

Utilizing Social Media for Ecotourism Branding Promotion in Tlahab Village: A Case Study of Wisata Alam Posong

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ABSTRACT: In the development of ecotourism, social media plays a strategic role in shaping destination branding, particularly in rural areas with limited access to conventional promotion channels. This study aims to analyze the utilization of social media in building the ecotourism brand of Tlahab Village, with a specific focus on Wisata Alam Posong. A mixed methods approach was employed, combining qualitative field observations and interviews with tourism managers, alongside a quantitative survey of preferences from 44 visitors. The results indicate that the current digital communication strategy remains passive and largely dependent on User Generated Content (UGC), with no structured content planning. Conversely, visitors expressed expectations for digital content that is visually engaging, consistent, informative, and reflective of local cultural values. A significant gap was identified between audience expectations and the current branding approach, exacerbated by limited human resources, a lack of digital literacy, and the absence of a strong visual identity for the destination. The study recommends the development of a localized content strategy to establish visual identity, the implementation of a content calendar, digital branding training for local managers, and the involvement of both local communities and tourists as co-creators of content. This research provides practical contributions to the management of social media based ecotourism branding and is expected to serve as a reference for sustainable ecotourism promotion strategies in other rural areas.

KEYWORDS : Ecotourism, Social Media, Destination Branding, Digital Promotion, Tlahab Village, Wisata Alam Posong.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism has become a key focus in global development, prioritizing environmental conservation and community empowerment rather than merely increasing tourist numbers. In this context, ecotourism has emerged as an alternative approach that emphasizes the importance of nature conservation, supports local communities, and provides education for tourists. Ecotourism contributes to environmental sustainability while also strengthening local economies through participatory models and empowering villages. This trend aligns with Indonesia's national strategy, as seen in initiatives like the Jejaring Desa Wisata (JADESTA) implemented by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, which highlights the importance of community involvement in managing nature and culture-based tourist destinations (Kemenparekraf, 2023).

The area with significant potential for developing ecotourism is Tlahab Village, Kledung, Temanggung. Located between Mount Sumbing and Mount Sindoro at an elevation of 1,200 meters above sea level, Tlahab Village boasts unique natural and cultural riches, including Wisata Alam Posong established in 2016, which offers panoramic views of seven mountain peaks, sunrise vistas, and agritourism potential from flagship commodities such as tobacco and coffee. Throughout 2024, Wisata Alam Posong has been visited by over 127.000 tourists, with an average daily visitor count of around 300 people, and can surge dramatically to 1,500 visitors per day during peak seasons, such as Eid al-Fitr or the end of the year. However, the ecotourism potential of Tlahab has not been fully optimized, and there is a lack of planned and sustainable social media promotion strategies to create a branding image for ecotourism in Tlahab Village.

In this digital age, social media has become the most effective and affordable channel for promoting tourism objectives and shaping the image of ecotourism destinations. Several studies have shown that social media platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok, and Facebook are not only used as communication tools but also influence public perception, expand the tourism market, and create tourism markets, and create tourism communities based on visual experiences and interactions. Research by Mauladi

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et al. (2024) indicates that social media has a positive and significant influence on the formation of ecotourism image. The image formed through social media directly contributes to increased public interest visiting the destination.

According to Bilderback (2024) and Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa (2021), social media plays a role in creating visual narratives that shape public perception. That makes social media an effective branding tool for ecotourism, as it can deliver an authentic and engaging visual experience. Narratives built through visual content, visitor reviews, and digital interactions create a stronger and more emotional image of the destination for potential tourists. The increasing number of social media users globally by 2025, based on DataReportal - Global Digital Insights, as of April 2025 reached 5,31 billion social media users worldwide, or equivalent to 64,7% of the total global population, making digital promotion strategies increasingly relevant, especially for rural ecotourism with limitations in conventional promotion. Unfortunately, the use of social media by local tourism stakeholders in Tlahab Village remains limited, both in terms of content quality, consistency, and brand storytelling. Currently, they still rely on the User-Generated Content approach.

