

Analysis of the Use of Social Media as a Promotional Tool to Attract Tourists in the Village of Belitar Seberang

M. Ricky Pratama¹, Heni Nopianti¹, Hajar G Pramudyasmono¹, Syaifullah¹

¹Department of Sociology, Faculty Social and Political Sciences, University Bengkulu, Indonesia



*Corresponding Author: M. Ricky Pratama

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Abstract

The study aims to analyze the use of social media as a promotional tool to attract tourists to visit Belitar Seberang Village, Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu. Researchers use a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques of interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Informants were selected through purposive sampling techniques with informant criteria, namely Seberang Village tourism managers, tourism village social media managers, and Seberang Village tour visitors. The data was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman technique. Then the results of the study were analyzed using Herbert Blumer Symbolic Interactionism Theory. The results showed that promotions were carried out on several social media platforms such as Instagram with the account name @desawisatabelitarseberang whose number of followers was 4,065 with several posts 216. Then Facebook Desa Wisata Belitar Seberang which has 835 followers, YouTube channel Desa Wisata Belitar Seberang with 223 subscribers, and Twitter @belirang which only has 4 followers. When viewed from the content uploaded, the number of posts per month is 4 to 5 content and with the number of likes that are also more than other platforms, reaching more than 25 likes per content. All data is taken as of October 16, 2023. Based on these data, it can be seen that Instagram is the platform with the most followers or followers. This means that Instagram is the most effective platform for promoting Sabrang Village tourism to attract tourists.

Introduction

Current technological developments in Indonesia have crossed the boundaries that were imagined in the past. This is especially visible in the use of the internet, which has become an important part of everyone's life in the digital era. The use of the internet as a communication medium allows people to connect anywhere, with their comments and thoughts able to be sent from any location. This means, people can share information faster and more efficiently via the internet (Fahrimal, 2018).

One of the most common benefits of using the internet is social media. Social media has emerged as a new way for people to interact online. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have allowed people to share and interact with each other, both locally and internationally. This is very helpful for promoting products and services anywhere in the world, providing opportunities for many users to obtain information and knowledge from various sources. Social media is also very helpful for maintaining contact with family and friends (Gunawan et al., 2021).

Based on data released by Data Portal (Kemp, 2023), the number of active social media users in Indonesia has now reached 167 people (60.4% of the total population) so that the dissemination of information on social media is very effective for use at this time. There are

three social media platforms that are most frequently used by Indonesian people today. The first is Whatsapp with the number of users amounting to 92.1% of the total population, in second place is the Instagram application with the number of users as much as 86.5% of the total population and in the top 3 there is the Facebook application with the number of users as much as 83.8% of the total population. From this data, the majority of people have used social media to help carry out their daily activities such as contacting friends and family, filling their free time, finding out what people are talking about, reading news or articles and many other positive activities.

With so many Indonesians, especially those using social media, the opportunity to provide information is increasingly effective. One of the benefits of using social media for community welfare is promoting tourist destinations in a village so that they can attract many tourists. The use and understanding of social media as a promotional tool in the world of tourism has the opportunity to showcase culture, traditions, activities, natural beauty, special foods and other tourism potential that other villages do not necessarily have. Social media offers many benefits, making social media the right tool to use to develop village tourism.

Social media can help to promote tourist destinations in a village. By utilizing social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube, then the promotion of tourist destinations in villages can be known more quickly to the wider community. By uploading interesting photos and videos about these tourist destinations, more and more people will be interested in visiting the tourist attractions in question.

Promoting tourist destinations through social media can bring great benefits to the welfare of village communities. Tourists who visit these destinations can generate income for people around the village. This income can have a positive impact on the village economy and village communities will be able to feel the benefits. Apart from that, promoting tourist villages through social media can also increase tourist visits to the village, resulting in increased income and overall community welfare (Nurjanah, 2018).

Belitar Seberang Tourism Village is one of the 50 best tourist villages in the 2022 Indonesian Tourism Village Award (ADWI). Belitar Seberang Tourism Village is located in Sindang Kelingi District, Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province. One of the advantages of the Belitar Seberang Village location is the many waterfalls which make the natural atmosphere beautiful and cool as well as several waterfalls in the surrounding area. Apart from that, there is a natural hot spring pool and clear river water in the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village. Both of these things help develop natural tourism in villages, which will have an impact on local economic growth and improve the quality of life of village residents (Profil Desa Belitar Seberang, 2022).

One of the main objects in the Belitar Seberang tourist village is Puspa Dewi Waterfall and Tri Sakti Waterfall. These two waterfalls have warm water and cold water, making them the only phenomenon that occurs in Indonesia. However, there are many other interesting tourist locations, such as Don Waterfall, Tedung Sakti Waterfall, Lubuk Tiga Waterfall, and Natural Hot Springs. The many benefits offered by the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village always attract many tourists, both local and foreign. Sports destinations such as canyoning, camping, and tubing on the river are also available on this tour.

