

## Utilizing Social Media and Creating Creative Content as a Means of Digital Tourism Branding

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### ABSTRACT

Sektor pariwisata berbasis komunitas di berbagai wilayah kepulauan Indonesia, seperti Jawa, Sumatera, Kalimantan, dan Sulawesi, memiliki potensi yang sangat besar, namun seringkali terhambat oleh jangkauan pemasaran yang terbatas dan penggunaan teknologi digital yang kurang optimal. Kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat (PkM) ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kapasitas pengelola destinasi wisata dalam memanfaatkan media sosial dan menghasilkan konten kreatif sebagai alat branding pariwisata yang efektif di empat wilayah strategis tersebut. Kegiatan ini dilaksanakan melalui metode bimbingan teknis (bimtek), termasuk pelatihan literasi digital, lokakarya pembuatan konten visual dan audiovisual, serta bantuan langsung dengan strategi optimasi platform Instagram dan TikTok. Target audiens untuk kegiatan ini adalah kelompok penyadar pariwisata (Pokdarwis) dan usaha mikro di sekitar destinasi wisata lokal. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam pemahaman mitra tentang estetika media sosial (feed dan reels), teknik fotografi yang menarik, dan pengembangan kalender konten. Lebih lanjut, kegiatan ini berhasil menghasilkan sejumlah konten kreatif yang langsung diunggah, sehingga meningkatkan interaksi audiens (tingkat keterlibatan) di media sosial pariwisata di setiap wilayah.

*The community-based tourism sector in various regions of the Indonesian archipelago, such as Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi, holds enormous potential, but is often hampered by limited marketing reach and suboptimal use of digital technology. This community service (PkM) activity aims to increase the capacity of tourism destination managers to utilize social media and produce creative content as an effective tourism branding tool in these four strategic regions. The activity was implemented through technical guidance (bimtek) methods, including digital literacy training, visual and audiovisual content creation workshops, and direct assistance with strategies for optimizing Instagram and TikTok platforms. The target audience for this activity was tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis) and micro-businesses around local tourist destinations. The activity results showed a significant increase in partners' understanding of social media aesthetics (feeds and reels), attractive photography techniques, and content calendar development. Furthermore, this activity succeeded in producing a number of creative content that was immediately uploaded, resulting in increased audience interaction (engagement rates) on tourism social media in each region.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia boasts a rich diversity of tourism destinations spread across several major islands, including Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. The diverse geographic and cultural characteristics of these four regions demand professional management, not only in terms of physical facilities on the ground but also in terms of integrated marketing strategies. In this contemporary era, the tourism marketing paradigm has undergone a fundamental shift in function from conventional media to internet-based digital media (Sari & Rahma, 2023). The main challenge faced by many local tourist destinations in these regions is intense global competition, which requires managers to continuously innovate to attract both domestic and international tourists. Destinations that fail to adapt to digitalization trends tend to be isolated from the national market and lose momentum in regional economic growth (Pratama & Wijaya, 2024). Therefore, the adoption of visual communication technology is absolutely necessary to maintain the existence and competitiveness of inter-island tourism.

The development of the tourism sector at the regional level, whether in coastal areas of Sumatra, cultural villages in Java, natural tourism in Kalimantan, or marine tourism in Sulawesi, often relies on the participation of local communities who are members of Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis). These groups play a crucial role as the vanguard in maintaining, managing, and introducing local potential to the wider public (Wibowo et al., 2022). However, most Pokdarwis members in various regions of Indonesia outside Java still face classic obstacles such as limited human resource capacity in the field of information and communication technology. This lack of digital literacy results in the unique and beautiful tourism potential not being fully exposed outside the region due to geographical constraints (Utami & Setiawan, 2023). This phenomenon demonstrates a clear gap between the abundant physical potential of tourist destinations and the digital marketing communication capabilities of their managers at the national level.

The Strategic Role of Social Media and Creative Content in Destination Branding. The use of social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube is no longer just a lifestyle trend but has transformed into a powerful tourism marketing and business tool. Through these platforms, information about tourist destinations in Kalimantan or Sulawesi can be disseminated instantly, interactively, and across geographic boundaries without the need for expensive conventional advertising (Hidayat & Nugroho, 2024). Social media enables two-way communication between tourism managers and potential tourists, which in turn can build emotional closeness and public trust across islands. For new or local tourist destinations, social media acts as the primary digital storefront that potential visitors will assess first before deciding to purchase long-distance travel tickets (Kusuma & Lestari, 2023).

