

TOURISM MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR TOURIST VILLAGES IN SUBANG REGENCY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the tourism marketing communication strategies implemented by tourism village managers in Subang Regency to increase tourist visits. With the rapid development of rural-based tourism, this study focuses on the effectiveness of communication channels, the promotional mix, and local community participation. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach. The results indicate that the current marketing communication strategy has only entered the initial digital transition phase through the use of Instagram and TikTok, but has not yet implemented the principles of Integrated Marketing Communication. Digital promotional activities remain sporadic without a content calendar, and neglect the functions of public relations and direct marketing, resulting in managers relying heavily on word-of-mouth. Marketing effectiveness is hampered by structural factors (blank spots and damaged road access) and cultural factors (low digital literacy among local managers). Furthermore, the dynamics of multi-stakeholder synergy (pentahelix) have not been harmonious due to sectoral egos between the government, academia, the private sector, and the media. This study reconstructs the need for the establishment of a regular communication coordination forum and a networking model to align the vision for sustainable regional tourism promotion.

Keywords: *Communication Strategy, Integrated Marketing Communication, Tourism Village, Pentahelix Synergy.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a strategic pillar of the national economic structure, significantly contributing to increasing local revenue (PAD) and poverty alleviation (Imron, 2015). In recent years, Indonesia's tourism policy has undergone a paradigm shift from mass tourism to sustainable tourism. One concrete manifestation of this concept is the development of tourist villages, a development model that integrates the potential of natural attractions, cultural uniqueness, and local wisdom into a unified ecosystem (Widiati & Permatasari, 2022). Through community-based tourism management, tourist villages serve not only as recreational destinations but also as vital instruments in promoting economic equality and preventing urbanization by creating new growth centers at the rural level (Afriza et al., 2020).

Subang Regency, West Java, occupies a highly strategic geographic and geopolitical position within the regional tourism constellation. The South Subang region, in particular, is blessed with mountainous topography, expansive tea plantations, and natural hot springs, which are key assets for developing tourist villages (Abidin et al., 2022). The Subang Regency Government has responded to this potential by formally designating dozens of villages as official tourist villages, such as Cisaat Village, Cirangkong Village, and Sari Bunihayu Tourism Village. The presence of these tourist villages is expected to capture the niche market of domestic tourists who are tired of the urban atmosphere and crave authentic experiences of pristine Sundanese villages (Arifudin, 2020).

However, the reality on the ground shows a wide gap between the number of designated tourist villages and the actual volume of tourist visits. The growth in the number of tourist villages in Subang Regency has not been matched by equitable popularity and stable numbers

of visits to each destination (Farida et al., 2023). Most tourist villages in Subang remain stuck in a stagnation phase, where they offer high-value tourism products but fail to attract a broad market. As a result, the economic contribution expected to be directly felt by local communities is not optimal, and the operational sustainability of these tourism villages is now being questioned (Primanty, 2023).

The root of this stagnation stems from the weak implementation of marketing communication strategies by managers at the grassroots level (Sutrisno et al., 2023). Marketing communication in the tourism context is not simply about selling a place or announcing the existence of a destination, but rather a strategic process for building an image (branding), conveying value (value delivery), and creating emotional bonds with potential tourists (Andrianti & Lailam, 2019). Many tourism village managers in Subang have not been able to formulate an integrated promotional mix, resulting in the unique local narrative (storytelling) that is the main selling point of tourism villages failing to reach the right market segment (Wijayanti et al., 2024).

This challenge is further complicated by the increasing digital penetration in the modern tourism industry era, or Tourism 4.0. Contemporary tourists, dominated by millennials and Gen Z, rely heavily on digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and TripAdvisor to inform their travel decisions (UGM, 2021). Meanwhile, the majority of tourism village managers, typically driven by Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), still face serious challenges related to limited digital literacy and the ability to produce persuasive creative content. Traditional, passive marketing models still dominate, distorting promotional messages and making villages less competitive in the digital space (Suharsono & Harrison, 2024).

Given these dynamics, an in-depth study of the formulation of tourism marketing communication strategies for tourism villages in Subang Regency is an urgent academic and practical need. This research aims to unravel communication barriers encountered in the field and map the most adaptive marketing communication channels and models to the sociological characteristics of local managers. Through a structured scientific approach, this research is expected to provide alternative, applicable solutions so that the vast potential of tourism villages in Subang does not simply become a dead asset but can instead transform into a sustainable economic force.

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at gaining an in-depth, contextual, and comprehensive understanding of the marketing communication strategies implemented in tourist villages in Subang Regency. The research locations were purposively selected within several active tourist villages in the Subang region, with a primary focus on local managers, such as the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) and the Subang Regency Tourism, Youth, and Sports Office (Disparpora), as key informants. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that data were obtained from parties with authority, understanding, and direct involvement in regional tourism promotion activities. This qualitative paradigm was chosen to allow researchers to explore communication barriers, the use of digital media, and the dynamics of multi-stakeholder collaboration in a natural setting without any manipulation of variables in the field.

