

HARNESSING DIGITAL MARKETING TO PROMOTE CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN INDONESIAN TOURISM

MUHAMMAD NASIR

Department of Management, Universitas Negeri Medan, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia 20221

*email corresponds: naseerrfr@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The surge in foreign tourists within culturally diverse countries, such as Indonesia, has brought attention to the occurrence of cultural conflicts between foreign travelers and locals. This issue often arises due to a lack of cross-cultural awareness and misinformation about the host country. Meanwhile, the utilization of digital marketing and platforms in the tourism sector has become increasingly prevalent and impactful. Despite its significance, very limited studies have explored the integration of cultural sensitivity into tourism digital marketing campaigns. This study aims to address this gap by examining the potential for promoting cultural sensitivity (CS) through digital marketing in tourism, particularly in Indonesia. Through a descriptive qualitative exploratory approach using secondary data, the study discussed the significance and impact of CS in tourism digital marketing. The results highlight the significance of CS in tourism development and suggest that it can be effectively promoted through a range of digital marketing tools and activities. This integration of CS in tourism digital marketing has the potential to enhance visitors' cultural understanding, foster positive experiences and relationships between visitors and locals, and contribute to sustainable tourism development. By incorporating CS into digital marketing strategies, it is anticipated that cultural conflicts can be minimized and stronger relationships between tourists and local populations can be nurtured.

Keywords: *Cultural sensitivity, Digital marketing, Foreign Tourists, Indonesia.*

ABSTRAK

Peningkatan jumlah turis asing di negara-negara dengan keberagaman budaya, seperti Indonesia, telah memunculkan perhatian dalam terjadinya konflik budaya antara wisatawan asing dan penduduk lokal. Masalah ini dapat terjadi akibat kurangnya kesadaran lintas budaya dan adanya miskomunikasi tentang negara yang dikunjungi. Di sisi lain, pemanfaatan pemasaran digital dalam sektor pariwisata semakin luas dan berdampak besar. Meskipun demikian, penelitian yang telah dilakukan untuk mengeksplorasi integrasi sensitivitas budaya dalam kampanye pemasaran digital pariwisata masih sangat minim. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi gap tersebut dengan mengkaji potensi promosi sensitivitas budaya melalui pemasaran digital dalam pariwisata, terutama di Indonesia. Melalui pendekatan eksploratif dengan metode kualitatif deskriptif menggunakan data sekunder, penelitian ini mendiskusikan signifikansi dan dampak dari promosi sensitivitas budaya (cultural sensitivity) melalui pemasaran digital pariwisata. Hasil penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya sensitivitas budaya dalam pengembangan pariwisata dan menunjukkan bahwa sensitivitas budaya dapat dipromosikan secara efektif melalui berbagai alat dan kegiatan pemasaran digital. Integrasi sensitivitas budaya dalam pemasaran digital pariwisata memiliki potensi untuk meningkatkan pemahaman budaya para pengunjung, membina pengalaman dan hubungan positif antara pengunjung dan penduduk lokal, serta berkontribusi pada pengembangan pariwisata yang berkelanjutan. Dengan mengintegrasikan unsur sensitivitas budaya dalam strategi pemasaran digital, diharapkan konflik budaya dapat diminimalisir dan hubungan yang lebih kuat antara wisatawan dan penduduk lokal dapat terjalin.

Kata Kunci: *Sensitivitas Budaya, Pemasaran digital, Wisatawan asing, Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, renowned for its captivating landscapes and diverse attractions, has attracted numerous foreign tourists due to its beautiful scenery and cultural richness. Recent data from March 2023 indicates a significant surge in foreign tourist arrivals as the country gradually reopened its economy following COVID-19 restrictions. In fact, the number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia has increased by an impressive 470.37 percent year-on-year, reaching 809.96 thousand (Trading Economics 2023; Badan Pusat Statistik 2023), demonstrating the growing enthusiasm among foreigners to visit the country.

Aside from the substantial impact of tourism industry on the nation's economy (Rasool et al. 2021; Liu 2022), it is crucial to highlight the significance of a nation's socio-cultural values to prospective visitors. Recognizing and appreciating these values is essential in preventing cross-cultural misunderstandings between foreign tourists and the local population, an aspect known as cultural sensitivity. In addition, according to United Nation of World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2020), tourism activities should be conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of the host regions and countries and in respect for their laws, practices and customs (article 4).