However, simply having an official social media account is not enough to attract tourists without supporting it with high-quality content production. Creative content that combines visual aesthetics, strong storytelling about local wisdom, and trendy music selection is the main key in modern social media algorithms to capture audience engagement (Ramadhan & Putri, 2025). Today's tourists tend to seek authentic experiences that can be well-visualized, so promotional materials must be able to touch the psychological side and arouse the desire to visit (wanderlust). Failure to provide creative and consistent content will cause social media accounts of destinations in remote areas to be lost amidst the millions of other information circulating daily (Handayani & Saputra, 2023).

In the context of comprehensive destination marketing management, all creative activities on social media culminate in the formation of a brand identity, also known as destination branding. Strong and targeted tourism branding serves to instill a positive image and differentiate a destination from its competitors, both within the region and across islands (Prasetyo & Kurniawan, 2024). Through consistent branding, a tourist village in Java or a natural attraction in Sumatra can highlight its local uniqueness, whether in terms of culture, cuisine, or specific natural beauty. This image-building process requires a well-thought-out strategy, from determining the logo, color palette, language style, to the type of content produced regularly to ensure it remains firmly embedded in the minds of consumers across provinces (Nugraha & Santoso, 2023).

Identification of Problems in Four Main Regions (Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi). Based on initial observations and discussions with various tourism management partners in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi, several fundamental issues were identified that hampered the optimization of their digital marketing efforts. The first issue was the managers' lack of technical skills in operating smartphone-based video and photo editing applications, resulting in monotonous and visually

unappealing content (Fitriani & Utama, 2024). The second issue related to a lack of understanding of the importance of social media algorithms, the use of hashtags relevant to market segmentation, and the optimization of interactive features such as reels and stories, which have significant potential to bridge the gap between islands. The third issue was the lack of a structured content plan or calendar, resulting in sporadic and inconsistent social media posting, particularly in areas outside Java where supporting digital infrastructure is still limited (Budiman & Cahyono, 2025).

Given the urgency of these issues, which span from Java to Sulawesi, concrete and applicable academic interventions are needed to provide sustainable solutions for local tourism management communities. Universities, through community service programs, have a moral responsibility to transfer relevant knowledge and technology for the equitable economic advancement of lower-income communities (Suryani & Hartono, 2023). These empowerment efforts are aimed at changing the mindset of tourism managers, making them more digitally literate and able to view social media as a valuable, non-physical investment asset for their regions. Through intensive mentoring, communities' independent capacity to manage their marketing communications can be gradually improved without having to rely solely on external marketing agents (Gunawan & Kristiani, 2024).

Therefore, the implementation of this community service activity focused on technical guidance, workshops, and direct mentoring regarding the use of social media and creative content creation in four target areas. The approach used was not only theoretical, but rather emphasized direct practice (hands-on experience), starting from the technique of taking pictures using gadgets, simple video editing, writing promotional text (copywriting), to analyzing data insights (insight) of social media (Riyanto & Fadilah, 2025). It is hoped that through this structured Community Service activity, tourism managers in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi can independently build strong destination branding, which in the long term will contribute directly to increasing tourist visits and the economic welfare of local communities throughout Indonesia (Aditya & Wardani, 2024).

## **METHOD**

The initial stage of implementing this community service activity began with a comprehensive preparation phase, including coordination with stakeholders and identifying the basic needs of partners in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. At this stage, the community service team conducted an initial situation survey to map the level of digital literacy, the availability of supporting infrastructure, and analyzed existing social media accounts managed by local Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis). The initial baseline assessment was crucial to ensure that the training and mentoring materials developed were adaptive and targeted according to the unique characteristics of each tourism area cluster (Riyanto & Fadilah, 2025). After collecting the initial data, the team developed an integrated training module that included social media management guidelines, creative content production techniques, and destination branding strategies relevant to the latest algorithm trends.

