

The Role of Digital Marketing in Increasing Tourist Visits to Trekking Attractions in Bukit Lawang

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to analyze the efforts made by tourism managers in digitalizing tourism development to increase tourist visits in Bukit Lawang and to analyze the impact of digital tourism on increasing visits to tourist attractions in Bukit Lawang. This research method is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The data collection process is carried out through in-depth interviews and direct observation at the Bukit Lawang trekking tourist attraction. The results of the research show that the efforts made by tourism managers in digitizing tourism marketing have succeeded in increasing tourist visits in Bukit Lawang. The implementation of this program has gone well.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a significant source of income for many countries around the world. Therefore, tourism is able to become one of the main pillars for increasing state income, foreign exchange, and creating extensive employment opportunities (Mistariani et al., 2023). Technological developments have played an important role in changing the way people plan, access, and experience tourist travel. Various technological innovations have opened up new opportunities and overcome challenges in the tourism industry. Digital tourism provides easy access to information, effective promotions, and interesting virtual experiences, all of which can influence increased tourist visits (Sigala and Gretzel, 2019).

Based on an explanation from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of North Sumatra Province (2024), the number of tourist visitors has decreased with the number of foreign tourist arrivals during January 2023. The decrease in visits from Malaysia, India, Singapore, and the United States to North Sumatra may be caused by external factors. One tourist village in North Sumatra is Bukit Lawang. Bukit Lawang is part of TNGL, which causes this area to have a high level of endemism of flora and fauna and is one of the biodiversity centers in the world. foreign tourist visits to Bukit Lawang in 2022 because many tourists have experienced trauma due to COVID-19 and frightening news. However, in 2023, entrepreneurs will carry out intensive digital marketing, especially regarding the current state and condition of Bukit Lawang, through YouTube vlogs and Instagram stories regularly every day. Due to these activities, there was a very significant increase in tourist visits, especially in June, which led to normal conditions. Based on this phenomenon, this research examines the role of digital marketing in increasing tourist visits to the Bukit Lawang tourist attraction.

This research covers what efforts have been made by tourism managers in digitalizing tourism marketing to increase tourist visits to the Bukit Lawang Trekking tourist attraction. And what are the results of implementing digital marketing in increasing tourist interest and visits to the Bukit Lawang Trekking tourist attraction? With research objectives to analyze the efforts made by tourism managers in digitalizing tourism marketing to increase tourist visits to the Bukit Lawang trekking tourist attraction, And to analyze the results of implementing digital marketing in increasing tourist interest and visits to the Bukit Lawang Trekking tourist attraction

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Marketing management is a company's efforts to organize, direct, and carry out marketing initiatives with the aim of understanding, meeting, and caring for their customers amidst constant changes in the business environment (Kotler and Keller 2021:18).

Tourism is all activities related to the arrival, stay, and movement of foreign nationals within or outside a particular country, city, or area (Sri et al., 2022:332)

Digital tourism involves the use of digital technologies such as the internet, social media, and mobile applications in various aspects of the tourism industry, including destination marketing, information distribution, interaction with

tourists, and the development of innovative tourism experiences. This helps tourism destinations increase their visibility and reach through online marketing. (Stangl et al., 2020)

According to Gupta (2019), digital marketing allows tourism businesses to reach more customers and influence their travel decisions through visual content such as images and videos. Digital tourism destinations involve the use of digital technology in transportation aspects related to the tourism industry.

Marketing performance consists of sales revenue, brand and equity customers, Ethics, Environment, Law and Social. Internal sales revenue Indonesian refers to the amount of money earned by a person companies from sales of the products or services they offer to customer. (Kotler and Keller 2021:44).

According to Arifin, (2022:2) Sales performance is the result of implementation various sales strategies carried out by the company. Sales performance can be measured through indicators such as sales volume, customer growth, as well as growth in sales.

According to Firmansyah, (2018) In the world of marketing, consumers is something that needs to be considered, if a company or trader does not If you have consumers, then the traded goods will be in vain. Tourism is all activities related to arrival, overnight stay, as well as the movement of foreign nationals within or outside a country, city, or certain area, (Sri et al, 2022:332) Tourism consists of two community groups involved: informal groups, those involving actors who do not interact directly with visitors or tourists, and formal groups, which include local governments as providers of transportation, accommodation and tour guides who interact directly with visitors or tourists. (Rakib and Farid, 2023:69).