In popular Indonesian tourism destinations, such as Bali, conflicts between inbound tourists and the local population are not uncommon. These conflicts can be caused of the lack of information or awareness among foreign visitors regarding the local customs, traditions, and social norms. However, with the advent of tourism digitalization, there is an opportunity to bridge this gap by utilizing digital platforms and tourism digital marketing campaigns to promote cultural sensitivity.

While tourism publications and promotional materials often focus on the country's natural wonders, culinary, arts, and exhibitions, there is a growing need to incorporate a deeper understanding of Indonesian cultural diversity and religious traditions, particularly in the era of tourism digitalization. By leveraging digital marketing and promotion, (foreign) tourists can gain a greater appreciation for Indonesian cultural values, thus minimizing the occurrence of conflicts between visitors and locals.

Despite its significance, very limited studies have discussed cultural sensitivity in tourism industry (Beerli-Palacio and Martín-Santana 2018; Saari et al. 2020; Viken et al. 2021) and its' the integration into tourism digital marketing campaigns. This study aims to discuss the aforementioned issues and explore the intersection of promoting cultural values, tourism, and digitalization, particularly in Indonesia. By analyzing the potential of digital marketing campaigns in disseminating cultural information with the tourism context, this article sheds light on the necessity to promote cultural sensitivity in international tourism context. The study emphasizes the significance of incorporating digital platforms in marketing cultural values to foreign tourists, showcasing how harnessing the power of technology can bridge cultural gaps, promote cultural sensitivity, and enhance the overall tourism experience.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an exploratory research approach with a descriptive qualitative design (Kumar 2014; George 2023), focusing on the analysis of secondary data or literature review to discuss the impact of digital marketing in promoting cultural sensitivity in Indonesian tourism. This method was chosen due to the limited availability of research and in-depth studies on this subject, as well as to contribute new perspectives and enrich literature in this field.

The secondary data or literature review were collected from diverse sources, such as academic journals, reputable website articles and online newspapers. The selection of literature was based on its relevance to the research objectives and the credibility of the research conducted.

Next, I carefully analyzed the collected literature by examining each study. I looked for key arguments, findings, and evidence that directly relate to the impact of digital marketing on cultural sensitivity in Indonesian tourism. By identifying common themes, patterns, and connections across the literature, I synthesized the information to present a comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge and insights that support the objective of this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Cultural Sensitivity (CS) and its Impact on Tourism

Despite its significant contribution to economic growth and job opportunities, the advancement of tourism presents certain challenges, such as overcrowding, cultural issues, and the loss of authenticity that may result in disrupting the daily routines of the locals and impact negatively on their culture and heritage (European Commission). Additionally, the negative impacts of tourism have also drawn the attention of tourism researchers to explore alternatives (Viken et al. 2021, p.2). One of the most common cultural issues arises in tourism is the lack of cultural sensitivity among (foreign) tourists.

In the context of this study, cultural sensitivity (CS) or intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 2017) plays a pivotal role in minimizing or preventing cultural issues. It refers to the degree to which individuals involved in ecotourism activities strive to minimize negative impacts on the natural and cultural surroundings, particularly to promote intercultural understanding and respect, safeguard cultural heritage, empower local and indigenous communities, and honor the socio-cultural values of the host community (Donohoe 2011). Previous studies have shown that CS is closely associated with other concepts related to the preservation of local culture in tourism, including cultural carrying capacity, cultural sustainability, cultural representations, and cultural identity (Saari et al. 2020).

Respecting the local culture is crucial when visiting a new country. In other words, CS fosters an appreciation for one's own culture and other cultures among individuals, whether they are locals or foreigners, when visiting a particular place. (Marque and Engberg 2022). In this respect, the lack of information on the cultural aspects in a destination may lead to cultural violations by foreign tourists. In one of the most popular destinations in Indonesia, like Bali, there have been frequent reports concerning this issue, where some tourists were found to be in violation of local cultural norms, such as careless driving, disrespect toward sacred monuments, inappropriate attire, and other disrespectful behaviors (BBC News Indonesia 2018; Compton 2023; Milienos 2023). Such behavior not only affects the comfort of the locals in welcoming visitors but also tarnishes the reputation of the country among those who witness or experience the misbehavior of these visitors. Moreover, this perspective aligns with the recent update on the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf 2023) website addressing negative behaviors observed among some foreign tourists in Indonesia. Furthermore, the efforts to enhance cultural sensitivity among tourists play a crucial role in ecotourism (Donohoe 2011) and have a significant impact on tourism sustainable development.