Without a good promotional strategy, no matter how great the tourism potential is, it will be difficult for tourists to discover and visit. In this context, branding ecotourism becomes crucial, not only to highlight the uniqueness and local values of the village but also to establish a strong position amid competition from other tourist destinations. A strong brand can enhance tourist appeal, reinforce local identity, and drive economic growth for the community through increased visits, transactions, and collaboration with tourism industry stakeholders.

This study aims to analyze how social media can be strategically utilized to promote and enhance the ecotourism branding of Tlahab Village. It will examine the effectiveness of social media in showcasing the village's natural and cultural attractions, as well as its tourist activities. Additionally, the study will explore how appropriate digital communication strategies can create a positive image and sustainably attract tourists to the area.

This study is grounded in the concept of destination branding, which encompasses the development of visual identity, audience engagement, and social media theory as digital marketing tools. It highlights the importance of visual content, platform algorithms, and user interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Additionally, the research incorporates the community-based tourism (CBT) approach, where local communities play a vital role in the tourism sector's development, including management, promotion, and service provision.

Through this approach, it's hoped that this research can make a real contribution to developing relevant and contextual social media based promotional strategies for Tlahab Village. The findings are expected to benefit not only village officials and rural ecotourism stakeholders but also policymakers and academics focused on sustainable tourism development. Moreover, an effective digital branding strategy may inspire other tourism village to develop inclusive and creative promotional approaches that positively impact the well being of local communities,

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media and Theoretical Framework

Social media refers to a range of internet-based applications that allow for the creation and sharing of user-generated content through interactive and participatory methods (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). It facilitates social interaction among individuals and groups in a digital environment. In the context of ecotourism, social media can serve as a valuable tool for building a brand image and enhancing the brand positioning of an ecotourism destination amid the competitive nature of tourism on the environment. By leveraging various social media platforms, a positive perception of the destination's character and values can be established.

Several theories support the notion that social media can effectively function as a branding tool for ecotourism destinations. One such theory is the affordance theory, which emphasizes how the technological features of social media offer users opportunities (affordances) to engage in actions such as liking, sharing, commenting, and participating in digital narratives (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). This capability offers strategic opportunities for ecotourism managers to cultivate more engaging relationships with potential visitors. Additionally, Social Presence Theory emphasizes the importance of the social presence experienced by users during online communication, as reflected in visual imagery, emotional expressions, and followers interactions.

2.2 Ecotourism Branding

Ecotourism branding is an evolving concept that combines sustainable tourism principles with strategic marketing efforts aimed at promoting and protecting natural and cultural resources, and managing tourism resources (Topsakal, 2025). The name, logo, slogan, and visual representations of an ecotourism initiative serve as powerful symbols of identity. They not only create a strong first impression but also enhance visitor recall (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). When these elements can represent local values,

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sustainability, and authenticity through social media, they help create a cultural narrative that deepens the emotion between visitors and the ecotourism experience. This positive image fosters tourist loyalty, encouraging not only the intention to revisit but also a greater likelihood of recommending the destination to others (Leisen, 2001).

2.3. Rural Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a significant attraction for tourists, leveraging natural resources and local cultural wealth to promote sustainable economic and social development in local communities (Farrell, B.H. & Runyan, D., 1991). Its main goal is to preserve biodiversity and encourage the sustainable use of natural resources, ensuring that tourists benefit ecologically while also generating positive economic impacts. According to Weaver (2001), ecotourism is defined as natural-based travel that is economically, socially, and environmentally focused, providing tourists with opportunities to learn about the natural world. As such, sustainable tourism plays a crucial role in balancing the interest of environmental conservation, community empowerment, and economic growth in the tourism sector. The principles of ecotourism include: (i) optimum multiple use of the resources; (ii) maximum sustainable use; and (iii) conservation and development of natural resources (Mangrove Action Project, 2007).

However, developing ecotourism in rural areas presents various challenges, including limited human resources, low awareness among local communities, and inadequate infrastructure and accessibility. Rahman, et al (2020), identify waste management, safety in tourist areas, and a lack of community awareness regarding the potential of ecotourism as the primary obstacles to rural ecotourism development. Additionally, the rise of the digital era offers opportunities for tourism managers to use social media to promote ecotourism destinations. This can help shape public perception and increase audience reach through visual narratives that focus on nature and culture. Thus, social media can serve as a solution to the promotional limitations faced in rural ecotourism.