The concept of tourism is the activity of traveling or visiting places a place of interest or tourist destination for the purpose of recreation, entertainment, knowledge, or experience. Mathieson and inner wall yupi et all, (2023)

According to Isdarmanto (2017) a tourist is someone who does something Travel both individually and in groups for a minimum distance of 80 km more than 24 hours for the purpose of seeking pleasure/recreation in tourist objects/destinations.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative data analysis takes place along with data collection. During the interview, the researcher analyzes the answers received and, if necessary, continues to ask questions until the data is deemed credible. In testing the validity of the data, researchers used data triangulation credibility tests, discussions with colleagues, and reference materials.

RESULTS

Researchers have asked at least fourteen questions to each informant regarding the digital marketing phenomenon, which has caused an increase in tourist visits to the Bukit Lawang trekking tourist attraction. These questions include:

1. What is the strategy for implementing the web at Ecolodge
2. What is the role of local youth in marketing Bukit Lawang tourism via digital?
3. As a guide and entrepreneur, do you utilize social media such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, etc., in digital marketing?
4. Do you use an online travel agent when booking hotels or tour packages?
5. Does TNGL help in promoting the Bukit Lawang trekking tourist attraction?
6. Are entrepreneurs also active in creating content as a digital marketing strategy?
7. Does the government create international activities to support the Bukit Lawang tourism attraction?
8. Is information about the Bukit Lawang tourist attraction easy to find?
9. Do the photos and videos circulating on the internet make visitors interested in visiting the Bukit Lawang trekking tourist attraction?
10. Did you come to trekking to Bukit Lawang on the recommendation of visual content?
11. Are you interested in going on a trekking tour to Bukit Lawang because local entrepreneurs provide tour packages that include hotels, guides and food?
12. What do you think about Bukit Lawang being promoted by respected travel influencers or bloggers?
13. Does the TNGL cooperate with the mass media in promoting the trekking tourist attraction in Bukit Lawang?
14. What is HPI's contribution to the Bukit Lawang trekking tourist attraction?

Twenty informants from various backgrounds were interviewed, including representatives from hotels and accommodations, trekking guides, local communities, and entrance ticket managers, as well as tourism-related associations and organizations such as the Indonesian Tourist Guide Association (HPI) and the management of Gunung Leuser National Park (TNGL), as well as tourists who visit Bukit Lawang.

Interview conducted with Mr. Siregar as a Trekking tour guide in Bukit Lawang is "Bukit Lawang also offers a number of interesting tourism potentials others, including Jungle Trekking, exploration of the mysterious BatCave, the thrill of crossing the river by rafting, and an amazing experience at wild nature"

Bukit Lawang is part of the Gunung Leuser National Park which stands out for its natural beauty, diverse flora and fauna, as well as become an orangutan rehabilitation center. Bukit Lawang is rich in diversity nature,

including the rare rafflesia flower and more than 3500 plant species other. Apart from that, this area is also home to 103 species of reptiles, 285 bird species, 35 amphibian species, and primates. Sumatran orangutan, or Pongo Abelli, which is specially protected, has become a conservation icon in Bukit Lawang. (Ginting, 2019) One of the main attractions that has been highlighted in the introduction to this research is the stunning Jungle Trekking adventure with its natural beauty. There are 4 tourist attractions that are most visited by tourists, namely Jungle trekking, Bat Cave, Rafting, Bahorok River Baths.

Table 1.1 Sample Categories

Category	Name	Amount
hotels/lodgings	Ecolodge and Sibayak	1 Representative
trekking guide	Dedek, ipol	2 Representative
Local Youth	Rizal, Ginting	2 guides
Entrepreneur Guide	Mamat	1 Representative
Set Tour guide Indonesia (HPI)	Mrs. Ani	1 Representative
TNGL Manager	Mr. Jo, Mrs. Ani,	2 Administrators
Foreign tourists	Thezin, All, Tio, Serger, Pepe, Mimaria, Rodry, Martine	8 Representative
Local tourists	Ms Tin,Ari	2 Representative
Contest Participants International	Muh Hardis	1 Participant

source: researcher (2024)