Moreover, Article 4 of the Chapter of Ethical Principles in Tourism by UNWTO (2020) emphasizes the significance of cultural sensitivity towards the host countries. The article asserts the importance of tourists maintaining harmony with the locals through the promotion of mutual understanding and respect, while upholding ethical values, tolerance, and respect for the diverse religious, philosophical, and moral beliefs.

2. Promoting CS in Tourism Digital Marketing

Today, digital marketing or e-marketing is widely adopted to market products or services to reach a broader audience. It refers to the process and implementation of marketing by leveraging the latest technology, particularly the internet. Additionally, digital marketing has been widely implemented in tourism industry to communicate the destination effectively.

In general, culture consists of material and non-material aspects. In this regard, material culture refers to objects, including their characteristics, compositions, and the significance of these material aspects in relation to culture and social interaction (Woodward 2013). This encompasses various elements, such as places of worship, local souvenirs, clothing, monuments, and other tangible cultural artifacts. While non-material culture refers to the intangible representation of a society, such as religion, language, identity, and values. In CS context, this means that CS encompasses the mutual understanding and respect to those cultural aspects. In tourism marketing, these cultural elements can be classified as products or services if they are utilized to attract and satisfy the need or wants of tourists who wish to visit a destination (Chiriko 2021, p. 2-3). In this context, Chiriko (2021) also highlights the opportunity to offer the cultural resources as a tourism product in Sidama, Southern Ethiopia.

Thus, by leveraging digital marketing to reach a broader audience worldwide with creative and innovative medias, it is also most likely that incorporating the promotion of CS can be done effectively. Furthermore, this also enhance the opportunity to promote cultural tourism in Indonesia.

a. Leveraging User-Generated Content (UGC) and Digital Platforms

As a result of digital transformation, digitalization has been adopted to accelerate the progress of hospitality and tourism ecosystem to foster innovation (Troisi et al. 2023). For that reason, tourism marketing has adapted to introduce more digital campaigns by creating contents to promote tourism aspects to its audiences. In the context of marketing, content refers to the use of web pages, and dynamic rich-media content that facilitates interaction with diverse formats to effectively engage with the target audience. It encompasses various elements such as videos, podcasts, user-generated content, and interactive product selectors (Chaffey 2015, p. 331).

Meanwhile, with the recent growing popularity of social media platforms, particularly YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, it has become commonplace for people to seek destination information on these platforms, influencing their tourism intentions and considerations (Wang and Yan 2022). This trend has greatly enhanced travelers' awareness of destinations and facilitated tourism promotions through UGC, social media marketing (SMM), and travel influencers (Volkman, 2022). Consequently, UGC such as video blogs and Instagram posts serve as valuable sources of information and promotional tools for tourism content.

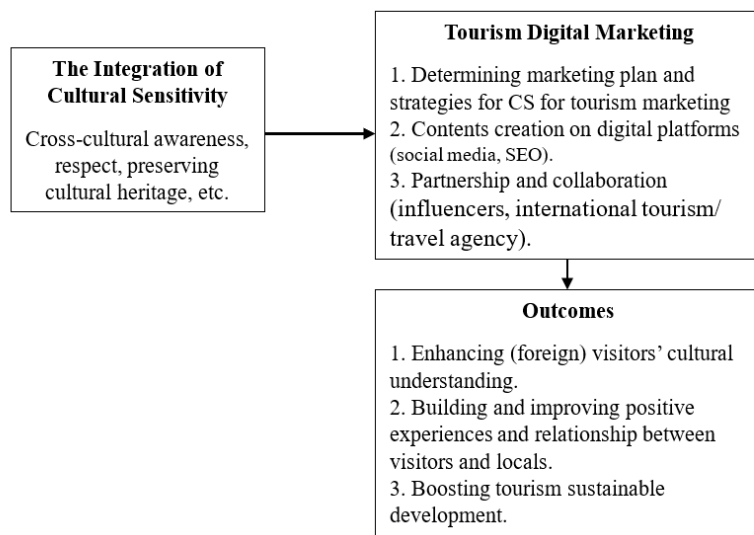
In addition, content creators have the opportunity to go beyond showcasing attractions and focus on highlighting cultural values, including local traditions, regulations, and religious practices that form an integral part of life in the country. This approach promotes intercultural exchange between locals and potential foreign visitors, fostering a deeper understanding of Indonesian culture and preventing misunderstandings.