The data collection technique in this study combined three primary methods to achieve high data validity: in-depth interviews, passive participant observation on digital platforms and the physical activities of managers, and documentation studies related to regional tourism regulations. To ensure the validity and accuracy of the collected data, researchers applied triangulation techniques, which include source triangulation (comparing data from managers, government, and tourists) and method triangulation (matching interview results with facts in the field and official documents). Furthermore, the collected data were analyzed interactively

using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three simultaneous systematic stages: data reduction to sort out relevant information, data presentation (data display) in the form of logical narratives and matrices, and drawing conclusions or final verification to formulate the most effective marketing communication strategy model for tourist villages in Subang Regency.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Formulation and Implementation of a Contemporary Marketing Communications Mix in Tourism Villages in Subang Regency

Based on field research, digital observations, and in-depth interviews with managers of Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) and the Subang Regency Tourism, Youth, and Sports Office (Disparpora), it was found that the current marketing communications strategy is still in a transitional phase. Tourism village managers in Subang Regency are attempting to shift from conventional marketing paradigms to more modern and interactive communication patterns. This transition is driven by market demands for easy access to information related to rural-based tourism destinations. However, in practice, this strategy formulation is not yet fully developed and is still implemented partially in each village.

Efforts to build brand awareness in Subang Regency currently rely on the use of social media platforms, with a primary focus on Instagram and TikTok. These two platforms were chosen based on the characteristics of modern audiences who are highly responsive to visual stimulation. Tourism village managers utilize features such as Instagram Reels and TikTok FYP (For Your Page) to showcase the natural aesthetic appeal of South Subang. The content produced generally explores the beauty of mountainous landscapes, the green expanses of tea plantations, and the pristine clarity of natural waterfalls. Through engaging visualizations, managers strive to create a strong first impression for potential tourists.

Beyond natural beauty, marketing communication messages in several Subang tourist villages have begun to incorporate cultural and educational aspects through local narrative techniques (storytelling). Managers are no longer simply selling the physical beauty of the destination but are also increasingly packaging the experiences of local residents' daily activities as high-value tourism products. Content on Sundanese cultural traditions, handicraft production processes, and even agricultural education or plantation agrotourism has been regularly produced. This narrative approach is designed to engage potential visitors emotionally, enabling them to perceive the added value and uniqueness that distinguishes Subang tourist villages from other destinations.

This casual and interactive short video content format has proven highly effective in attracting the attention of contemporary market segments, particularly millennials and Gen Z. This demographic group is experience seekers who actively search for weekend getaways through their devices. The metropolitan areas surrounding Subang, such as the Bandung metropolitan area and Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek), are the primary target markets successfully reached by this social media algorithm. For these urban communities, Subang's pristine and relatively close rural atmosphere offers an ideal escape from the stress of work routines and the hustle and bustle of the big city.

Although social media utilization has shown a positive trend, theoretical analysis indicates that the implementation of this communication mix does not yet meet the principles of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). The IMC concept requires alignment and consistency of messages across all communication channels to build a solid brand image. In tourist villages in Subang Regency, digital promotional activities are still carried out independently and are reactive. Digital campaigns are often only intensively conducted around long holiday seasons or during certain cultural festivals, then suddenly become inactive on weekdays.

The fundamental weakness in the execution of this digital promotion stems from the lack of a structured content calendar by local managers. Most social media accounts in Subang tourism villages are managed without a consistent posting schedule, in-depth hashtag research, or a clear audience segmentation strategy. Content is produced spontaneously, depending on the availability of time and random documentation from managers in the field. As a result of this unplanned work pattern, social media algorithms cannot function optimally to boost account rankings, resulting in a decline in the organic reach of these digital promotions.

The imbalance in the promotional mix is further glaringly apparent in the lack of professional public relations management by the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis). The role of public relations in tourism is crucial for building a long-term reputation, managing public opinion, and addressing tourist complaints to maintain a positive destination image. In Subang Regency, this public relations function is often overlooked and considered merely part of regular correspondence administration. Managers lack the capacity to issue high-value press releases to mainstream media or manage information crises when negative issues arise regarding tourism services or facilities.

In addition to public relations, direct marketing and personal marketing elements are also observed to be minimal in the marketing communications structure of tourist villages in Subang. Managers have not utilized tourist visit databases (database marketing) to build post-visit communications, such as sending periodic promotional catalogs or thank-you messages via email or instant messaging apps. Relationships with tourists tend to be lost once they leave the tourist village area. Maintaining ongoing communication with former tourists is the most efficient direct marketing strategy for encouraging repeat visits and customer loyalty.