2.4. The Role of Social Media Marketing in Rural Ecotourism Branding

Social media has become one of the most effective strategies for strengthening the image of ecotourism destinations, especially in rural areas with limited promotional resources. Research by Thong et al. (2022) confirms that social media marketing has a positive impact on enhancing the competitiveness of ecotourism destinations by helping tourists understand real-time and interactive information about infrastructure, activities, and local uniqueness. Digital engagement granted through features such as likes, comments, and shares can expand promotional reach and help create an emotional connection between tourists and tourism managers (Grosso et al., 2024).

In addition to content strategies from tourism managers, User-Generated Content (UGC) play a strategic role in enhancing ecotourism branding, including reviews, photos, and videos from tourists, which is considered more credible as they involve users' direct experiences at the location in conveying visual narratives related to tourism (Aslam & Hussain, 2024). Content shared by other tourists on social media has proven to influence tourists' perceptions and expectations of an ecotourism destination (Narangajavana Kaosiri et al., 2019). UGC plays a role in validating the image of an ecotourism destination, as it can build trust among potential tourists through the experiences and recommendations shared by other tourists. Therefore, social media can serve as a collaborative branding tool by encouraging direct tourist engagement and fostering a sustainable destination image.

2.5 Community Involvement and Digital Readiness in Rural Ecotourism Branding

Community Involvement plays a vital role in rural ecotourism branding strategies. According to Weaver (2001), local communities serve not only as beneficiaries but also as co-creators of tourism experiences, which fosters active participation in preserving sustainable practices in ecotourism. On one hand, the development of digital technology requires local communities to adopt branding media to reach audiences and engage directly with tourists. Utilizing social media for promotion allows rural ecotourism to attract tourists with high digital literacy while also sharing narratives focused on local wisdom values. Therefore, the combination of active local community participation and digital readiness forms a strategic foundation for creating a destination branding image that preserves authenticity and supports sustainability.

2.6 Previous Research

Previous studies have demonstrated that social media plays a strategic role in promoting ecotourism branding. Kavaratzis (2004) emphasizes that destination branding should not only focus on names and logos but must also reflect the overall values of local culture through consistent narratives. The concept of Competitive Identity, introduced by Anholt (2007), asserts that a destination's image is formed through the interplay of governance, local culture, and strategic communication. With the advancement of digital technology, Buhalis and Law (2008) alongside Xiang and Gretzel (2010) show that social media can serve as a more interactive promotional platform connecting ecotourism with tourists

Research highlights a shift in tourist behavior patterns, which increasingly depend on user generated content (UGC) during the travel decision making process. According to Narangajavana Kaosiri et al. (2019), UGC - such as reviews, photos, and

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testimonials- holds significant credibility for potential tourists. This finding aligns with Thong et al. (2022), who state that social media marketing significantly enhances the competitiveness of ecotourism destinations, particularly in rural areas, by improving tourists' understanding of local infrastructure and potential. Conversely, Grosso et al. (2024) underline the importance of digital engagement in fostering an emotional connection between tourists and destinations.

Consequently, this study employs an ecotourism branding approach via social media, which is particularly relevant to the conditions in Tlahab Village, Posong Nature Tourism, where conventional promotion methods are limited. Topsakal (2025) introduces the concept of ecotourism branding as a blend of sustainability principles, environmental conservation, and visually appealing communication strategies. Collectively, these studies provide a strong theoretical foundation supporting the use of social media as the primary tool for building an authentic, competitive, and sustainable ecotourism image in rural areas like Tlahab.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Site



Figure 1. Instagram account @tamanwisata_posong

This study was conducted in Wisata Alam Posong, located in Tlahab Village, Temanggung Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. Positioned at approximately 1,800 meters above sea level on the slopes of Mount Sindoro, Posong has become a popular rural ecotourism destination, known for its breathtaking sunrise views, agricultural landscape, and unique aesthetic appeal for digital content sharing. Despite its natural advantages and growing popularity, Posong faces challenges in institutional capacity for effective strategic branding. Based on figure 1, by July 2025, Posong's official Instagram account had surpassed 60,000 followers with over 3,400 content posts. However, the account is solely managed by one administrator, with no formal strategy for content development, audience segmentation, or performance monitoring. Financial limitations further constrain the scalability of its online branding initiatives. These factors make Posong an ideal case for exploring how social media can be effectively utilized for ecotourism branding in low-resource environments.