b. The Need for Partnership and Collaboration

Collaboration in marketing or collaborative marketing has been widely implemented in tourism destination (Perkins et al. 2021). In general, it can be useful for a number of reasons, such as to enhance market presence, greater reach and engagement, greater networks, shared workload and experience, and achieve cost efficiency (Temptmarketing 2020). In the context of this study, incorporating CS information through tourism digital marketing can be accomplished not only by the Indonesian Government or the State Tourism Agency but also through various channels such as travel forums, local tour guides, and even collaboration with foreign vloggers or travel influencers. Also, Indonesian tourism agencies, organizations or content creators should incorporate more contents on Indonesian cultural diversities and norms to avoid cultural misunderstanding and build better mutual understandings between the foreign visitors and the locals. This will lead to greater reach and foster creativity in creating digital content, whether for intentional tourism marketing purposes or for sharing travel experiences.

To summarize, Figure 1 below presents a concise conceptual framework that outlines the necessity of integrating cultural sensitivity through digital marketing in the tourism industry, as discussed in this chapter.

Figure 1. Promoting Cultural Sensitivity via Digital Marketing in Tourism



CONCLUSION

This study concludes that cultural sensitivity (CS) is a crucial factor in supporting sustainable tourism development in a culturally diverse country, particularly in Indonesia. It emphasizes the potential to incorporate cultural sensitivity into tourism digital marketing activities. In addition, UNESCO (2021) asserts that understanding and promoting the local culture in tourism is essential in boosting cultural tourism. This can be achieved by promoting Indonesian cultural and religious diversity through specific contents or by integrating CS into general tourism digital marketing strategies. Furthermore, in the context of digital business in tourism, promoting culture can be achieved by leveraging various up-to-date digital platforms and channels, such as through the creation of mobile app services (Ammirato et al. 2021). By doing so, the aim is to minimize cultural conflicts and foster better relationships between tourists and local populations through digital marketing platforms and campaigns.

Finally, this study makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature by exploring the integration of CS in tourism digital marketing. However, to further explore this topic and gain a deeper understanding, future research should investigate the impact of incorporating CS in tourism digital marketing campaigns on the locals' appreciation and foreign tourists' knowledge when visiting different regions in Indonesia. Additionally, studying the effectiveness of tourism marketing strategies and programs implemented in this context would be valuable.

REFERENCE

- Ammirato S, Felicetti AM, Linzalone R. 2021. Digital business models in cultural tourism. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship Behavior and Research*. 28(1): 1940-1961. doi: 10.1108/IJEBr-01-2021-0070.
- BBC. *Perilaku Turis Serampangan di Indonesia akibat Kurang Informasi?*. [accessed 2018 Apr 26]. BBC News Indonesia. <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/trensosial-43895528>
- Beerli-Palacio A, Martín-Santana JD. 2018. Cultural sensitivity: an antecedent of the image gap of tourist destinations. *Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC*. 22(1):103–118. doi:10.1108/SJME-03-2018-002.
- Bennett MJ. 2017. Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In: *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*. Wiley. p. 1–10.
- BPS. 2023. Indonesia. *Kunjungan Wisatawan Mancanegara pada Maret 2023 tumbuh 470,37%...*; [accessed 2023 June 6]. <https://www.bps.go.id/pressrelease/2023/05/02/1977/kunjungan-wisatawan-mancanegara-pada-maret-2023-tumbuh-470-37-persen-bila-dibandingkan-bulan-yang-sama-pada-tahun-lalu-dan-jumlah-penumpang-angkutan-kereta-api-pada-maret-2023-naik-13-56-persen.html>
- Chaffey D. 2015. *Digital Business and E Commerce Management: Strategy, Implementation, and Practice*. 6th ed. Harlow, UK: Pearson.
- Compton, BN. 2023. 'It's Disgusting: Bali Locals are Fed Up with Bad Tourist. [accessed 2023 June 16]. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2023/04/11/bali-bad-tourists-deported/>
- Donohoe HM. 2011. Defining culturally sensitive ecotourism: a delphi consensus. *Current Issues in Tourism*. 14(1):27–45. doi:10.1080/13683500903440689.
- European Commission. *Culture and Creativity: Sustainable Cultural Tourism*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/cultural-heritage-in-eu-policies/sustainable-cultural-tourism>.