Apart from that, the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village offers educational trips, namely the process of making palm sugar. Tourists can also experience life as a sugar palm farmer. Tourists who want to gain new experience as sugar palm farmers can take part in this activity. Tourists will be taught how to harvest, collect sap water, climb palm trees using bamboo, pass through valleys, pass through coffee plantations, and take shelter in palm palm houses. They

will also be taught how to process palm juice into palm sugar using traditional methods (Putra et al., 2023).

The existence of its tourism potential meant that Belitar Seberang Village was confirmed as a Belitar Seberang tourist village on September 13 2019 based on the Rejang Lebong Regent's decision Number 180.579.IX of 2019 concerning the Determination of Tourist Villages in Rejang Lebong district.

The Belitar Seberang tourist village also received an award as ADWI's 50 Best Tourist Villages 2022 held by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia and was the only tourist area in Bengkulu province visited by the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Sandiaga Uno (Then et al., 2021; Istanti, 2021; Deli et al., 2022).

With its uniqueness and unique advantages, the Belitar Seberang tourist village is very unfortunate if there are still many people who do not know information about this tourist destination. With the promotion carried out, it is hoped that it can attract regional tourists to visit and enjoy the beauty of the Belitar Seberang tourist attraction. With the ease of information entering social media, it will increase the possibility of getting more tourists so that the process of developing tourism potential can continue and the surrounding community can gain an impact from tourism activities. Maximizing the use of social media such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc. can be an effective step to promote tourist destinations in Belitar Seberang Village.

Methods

This research used qualitative research methods and was conducted in Belitar Seberang Village, Sindang Kelingi District, Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observation and documentation studies. Determining informants in this research used a purposive sampling technique with the criteria that the informants were managers of the Belitar Opposite tourist village, social media managers of the tourist village, and tourists who had visited the Opposite tourist village. The data obtained were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman technique. The research results were concluded using the theory of Symbolic Interactionism proposed by Blumer (2012).

The data analysis technique used is the qualitative data analysis technique by Miles and Huberman which consists of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The data reduction stage involves data collection, data reduction, and selection of relevant data. The data presentation stage involves presenting data in narrative, table, or diagram form. The conclusion drawing stage involves interpreting data and drawing conclusions. This technique is often used in qualitative research to analyze complex and in-depth data (Rijali, 2019).

According to Blumer (2012), Symbolic Interactionism theory is a sociological approach that emphasizes the importance of symbols in understanding social interaction. According to this theory, symbols provide meaning to reality and shape the way a person sees the world around them (Ritzer, 2016). In this research, the theory of Symbolic Interactionism functions as a framework to see how social media is used to promote tourism in Belitar Seberang Village.

Social media, as a means of communication, has become a place where symbols are used to create meaning and create an image of a tourist destination. Social actors, including local communities, tourists, and influencers, participate in effective processes that use visual and verbal symbols through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The Tourism Awareness Group can work together to create interesting stories about Belitar Seberang Village

as a tourist spot. Pictures, words and comments posted on social media are a symbolic representation of the attractiveness and uniqueness of Belitar Seberang Village.

Results and Discussion

The Belitar Seberang Tourism Village has been managed by the village government since 2019. Under the auspices of BUMDES (Village-Owned Enterprise) Belirang Belitar Seberang, one of the organizations operating in the tourism sector, namely Pokdarwis Eka Wana Belirang, is chaired by Hendri Hendika and has 19 members. All tourism activities, including development, cooperation, tourists and social media management, are the duties of the Pokdarwis. In the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village, only 4 of the 7 waterfalls in the village have been discovered, so the potential for improving the quality of the tourist destination continues. There is a lot of work that needs to be done currently, such as road repairs, building stairs, building accommodation and others.

From interviews with the manager, the history of tourism management in the Belitar Seberang village began in 2012. The village community was aware of the existence of the waterfall, making it a tourist attraction in their free time. At that time, this tourist attraction was only famous among local people around the area. Seeing this potential, Pokdarwis manages the tourism independently and promotes it through social media. In 2019, the village government approved the Pokdarwis as part of Bumdes so that the changes occurring in the village continued to increase with a lot of assistance from government and private agencies.

In 2020, Pokdarwis first started promoting its tourist destinations via the Instagram platform. This platform is used to showcase the beauty of tourism, both natural, artificial and cultural. This content is packaged attractively so that it can attract many tourists. Utilizing social media is an effective way to attract tourists. Pokdarwis Belitar Seberang Tourism Village also has different social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Having social media accounts as a tool to promote tourist destinations in Belitar Seberang village attracts many tourists both from the region and foreign tourists.