Due to the weak management of these modern communication channels, the majority of tourist villages in Subang Regency still rely heavily on traditional word-of-mouth communication. Information about the existence and attractions of tourist villages is spread primarily through word-of-mouth recommendations among previous tourists or through local community networks. While this traditional communication model commands a high level of trustworthiness among consumers, its reach is very limited geographically and requires a relatively long time to expand market share.

This heavy reliance on traditional word-of-mouth marketing methods creates a new problem: slow market penetration outside West Java. Tourist villages in Subang struggle to compete with similar destinations in Yogyakarta, Bali, or Malang, which already have national-scale integrated marketing communications systems. The limited scope of information dissemination makes daily visitor numbers fluctuating and uncertain. This directly impacts the economic uncertainty of local businesses, such as homestay owners, tour guides, and local culinary vendors.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis in this study found that information distortion often occurs due to a lack of message alignment across communication channels. Information regarding entrance ticket prices, tour packages, accommodation facilities, and operating hours often differs between what is listed on social media and official government websites and the reality encountered by tourists upon arrival. This data mismatch triggers visitor disappointment and lowers their satisfaction levels. In the tourism industry, a mismatch between expectations and reality is a fatal failure in the marketing communications process that can instantly damage a destination's reputation.

This problem is exacerbated by the failure of managers to emphasize the uniqueness or product differentiation between one tourist village and another in the Subang region. When one village successfully develops a fruit-picking agrotourism or cultural education concept, neighboring villages tend to imitate the exact same concept without making creative modifications (a copycat phenomenon). As a result, market cannibalism occurs within Subang Regency itself, with villages competing for the same market niche. Communication messages

delivered to the public become uniform and monotonous, making it difficult for potential tourists to grasp the unique identity of each tourist village.

Theoretically, this failure to differentiate indicates that tourist village managers lack a strong understanding of the concept of brand positioning in the minds of consumers. An effective marketing communications strategy should establish a unique destination identity so that the public immediately recalls the area's name. For example, one village should be specifically known as "Anyaman Educational Tourism Village," while another village is known as "Nature Adventure Tourism Village." Without this refined identity, promotional messages disseminated in the public space will simply be information noise that is quickly forgotten by potential consumers.

2. Communication Barriers and the Dynamics of Multi-Party Synergy (Pentahelix) in Regional Tourism Marketing

An analysis of the effectiveness of tourism marketing communication channels in Subang Regency reveals the existence of various interconnected, multidimensional barriers. These barriers can be broadly classified into two main categories: structural barriers related to physical infrastructure and technology, and cultural barriers rooted in the socio-economic characteristics of local communities. These two categories of barriers operate simultaneously in the field, creating a multiplier effect that slows the acceleration of destination promotion. As a result, well-designed marketing messages often experience distortion, delays, or even fail to reach their intended target audiences.

The most visible structural barrier in Subang Regency, particularly in the hilly South Subang region, is limited digital infrastructure and telecommunications networks. Several prime tourist village destinations are still categorized as buffer zones with poor signal (blank spots). The geographical conditions, dominated by mountainous and valley topography, pose a unique technical challenge for cellular operators in expanding stable internet network coverage. These connectivity issues directly cut off real-time communication between village managers and potential tourists who need quick confirmation.

The impact of these technical barriers is significant for digital marketing operations, which require constant data updates. Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) managers often struggle to upload promotional content for tour packages, respond to consumer inquiries via social media, or update the availability of accommodations (homestays). This delayed response phenomenon is a significant disadvantage in the modern tourism industry, which places a high value on speed of interaction. Potential tourists, accustomed to a fast-paced digital culture, tend to cancel their visits if their inquiries aren't answered within minutes.

In addition to internet network issues, structural barriers also manifest themselves in the limited physical infrastructure, including road accessibility to tourist villages. Several routes to destinations in the interior of Subang still experience damaged roads, poor lighting, and a lack of representative directional signage. From an integrated marketing communications perspective, physical elements such as road access and directional signs are part of environmental communication. The absence of clear directional signs not only hinders tourists' physical mobility but also sends a negative signal that the destination is not yet ready to receive professional visitors.

Meanwhile, the main stumbling block stemmed from the low level of digital literacy among Pokdarwis members and rural communities. The majority of tourism village managers in Subang Regency are farmers, plantation workers, or traditional micro-entrepreneurs who independently switched professions without formal education in tourism or communications. This limited background triggers resistance or technophobia in adopting modern marketing tools. Managers tend to feel comfortable with traditional face-to-face interaction patterns and perceive digital media operations as a complex additional workload.

The implications of this low digital literacy are evident in the inability of managers to operate more complex digital marketing analysis tools. Tourism village managers in Subang are generally unfamiliar with, let alone utilize, important features such as Google Trends Analysis, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), or paid digital advertising (Instagram/Facebook Ads). This lack of technical skills limits their digital marketing strategies to posting random photos without a relevant keyword strategy. As a result, the official websites and social media accounts of these tourism villages sink to the back pages of search engines and lose out to algorithmic competition.