- George T. 2023 Jan 23. Exploratory Research: Definition, Guides, & Examples. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/exploratory-research/>.
- Kemenparekraf. 2023. Responding to Negative Behavior of Foreign Tourists, What should We Do? <https://kemenparekraf.go.id/en/articles/responding-to-negative-behavior-of-foreign-tourists-what-should-we-do>.
- Kumar R. 2014. Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners. 4th ed. Sage.
- Liu A. 2022. Impact of tourism on regional economic growth: a global value chain perspective. SSRN Electronic Journal. doi:10.2139/ssrn.4019859.
- Marques L, Engberg M. 2022. Introduction: cultural sensitivity in tourism encounters. In Engberg M, Björkroth P, Marques L. 2022. Creating cultural understanding through travel. CultSense Case Collection (pp. 5–10). Arnhem: ATLAS / CultSense Project.
- Milienos A. 2023. The end of the Bali bogan? Thousands of Aussies affected as the popular destination launches a crackdown on how tourists dress and behave. [accessed 2023 June 16]. Dailymail. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11828877/Bali-officials-launch-crackdown-tourists-dress-behave-billboard-campaign.html>.
- Perkins R, Catheryn K-L, Arcodia C. 2021. Collaboration in marketing regional tourism destinations: Constructing a business cluster formation framework through participatory action research. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*. 46: 347-359. doi: 10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.01.004
- Rasool H, Maqbool S, Tarique Md. 2021. The relationship between tourism and economic growth among BRICS countries: a panel cointegration analysis. *Future Business Journal*. 7(1). doi:10.1186/s43093-020-00048-3.
- Saari R, Höckert E, Lüthje M, Kugapi O, Mazzullo N. 2020. Cultural sensitivity in Sámi tourism: A systematic literature review in the Finnish context. *Matkailututkimus*. 16(1):93–110. doi:10.33351/mt.88061.
- Temptmarketing. 2020. Why is a collaborative marketing approach important for tourism and hospitality? [accessed 2023 July 10]. <https://temptmarketing.co.uk/why-is-a-collaborative-marketing-approach-important-for-tourism-and-hospitality/>
- Trading Economics. 2023. Indonesia Tourist Arrival Climb 276% YoY in April; [accessed 2023 June 6]. <https://tradingeconomics.com/indonesia/tourist-arrivals>
- Troisi O, Visvizi A, Grimaldi M. 2023. Digitalizing business models in hospitality ecosystems: toward data-driven innovation. *European Journal of Innovation Management*. 26(7): 242-277. doi: 10.1108/EJIM-09-2022-0540.
- UNESCO. 2021. Cutting Edge: Bringing cultural tourism back in the game. [accessed 2023 July 10]. www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-bringing-cultural-tourism-back-game
- Viken A, Höckert E, Grimwood BSR. 2021. Cultural sensitivity: Engaging difference in tourism. *Ann Tour Res*. 89:103223. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2021.103223.
- Volkman M. 2022. [Washington, DC (USA)]. How has Social Media Changed the Tourism Industry; [accessed 2023 June 16]. <http://www.solimarinternational.com/how-has-social-media-changed-the-tourism-industry/>
- Wang H, Yan J. 2022. Effects of social media tourism information quality on destination travel intention: Mediation effect of self-congruity and trust. *Front Psychol*. 13. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1049149.
- Woodward S. 2013. Material Culture. In: *Anthropology*. Oxford University Press.
- Yaekob Chiriko A. 2021. Marketing Cultural Resources as a Tourism Product. In: *Tourism*. IntechOpen.