3.2 Survey design and data collection

Given the limited availability of structured frameworks for assessing social media use in ecotourism branding within rural ecotourism, this study explores the topic using a qualitative approach. The goal is to identify key practices, barriers, and the potential of digital media promotion in the local context. Additionally, since visitor preferences for digital content are highly contextual and influenced by platform trends, it was crucial to complement the qualitative findings with quantitative data. Therefore, the study employed a mixed-method approach that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative phases..

- Phase 1. Qualitative :

The researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the management of Wisata Alam Posong, located in Tlahab Village, Central Java, Indonesia. The goal of these interviews was to examine the internal practices, resources, and challenges involved in managing social media as a branding tool. The interviews revealed that the destination's digital promotion is currently handled by a single administrator, who does not utilize formal planning tools such as content calendars or analytics frameworks. Financial constraints were identified as a significant limitation. In addition to the interviews, the researchers performed a digital observation across Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and the official website to capture existing patterns in content presentation and audience engagement.

- Phase 2. Quantitative:

A visitor preference survey was developed based on the qualitative findings and previous literature on digital tourism marketing. The surveys aimed to identify visitors' preferred types of content, platforms, and communication styles in ecotourism promotion. A total of 44 valid responses were collected on-site from visitors during their trip to Posong in July 2025. The data gathered provided empirical support to validate insights from the qualitative phase and to inform future content strategies.

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3.2.1. Phase 1. In-depth semi-structured interviews

The qualitative phase of this study began with in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with the management of Wisata Alam Posong located in Tlahab Village. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure that the interviewees were directly involved in and responsible for the managing social media promotion and ecotourism branding at the destination. The interview protocol was guided by existing literature on destination, social media affordances, and rural ecotourism development.

These interviews, conducted on-site in July 2025 and provided valuable insights into the organizational challenges and digital capabilities of the destination. It was discovered that all social media activities were managed by a single administrator, without formal training in digital marketing or access to a content calendar or strategic segmentation framework. Financial constraints further hindered the production of consistent, high-quality content.

Despite these limitations, Posong has developed substantial digital visibility, with over 60,000 followers and more than 3,400 posts on its official Instagram account. To supplement the interview data, direct observation of the destination's digital footprint was undertaken across multiple platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and its official website. Observations focused on content types, posting frequency, visual aesthetics, and user engagement. Findings from this phase were instrumental in shaping the design of the visitor preference survey conducted in Phase 2.

3.2.2. Phase 2. on-site questionnaire surveys

The second phase employed a quantitative survey to assess visitor preferences regarding ecotourism-related content on social media. The survey instrument was developed based on insights gathered from Phase 1 and aligned with recent empirical studies in tourism marketing and digital communication.

Data collection was conducted using a convenience sampling technique during the third week of July 2025. A total of 44 visitors to Wisata Alam Posong voluntarily participated after being briefed on the study's objectives. The survey was administered in person at key visitor points within the destination.

The questionnaire comprised multiple sections aimed at capturing key aspects of social media engagement: the types of content preferred (e.g., short videos, nature photos, or user testimonials), the most frequently used platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok), preferred language tone (e.g., formal, casual), and initial sources of information about Posong. Demographic variables were also collected, including age, gender, residence, visit frequency, and motivation for visiting the site. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was pre-tested with ten respondents to ensure clarity, consistency, and contextual relevance. Feedback from the pilot test was used to revise ambiguous items and refine the final version of the instrument.

3.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with visual outputs generated via Microsoft Power BI to present key findings in a clear and interactive format. Graphical representations such as pie charts, bar graphs, and infographics were used to communicate insights related to user behavior, platform usage, content expectations, and communication style preferences. This visual approach was also intended to enhance accessibility for non-academic stakeholders, including local tourism managers and community leaders.