This cultural barrier is exacerbated by limited business management and interpersonal communication skills that meet hospitality standards. Some local managers still struggle to differentiate between casual, everyday communication patterns and professional and persuasive customer service communication. Language barriers, both standard Indonesian and foreign languages like English, also limit managers' flexibility when welcoming tourists from outside the region or abroad. This weakness in assertive communication often triggers sociological misunderstandings between urban tourists' expectations of comfort and the reality of the services offered by local communities.

Given the complexity of these structural and cultural barriers, resolving tourism marketing issues in Subang cannot be solely the responsibility of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis). It requires the concrete implementation of a multi-stakeholder synergy concept known as the Pentahelix model, which integrates the roles of government, academics, the private sector, the mass media, and the community. However, observations indicate that the dynamics of Pentahelix collaboration within the Subang Regency tourism ecosystem are currently not functioning harmoniously. The cooperative relationships between these stakeholders remain transactional, partial, and not oriented towards long-term strategic partnerships.

Government actors, through the Subang Regency Tourism, Youth, and Sports Office (Disparpora), are perceived to be trapped in a bureaucratic approach that relies on superficial formalities. Local government work programs tend to focus more on ceremonial activities such as the inauguration of new tourist villages, the provision of instant physical assistance, or the provision of one-off promotional training without ongoing monitoring and evaluation. After the legal status of tourist villages is ratified, the government often leaves local managers to fend for themselves without providing them with tactical marketing strategies after the designation. This disconnected approach has given rise to the phenomenon of "nameplate tourist villages," which exist administratively but are practically dead in terms of operational visits.

On the other hand, the involvement of academic institutions or universities in providing tourism assistance in Subang also leaves critical notes. Community service programs conducted by lecturers and students are often designed top-down without conducting in-depth needs assessments with the local community. Academics often bring overly complex modern marketing theories without considering the limited digital literacy of Pokdarwis members in the field. When the service program ends, universities often immediately withdraw without leaving behind an independent legacy system, resulting in village managers reverting to traditional, passive marketing patterns.

The role of the private sector and tourism business communities, such as travel agents and hotels in Subang, has also been observed as not being well integrated into the supply chain of tourist villages. The private sector still views tourist villages in Subang as potential competitors that could erode their market share, rather than as mutually beneficial collaborative partners (symbiotic). Combined tour packages that deliberately direct hotel guests in downtown Subang to take day trips to surrounding tourist villages are rare. This lack of distribution

networks leaves the tourist village market isolated from the mainstream tourism business ecosystem.

Meanwhile, the contribution of the mass media, one of the main pillars of the Pentahelix system in disseminating tourism information, is also deemed suboptimal. Local media in Subang Regency tend to be more interested in producing news about practical politics, crime, or conflicts over governance rather than providing dedicated space to promote the potential of tourist villages for free. Coverage of tourist villages typically only appears during specific incidents or major holiday celebrations, thus diminishing the media's role as an accelerator of public opinion formation and a positive image of the tourism area. Tourism village managers also lack sufficient budgetary resources to pay for commercial advertising space in mainstream media.

This weak multi-stakeholder synergy ultimately results in the absence of a regular communication coordination forum involving all Pentahelix actors under the supervision of the Subang regional government. Each sector operates independently, with its own sectoral egos and agendas, without any alignment of vision. The Tourism Office creates its own promotional roadmap, the private sector sells its own tour packages, while the Tourism Groups (Pokdarwis) struggle to manage their social media platforms despite the limitations on the ground. This overlapping and fragmented communication pattern has collectively led to Subang Regency's tourism marketing campaign losing its competitive edge at the regional level in West Java.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that tourism marketing communication strategies in tourist villages in Subang Regency are currently in a suboptimal transition phase. Although local managers have adapted by using social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to attract young tourists, their implementation does not yet meet the principles of Integrated Marketing Communication. Digital promotional activities continue to be sporadic without a clear content calendar plan. Furthermore, public relations and direct marketing functions are neglected, leaving managers heavily reliant on traditional word-of-mouth communication patterns that have very limited market reach. This failure to optimize promotions is exacerbated by interconnected structural and cultural barriers in the field. Structural barriers include the geographical conditions of South Subang, which trigger problems with limited internet access (blank spots) and damaged road access to tourist sites. Meanwhile, cultural barriers manifest themselves in low digital literacy and minimal service standards from local managers (Pokdarwis), who are predominantly based in agrarian communities. This problem is increasingly complex because the dynamics of multi-party synergy (pentahelix collaboration) between local governments, academics, the private sector, the media, and communities are still running independently without a continuous communication coordination forum to align the vision for regional promotion.

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