"...With this social media, it really helps us to promote the tourist destinations we have. Usually before the existence of this social media account, only 100 tourists visited per month. Since using social media and based on the latest tourist data in 2022 "The number of tourists visiting has increased by an average of 200 people per month..." said HH as chairman of Pokdarwis Eka Wana Belirang.

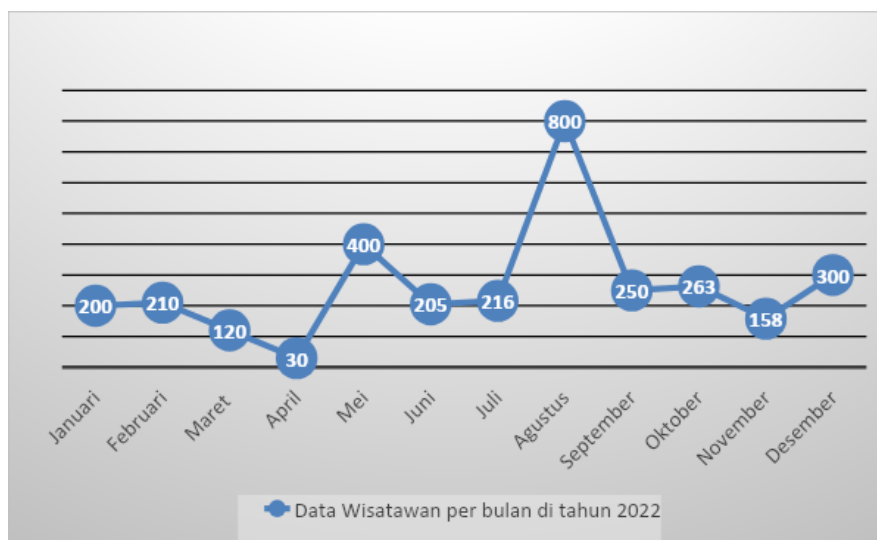


Figure 1. Belitar Seberang Tourist Statistics Data

Apart from these tourism activities, there are obstacles faced by Pokdarwis regarding the human resources they have, especially in the field of social media management. The factors causing Pokdarwis' human resources to be very lacking in tourism management and the use of social media are lack of training and limited access. Based on the results of the interview, Pokdarwis admitted that community resources (HR) were weak, especially in social media management, so that breakthroughs to promote tourism through social media experienced obstacles. Apart from that, lack of training and limited access are also factors causing the lack of tourism management and use of social media. To overcome this problem, currently, Pokdarwis continues to take part in training on how to use social media to attract more tourists.

"...Our obstacle when promoting via social media is that we have limited knowledge of how to use social media to promote our tourist village. Even though now many people know about our tourism and have gained many followers. Remembering that we started from zero, we learned from the beginning how to use social media. Being wise means that we have to continue to adapt and continue to learn so that people who see our social media are interested in visiting the tourist destinations that we have prepared..." said HH.

Pokdarwis Belitar Seberang creates content based on current trends. Like using the Instagram application, the content produced is usually in the form of reels, stories, or feeds (short videos), similarly with the Tiktok application the duration produced also adapts to trends that are currently viral on social media. The content creation process is also carried out both by tourism managers and in collaboration with external parties such as influencers, communities, and so on. Usually, tourism managers invite influencers in Bengkulu province to collaborate and invite them to promote tourism across Belitar. Regarding the use of hashtags and the selection of visual content, the manager will adjust to a point of view that is interesting to the audience. As said previously, follow whatever trends are currently viral in cyberspace. This content is packaged as attractively as possible to attract tourists to visit the tour.

From the results of interviews, managers usually do not have special provisions for assessing whether campaigns carried out on social media, including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, are successful or not. However, if there are big holidays such as Independence Day or Eid al-Fitr, they will speed up content creation to match and commemorate these big days. In one month, tourism managers can usually produce more than 4 pieces of content that are continuously updated. So it can be judged that they are up to date producing content that attracts the curiosity of potential tourists.

Efforts to promote village tourism are not only about the natural beauty that is owned, the richness of cultural values which are still preserved until now are also maintained and promoted via social media by the management. In the annual activity plan, the Belitar Seberang tourism manager has a special calendar to promote cultural values, specifically in September or November. This activity is called the "Bhumi Belirang Festival". This activity is a forum for local communities to showcase the rich culture of Belitar across the country. This activity includes a colossal dance performance that tells the history of the formation of the village of Belitar Seberang, "Market Arena" which sells local products with the concept of a market in the middle of a sugar palm plantation that offers a nostalgic atmosphere of the market in the 90s which is environmentally friendly and does not use plastic, the "bhuto" carnival which is defined as a figure who guards the village forest before it is occupied by the residents of the Belitar Seberang village, mountains of community produce which symbolizes the prosperity of the Belitar Seberang village which will be distributed to the community, guests and tourists, the Wahyu Teronggo Mudo Braided Horse Art Performance and the Bhumi cruise gloomy. This annual event involves various parties, including tourism managers, local communities,

arts and culture communities, artists, and government agencies. The Bhumi Belirang Festival will last for 2-3 days in Belitar Seberang village.