Meanwhile, qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and managerial challenges related to digital branding and organizational readiness. These themes were then cross-referenced with quantitative insights to develop a holistic understanding of how social media can be strategically leveraged to support ecotourism branding in low-resource settings like Tlahab Village.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Organizational Capacity and Digital Branding Challenges

The qualitative phase of this study uncovered a series of structural and operational constraints in how Wisata Alam Posong manages its social media branding. These limitations, rooted in both human resource and strategic capacity, have significantly affected the consistency, quality, and effectiveness of the destination's digital outreach.

Currently, the entire digital marketing operation is managed by a single staff member, who is tasked with handling content for Instagram, TikTok, and other online platforms. This individual does not possess formal training in digital branding or tourism communication and is simultaneously responsible for other offline duties at the site. The absence of a dedicated digital branding team or trained personnel represents a foundational bottleneck in maximizing the potential of social media platforms as promotional tools. In comparison, effective tourism brands—especially those in competitive ecotourism markets—often rely on multidisciplinary teams including strategists, content creators, visual designers, and community managers (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010)

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Although the destination has an official Instagram account (@tamanwisata_posong), field observation revealed the presence of numerous unofficial accounts bearing similar names. This digital fragmentation causes confusion among prospective visitors who cannot easily identify the verified source of information, weakening brand trust and credibility. This issue illustrates the lack of a clear digital identity governance framework, which is essential for destination branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; Anholt, 2007).

Further compounding this challenge is the lack of a formal communication strategy or content calendar. There is no systematic schedule to guide when and what kind of content is posted. Most uploads are driven by spontaneity or depend heavily on user-generated content from visitors and influencers, without narrative planning or strategic segmentation. This absence of editorial planning leads to content inconsistencies, visual clutter, and message fragmentation. As noted by Gretzel et al. (2016), digital branding success hinges on a combination of regular posting, visual consistency, and narrative continuity, all of which are currently underdeveloped in Posong's digital presence. Moreover, the content currently being posted lacks thematic variation. Posts are often repetitive, mainly showcasing scenic views without contextual storytelling that could deepen visitors' emotional connection to the destination. Content themes such as environmental education, cultural traditions of the Tlahab community, or sustainability practices are largely absent. This is a missed opportunity to differentiate the brand and project the unique values of rural ecotourism.

4.2 Reliance on Reposted Content and Informal Influencer Collaborations

The current digital communication strategy employed by Wisata Alam Posong remains heavily reliant on User Generated Content (UGC), particularly in the form of reposted photos, testimonials, and video reviews created by visiting tourists. These posts, often shared spontaneously by travelers, showcase panoramic landscapes, personal reflections, or group experiences that are rich in visual appeal and emotional resonance. The aesthetic and authentic nature of UGC plays a powerful role in shaping the perceived image of Posong as a desirable destination. UGC has been widely acknowledged in academic literature as a pivotal component in tourism branding. Xiang et al. (2017) argue that content created by visitors tends to be more credible and trustworthy in the eyes of potential tourists, especially compared to institutionally produced content.

A particularly noteworthy phenomenon observed in this study is the influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on the decision-making process of potential visitors. FOMO, triggered by highly engaging posts from peers, significantly increases the urgency and motivation for others to experience the destination firsthand (Przybylski et al., 2013). When tourists observe that UGC such as sunrise reels, drone shots of mountain peaks, or group photos at iconic viewpoints receives higher levels of interaction (likes, comments, and shares) than the official content posted by the site management, it reinforces social validation and aspiration-driven tourism behavior. This aligns with recent findings in digital tourism psychology, where social proof and peer influence are among the strongest predictors of visitation intent (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

In addition to relying on user generated content, Wisata Alam Posong has engaged in informal collaborations with local influencers, including nature photographers, environmental communities, and regional public information accounts. Campaigns such as "Temanggung: Tempat Wisatanya Gak Nanggung-Nanggung" reflect grassroots community involvement, where micro influencers act as organic brand ambassadors (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021). However, these collaborations remain unstructured and lack formal agreements, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Most are barter based offering free access in exchange for content without clear content objectives, rights agreements, or performance evaluation. This limits their long-term effectiveness and replicability as a strategic branding tool.