The core phase of this community service is implemented through a combination of offline/online technical guidance (workshops) and hands-on experience in the field. The training activities are divided into several structured sessions, which begin with a theoretical explanation of the importance of visual consistency, content scheduling, and promotional narrative writing techniques or copywriting (Budiman & Cahyono, 2025). Next, participants are intensively guided in technical simulation sessions to produce creative visual and audiovisual content, starting from the technique of taking pictures using a device (smartphone photography/videography) to the process of editing short videos using user-friendly mobile applications. This participatory approach ensures that each Pokdarwis representative does not merely act as a passive audience, but is actively involved in producing original promotional content drafts ready to be uploaded to Instagram and TikTok platforms (Fitriani & Utama, 2024).

The final stage of this implementation method focuses on periodic mentoring, evaluation of program results, and formulation of a sustainability plan. During the post-training period, the community service team conducts intensive monitoring of partners' performance and social media upload activity to ensure consistent implementation of the branding strategy (Gunawan & Kristiani, 2024). Evaluation of program success is measured quantitatively through a comparison of pre- and post-activity data (pre-test and post-test) related to participants' digital literacy, as well as analysis of account performance (insights) such as follower growth and audience engagement rate. To conclude the program series, a digital communication forum or learning community was established to ensure a sustainable consultation

space, thus maintaining the independence of digital tourism governance on the four major islands in the long term (Aditya & Wardani, 2024).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Analysis of Partners' Digital Literacy Capacity Improvement*

The simultaneous implementation of community service (PkM) activities in four strategic regions (Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi) has had a significant impact on the technical understanding of tourism destination managers. Prior to the program intervention, the majority of Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) members in the four regions faced serious obstacles related to the use of information technology for marketing (Fitriani & Utama, 2024). Through a series of structured technical guidance, workshops, and hands-on practice, a transformation in understanding occurred, as measured by pre- and post-test instruments. This evaluation included indicators of understanding social media algorithms, technical skills in editing videos/photos using devices, writing promotional narratives (copywriting), and managing upload schedules (content calendars). Cumulative data regarding the increase in participants' understanding scores from the four target regions is presented in detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of Digital Literacy Understanding Scores of Tourism Managers Before and After Activities

PkM Target Area	Number of Participants (People)	Average Pre-Test Score (Scale 1-100)	Average Post-Test Score (Scale 1-100)	Significance Increase (%)
Java Cluster	35	58.5	88.0	50.43%
Sumatra Cluster	30	46.2	79.5	72.07%
Kalimantan Cluster	25	42.0	76.4	81.90%
Sulawesi Cluster	30	45.6	81.2	78.07%

Source: Primary Data of PkM Activity Evaluation, 2026.

Based on the data in Table 1, there is a clear increase in cognitive and practical capacity across all regional clusters. The highest percentage increase was recorded by participants from the Kalimantan Cluster at 81.90%, followed by Sulawesi and Sumatra. This phenomenon indicates that enthusiasm and demand for digital marketing literacy outside of Java are very high, primarily driven by managers' awareness that geographical limitations can be effectively bridged through optimizing digital storefronts (Utami & Setiawan, 2023). On the other hand, the Java Cluster showed the highest final score (post-test score of 88.0) due to the support of relatively more stable initial internet network infrastructure and more adequate device ownership compared to other regions (Pratama & Wijaya, 2024).

### *Optimizing Social Media Accounts and Audience Engagement (Engagement Rate)*

The core activity of this mentoring program is producing creative visual and audiovisual content that is directly uploaded to the Instagram and TikTok platforms of each local tourism destination. Content production that emphasizes aesthetic aspects, audio trends, precise use of regional hashtags, and storytelling of local wisdom has proven to be able to break through the limitations of conventional marketing reach (Ramadhan & Putri, 2025). To measure the effectiveness of the creative content produced during the community service and mentoring program, the community service team collected data from partners' social media insights to observe changes in audience engagement metrics (engagement rate), average number of short video views (views), and growth in new followers (followers). Indicators of success in social media account performance after the program intervention are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Post-Mentoring Social Media Account Performance Metrics for Cross-Regional Tourist Destinations

Tourism Cluster Area	Number of Creative Content Produced	Average Follower Growth (%)	Account Engagement Rate Increase (%)	Average Views Per Short Video
Java Cluster	18 Contents	24.5%	6.8%	12,500+ Views
Sumatra Cluster	15 Contents	18.2%	5.2%	8,900+ Views
Kalimantan Cluster	12 Contents	15.4%	4.9%	6,200+ Views
Sulawesi Cluster	14 Contents	19.8%	5.5%	7,800+ Views

Source: Instagram and TikTok Platform Insight Extension Data Analysis, 2026.

