from the content is about Max's activities while in Manado. While tasting typical Manado food, Max was taking culinary walk in Manado, North Sulawesi. This Youtuber looks very happy and enjoys the typical Manado food. Manado is also known for its delicious culinary destinations. In the video, Max said, "breakfast is enjoyable. This simple food, fresh fish, lots of fresh vegetables, lots of fresh chilies, looks simple but delicious. There is so much that can be explored here in Manado."

Conclusion

North Sulawesi with its captivating nature communicates its natural and cultural identity through conducting international events and digital campaigns. The cultural identity shows its natural beauty combined with its rich cultural wealth. The international events and cultural attractions festivals held successfully have proven North Sulawesi's cultural and natural richness. It received special awards for the natural beauty potential of North Sulawesi. (Ukaj, 2014) The accomplishment that has been done should refer to applying marketing concepts in the tourism sector by qualified personnel who know marketing elements and strategies.

In communicating by the North Sulawesi community, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected several private sectors in North Sulawesi significantly. To support healthy travel campaigns, the government has issued the national certification policy; namely, Cleanliness, Health, Safety, and Environment Sustainability, to facilitate hotels and restaurants establishing national certification amid the pandemic and periodically conduct reviews and visits related to service standards. Besides social media, digital applications have been used and are included in the Tourism Office plan, such as *the Pasiarjo application*, which has features such as destinations, hotels, and restaurants to promote tourism.

Language in intercultural interactions is adequate as long as the language used is English however when it comes to other languages such as Mandarin, hotels rely on the translator from tour-and-travel department and performs non-verbal communication. There is a tour-and-travel agency, such as MM Tour and Travel, that produces and utilizes digital application in English, but restaurants and traditional cake operators often experience difficulties communicating in English and foreign languages.

Culinary and fashion also represents the culture and identity of Manado. In optimizing social media use as digital communication marketing, hotels and tours-and-travel agencies have used social media to promote and share information. In contrast, traditional restaurants and cake sellers still use the conventional method, not social media.

In performing the community official campaign, SMEs and tourism run linearly; when tourism has increased, SMEs will also increase. While using the website and social media as marketing strategy and creating the application, the Tourism Office's role is to prepare facilities and infrastructure and making policies to support tourism—business operators sell tour packages in the form of products or services. The Office social media aims to create engaging, eye-catching, attractive design and engaging visual content.

Tourist engagements are contributing to the North Sulawesi tourism campaign. Based on the Tourist Vlog and e-WOM Analysis results, positive results are drawn from tourists who do vlogs and reviews on these videos. From the assessment of the video vlogs of foreign tourists from Korea and the USA, they gave positive reviews about the delicious culinary delights of North Sulawesi and the beautiful tourism of North Sulawesi. Social media such as Facebook is a platform for tourism campaigns in North Sulawesi, and the government's official Instagram account always updates the latest information (Kaur, 2017). The way businesses reach customers has changed because digital marketing has changed the industry. Quality web, email marketing, SEO, Presence on social media, content, mobile-friendly play a critical role, these points are how to be digitally successful in the tourism industry. However, there is still a lack of posts about tourism information destinations.

Assessment from the official YouTube account activity from the government has very little content about tourist destinations. Nonetheless, social media plays an essential role by implementing the right digital marketing strategy in the North Sulawesi tourism industry to effectively reach foreign and local tourists, especially in promotion, decision-making, and information retrieval about North Sulawesi tourism. Therefore, the government must further optimize and manage social media, which has a significant role as an extension of the North Sulawesi tourism campaign. Brand personality is a consideration when promoting destination awareness, creating a destination brand identity system, and a high-quality destination to increase its tourism value (Tsaur, Yen & Yan, 2016). This research can help local government and private sectors plan promotional activities to attract attention and reach potential tourists and build a strong, distinctive, memorable brand identity of North Sulawesi.

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