Moreover, while influencers effectively highlight Posong's scenic and adventure aspects, they rarely incorporate local culture, traditions, or agricultural identity, which are key pillars of ecotourism branding (Weaver, 2001; Farrell & Runyan, 1991). The absence of cultural storytelling represents a missed opportunity to differentiate Posong in a competitive ecotourism landscape. Therefore, while UGC and influencer outreach contribute to visibility, they must be supported by a formalized and culturally grounded content strategy. The use of MoUs, along with planned storytelling that includes local wisdom and community narratives, is essential to position Posong as an authentic and sustainable ecotourism destination.

4.3 Visitor Preferences and Expectation Gap



Figure 2. Visitor Demographic and Behavioral Insights

The survey results shown in Figure 2 indicate that the majority of visitors to Wisata Alam Poong are women (68,2%) with an average age of 21,5 years, predominantly Generation Z from outside Temanggung who are still in the Central Java region. Most visitors learn about Wisata Alam Posong through social media, making social media an effective platform for promotional branding, particularly in shaping perceptions of the destinations' image. The primary reason visitors come is for recreation (54,4%), and some even experience Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) because they don't want to miss out on visiting the viral tourist spot.

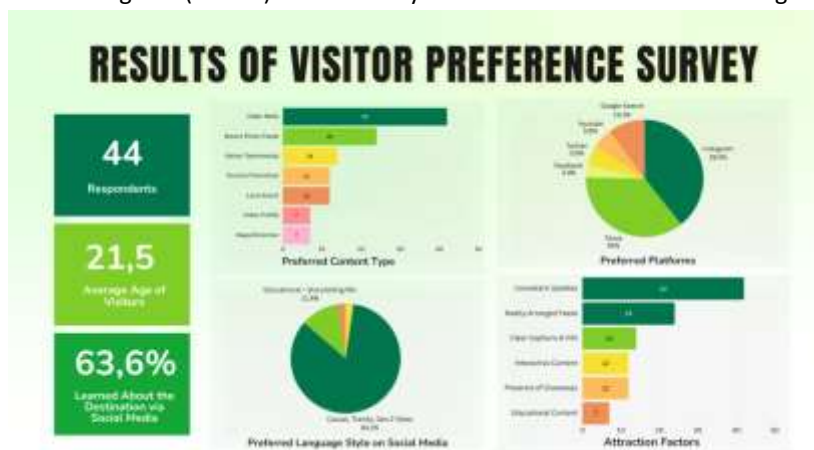


Figure 3. Visitor Content Preferences and Social Media Engagement

The analysis presented in Figure 3 highlights a gap between visitor preferences and the content strategy developed by the management. Most visitors prefer content that includes reels, nature photos, and authentic visual testimonials, avoiding gimmicks. Furthermore, they prefer a casual and contemporary writing style that is relevant to Generation Z (84,5%), rather than a formal and rigid approach. Tourists are also interested in following tourism-related social media accounts that consistently update their content, maintain an organized feed layout, and high engagement with followers. However, the branding strategy implemented by management is not optimal. There is a noticeable lack of a local wisdom approach and a storytelling element that reflects tourist's experiences.

4.4 Strategic Development Opportunities for Ecotourism Branding

Based on the insights from both the qualitative interviews and quantitative visitor surveys, several strategic development opportunities emerge to enhance the digital branding of Wisata Alam Posong and position it more competitively in the ecotourism landscape. These recommendations are especially relevant for rural tourism destinations like Tlahab Village, where branding efforts must balance limited institutional capacity with high expectations from digitally active travelers.

First, there is a need to establish a clear and consistent digital identity. Currently, the proliferation of unofficial social media accounts under the name "Wisata Alam Posong" has led to confusion and weakened brand recognition. A strong digital identity includes verified social media handles, unified visual elements (such as logo, font, and color scheme), and consistent brand messaging that reflects the core values of sustainability, local culture, and natural beauty. As noted by Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013), brand identity serves as a foundation for building long-term emotional connection and trust with target audiences.