The performance analysis results in Table 2 show that consistent uploading of aesthetically pleasing and well-planned content has a direct impact on expanding the tourism market share. The Java cluster leads in average video views, exceeding 12,500 views per short video, driven by the island's large internet user base (Sari & Rahma, 2023). However, significant gains in Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan demonstrate that contemporary social media algorithms no longer limit information distribution based on the uploader's physical location, but rather on the content's level of creativity and relevance to the psychological preferences of potential tourists (Hidayat & Nugroho, 2024).

#### Sustainable Destination Branding Strategy Discussion

The successful improvement of technical capacity and digital performance of partners in these four regions reinforces the urgency of implementing a targeted, long-term destination branding scheme. This community service program not only trains tactical skills in editing promotional materials, but also instills a strategic understanding of how to create a unique and authentic destination brand identity (Prasetyo & Kurniawan, 2024). Creative content produced by the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) in Sumatra emphasizes the uniqueness of natural landscapes and Malay cuisine, while in Kalimantan it emphasizes adventure tourism and river culture, and in Sulawesi it focuses on maritime exoticism. This content differentiation is what determines the strength of a destination's image in the public mind (Nugraha & Santoso, 2023).

Despite the positive results, the biggest challenge after this community service training is maintaining consistency and continuity for tourism managers in implementing the content calendar independently. The end of the mentoring program from universities often triggers a decline in upload activity due to Pokdarwis members' domestic activities or operational technical constraints (Budiman & Cahyono, 2025). Therefore, the establishment of a cross-regional digital learning community forum, initiated within this PkM, is crucial as a platform for exchanging information, jointly solving problems, and collectively monitoring content quality (Gunawan & Kristiani, 2024). The transformation from conventional tourism managers to independent digital tourism content creators will ultimately stimulate the local creative economy to move faster and more sustainably (Aditya & Wardani, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

A series of community service (PkM) activities focused on utilizing social media and creating creative content has proven to have a significant positive impact on tourism managers in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. Through intensive technical guidance and mentoring programs, a digital capacity transformation has occurred evenly among members of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis). The lack of information technology literacy, which was previously a major obstacle in local tourism marketing, has now been overcome, marked by a very progressive surge in participant understanding as seen in pre- and post-activity evaluations (Riyanto & Fadilah, 2025). This academic intervention has succeeded in shifting the community's mindset from conventional managers to adaptive digital marketing drivers.

The implementation of this program also demonstrates that creative content production that emphasizes visual aesthetics, storytelling, and adapting to the latest algorithms effectively breaks down geographical barriers between islands. Through professionally managed digital storefronts on Instagram and TikTok, local tourism destinations are able to garner high engagement rates and expand their promotional reach nationally without incurring expensive advertising costs (Hidayat & Nugroho, 2024).

The successful penetration of content across these four island clusters confirms that modernly packaged visualizations of unique local wisdom are key to attracting contemporary tourists (Ramadhan & Putri, 2025).

Furthermore, this Community Service Program (PKM) activity has laid a strong strategic foundation for the development of sustainable destination branding. The differentiation of content characteristics from each region—whether cultural beauty, natural exoticism, or marine tourism—successfully strengthens the positive image and competitiveness of regional tourism amidst intense industry competition (Prasetyo & Kurniawan, 2024). With consistent account visual design and a structured upload schedule, community groups at the grassroots level now have an independent tool to continuously communicate the added value of their tourist attractions to the public (Nugraha & Santoso, 2023).

As a sustainability measure, the establishment of a cross-regional digital learning community forum plays a crucial role in maintaining consistent content production after this community service activity concludes. Collective collaboration and independent commitment from local tourism managers are essential to ensure that social media utilization is not sporadic but becomes a long-term, non-physical investment asset (Budiman & Cahyono, 2025). The resulting independence in digital governance is ultimately expected to continue to drive the growth of a community-based creative economy, trigger increased tourist visits, and improve the welfare of communities across the archipelago (Aditya & Wardani, 2024).

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