Of course, these activities have a big impact on people's lives. For example, the community is also invited to get involved in preserving local cultural values, the availability of new jobs that help the local community's economy, or the introduction of culture to the younger generation to perpetuate the preservation of natural and cultural tourism which is very numerous and interesting to be explored widely. With its special values, it is necessary to continue to adapt, be innovative, and be creative to continue producing content that attracts the attention of tourists which can be promoted via social media. Community empowerment in the form of using technology as a medium for transformation and information as well as training, especially related to visual content, must continue to be carried out for the sustainability of efforts to promote tourist destinations in the Belitar Seberang village.

Social media can be an effective means of promoting tourist villages (Prasetyo et al., 2023). There are several positive impacts of using social media as a promotional tool: (1) Increase reach: By using social media, information about tourist villages can reach more people, even abroad. This can increase the number of tourists interested in visiting the tourist village; (2) Increase interaction: social media allows tourists to interact with tourist village managers and other tourists. This can help in obtaining more complete information about tourist villages and also provide a more memorable experience for tourists; (3) Improving image: By promoting a tourist village through social media, it can help improve the image of the tourist village. This can help attract tourists to visit the tourist village.

Not only do they use social media to promote tourist villages, tourism itself often gets free reviews from tourists who have visited via their personal social media accounts. Researchers took several tourists to serve as sources. They were asked to provide their feedback and satisfaction after visiting the Belitar Seberang tourist village.

The first is Novisa Ahmad from Curup, he visited the Belitar Seberang Tourism village several months ago.

"... I know the information through social media and the news because I was visited by Minister Sandiaga Uno as minister of tourism who has designated the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village as the 100 best tourist village..."

"... The view itself is extraordinarily beautiful, it feels like heaven is right in front of your eyes. It would be a loss if people have never visited there..."

"...All the facilities there have been well arranged by the management, including the off-road car transportation provided as well as other supporting facilities..."

"...I feel very satisfied after seeing that there is a piece of heaven on this earth. We can bathe in the hot springs near the rest area, the tiredness of climbing to get to the waterfall will disappear after bathing in the hot spring pool..."

Next is Aiyu Agaara Lestari from Bengkulu City, who visited Belitar Seberang village some time ago. The natural charm is very pleasing to the eye, making me want to visit the village again someday.

"...Knew about this tour from social media, Instagram and Google. I've wanted to go there for a long time, but only got there a few days ago..."

"..... From all tourist activities, I feel satisfied. Complete facilities such as a prayer room and not only one toilet. The views are very beautiful and addictive so I will plan to go there again with my friends..."

Next is Muhammad Al Kahfi from South Sumatra.

"...I knew about this tour from a friend who lives there, but had previously seen the tour via Instagram..."

"...In my opinion, the tour is good and the views are beautiful, but road access to the waterfall is still lacking because the road is slippery. As a suggestion, tourism managers should pay more attention to road access..."

From the research results, it shows that the interesting content uploaded by Pokdarwis influences tourist attraction interest. Blumer (2012) theory of Symbolic Interactionism can be applied in this research, where the symbols contained in the content provide positive meaning, build perception, and increase the curiosity of potential tourists. The content uploaded by Pokdarwis can be considered as symbols that stimulate positive interpretation and create a memorable and engaging visual experience.

The importance of social media, especially Instagram, as the main source of information on tourist destinations reflects the concept of Symbolic Interactionism. Tourists via social media not only receive information, but they also interpret the symbols contained in each upload. The increase in the number of tourists following the adoption of social media as a promotional tool confirms that symbolic interactions are successful in building positive perceptions, sparking interest, and encouraging new tourist participation. Overall, the application of Blumer (2012) theory of Symbolic Interactionism provides a strong conceptual framework to explain the role of symbols in shaping perceptions and motivating tourists to visit the destination.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and their relationship to Blumer (2012) theory of Symbolic Interactionism, it can be concluded that potential tourists are influenced to visit the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village. Seeing the interesting content that is always uploaded by Pokdarwis makes tourists' curiosity increase. This can be seen from the discussion. On average, prospective tourists find out information about tourist destinations through social media, especially Instagram and known relatives. In terms of effectiveness, the use of social media as a promotional tool has been able to attract new tourists, resulting in an increase in the number of tourists before and after using social media. The efficient use of social media makes the tourism development process in Belitar Seberang Village run smoothly. The increase in visitors will also have an impact on the socio-economic impact of the community.

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