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Second, the adoption of a content calendar is essential. The current ad-hoc content approach lacks direction and makes it difficult to build momentum, engage followers regularly, or align posts with seasonal trends or events. A structured calendar allows for thematic consistency and strategic storytelling across platforms. As suggested by Gretzel et al. (2016), planned content production not only improves engagement but also increases the perceived professionalism of the destination.

Third, there is significant potential in optimizing audience reach through platform specific strategies. This includes identifying the best times to post, using platform analytics to segment and understand followers, leveraging hashtags and geotags effectively, and adapting content format to platform behavior for instance, using short, dynamic videos on TikTok, and carousel storytelling on Instagram. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) emphasize that different social media platforms afford different types of interactions, and successful branding strategies must adapt to those affordances.

Fourth, enhancing visual quality and coherence is a key factor. High quality, well edited photos and videos that reflect the destination's character are more likely to be shared and bookmarked, thus amplifying organic reach. Visuals should not only focus on scenic views but also integrate elements of daily life in Tlahab, agricultural activity, and cultural practices to deepen narrative richness and authenticity.

Fifth, developing an appropriate communication style is crucial for connecting with diverse audience segments. The majority of visitors surveyed prefer informal, friendly, and relatable content, as opposed to rigid or overly formal captions. This suggests the need for a tone that is engaging, inclusive, and aligned with the platform's culture, while still conveying key ecotourism messages such as environmental responsibility and local pride. Hudson & Thal (2013) argue that tone of voice plays a central role in developing brand personality and loyalty in digital communication.

These strategies should be gradually implemented with capacity building efforts, including digital branding training for local staff and the formation of a small, dedicated digital team. In line with the principles of community based tourism (Weaver, 2001), these efforts should also involve local stakeholders to ensure that the branding narrative remains authentic, inclusive, and empowering for the host community.

V. CLOSING

5.1 Conclusion

This study shows that social media plays a strategic role in promoting and strengthening ecotourism branding in Tlahab Village, particularly through the case study of Wisata Alam Posong. Although this destination has high natural and cultural potential, the digital promotion strategies implemented by the management are still not optimal and don't fully reflect tourists expectations. The study findings reveal that audiences tend to prefer consistent, high-quality content that reflects local uniqueness, and the current branding approach still relies heavily on user-generated content (UGC) without structured visual management. With the increasing number of social media users and the significant influence of UGC on tourist decisions, there is a need to strengthen community-based digital communication strategies that can authentically represent local values. Therefore, efforts to enhance human resource capacity, develop a content calendar, and collaborate with local communities are crucial steps to promote sustainable branding that aligns with the evolution of digital tourism.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings and discussions presented in this study, it is evident that the strategic development of digital branding is essential to enhance the visibility and competitiveness of Tlahab Village's ecotourism, particularly Wisata Alam Posong. The destination management should initiate a comprehensive and culturally embedded branding framework that includes a clear visual identity, cohesive storytelling, and a structured content calendar. These elements must not only showcase the area's natural beauty but also reflect the local culture, traditions, and community narratives that create authentic emotional connections with visitors. To implement this effectively, there is a pressing need to strengthen the human resource capacity in digital communication. This may involve conducting training programs in content creation, photography, copywriting, and social media analytics, or building partnerships with local creative communities and youth groups to collaboratively manage and produce branding materials that align with the destination's values.

In addition, the study highlights the strategic potential of User Generated Content (UGC) as a credible and persuasive tool for shaping visitor perceptions. Destination managers should actively encourage and curate UGC through digital campaigns, hashtags, storytelling competitions, or review-based engagement strategies. The incorporation of UGC into official content streams not only amplifies reach but also fosters trust and peer-driven marketing. Furthermore, collaborations with local influencers and community-based organizations should be optimized through formal agreements such as Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), with clear objectives and performance indicators. Importantly, future collaborations must prioritize the inclusion of cultural depth and sustainability values, rather than relying solely on aesthetic appeal. This cultural integration is key

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to building a strong, authentic, and sustainable ecotourism brand that resonates in the long term, particularly within the highly competitive and content-saturated digital tourism environment.

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