have been made by tourism managers in digitizing tourism marketing to increase visits to trekking tourist objects in Bukit Lawang are: 1) making digital tourism books. Making tourism books is an effective form of promotion to introduce the beauty and tourist attractions in Langkat Regency. This book, entitled "The Charm of Langkat Regency Tourism, Apart from being in print format, the book "The Charm of Langkat Regency Tourism" is also available available in a digital version that can be accessed online. This online version

equipped with interactive features such as digital maps, videos and live links to the official websites of accommodation and tourist services. This makes it easier travelers to plan their trips more effectively and efficient. With complete information and interesting visuals, the book "Charm Langkat Regency Tourism" not only functions as a tourist guide but also as a powerful promotional tool to attract more tourists to Langkat, raising awareness about the importance of nature conservation, and supporting the local economy through sustainable tourism. 2) Official Website: The official Bukit Lawang website, which includes complete information about tourist attractions, available activities, accommodation facilities, and the latest news, can be accessed through several sources, including the official website of the Langkat Regency Tourism Office, a website owned by a hotel entrepreneur in the area, a website managed by a guide entrepreneur, and also a website created by local youth who participated in creating a website regarding the Bukit Lawang trekking tourist attraction. "In the results of the interview with the ecolodge manager, namely ecolodge use the website as a marketing tool for hotels, restaurants and services their trekking, the ecolodge owners highlighted some important things. First, use of the website as the main platform to promote services and can reach a wider audience globally. we admit that websites are an effective means of displaying uniqueness and added value of the ecolodge. Additionally, it can emphasize the importance of content attractive visuals, such as high-quality photos and videos showing the natural beauty around the ecolodge. In a restaurant context, use of the website as a forum for sharing menus, reviews customer, and contact information helps in increasing visibility them in local and tourist markets. Lastly, in terms of trekking services, The website is used to present trekking routes, travel packages, and other practical information for potential customers, thus making the process easier planning and reservations.." 3) Marketing via social media, utilizing social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to promote the attractions of Bukit Lawang. This includes posting interesting photos, videos, and visitor testimonials. Based on the results of an interview with Bg Ipol jungle, as a Bukit Lawang Trekking guide who has a private business in guide services "Through Instagram I can bring in foreign tourists Bukit Lawang, like this week there have been 20 tourists who have contacted me Through Instagram, I provide information so that tourists are interested with its stunning natural beauty and opportunities for encounters with wild orangutans. I also explained that Bukit Lawang is the right destination for nature exploration. The information I provide is online provides a clear picture of various tourist activities things you can do in Bukit Lawang, including day trekking in the forest, Night snake trekking in the forest and enjoying the beauty of the Bahorok river" 4) Partnerships with Online Travel Agents, Partnerships with online travel agents (OTAs) such as Booking.com, Agoda, and TripAdvisor have become very effective strategies for promoting tour packages and accommodations in Bukit Lawang. Based on the results of interviews conducted with Mrs tin as a local tourist, namely: "We came to Bukit Lawang just to enjoy bathing just. We have long known about the beauty of Bukit Lawang tourism through information by

word of mouth. However, when we booked accommodation, we... use the Traveloka application because the price is more affordable than prices directly on the spot. Apart from that, using the application is also more practical and efficient. Once we arrived at our destination, we didn't have to bother search for hotels directly, everything is available in the application." 5) Produce interesting visual content, such as high-quality photos and videos showing the natural beauty and tourist activities in Bukit Lawang. based on results interview with Mrs. Balqis as TNGL staff, namely "Authentic, high-quality visual content is not only engaging tourist interest, but also functions as an effective educational medium. Through photos and videos, we can show conservation efforts carried out in Bukit Lawang, showing the biodiversity we protect, and provide a real picture of the experience can be enjoyed by visitors. Thus, not only tourists interested in visiting, but also more aware of the importance of looking after environment and supporting sustainable tourism." 6) carrying out international activities. In 2022, the Culture and Tourism Department will begin to expand their marketing by carrying out international-standard activities in Bukit Lawang. These include the Bukit Lawang Jungle Trail Run on May 27-28, 2022; the Bukit Lawang Orangutan Trail on May 26-27, 2023; and the Bukit Lawang Orang Utan Trail on May 11-12, 2024, This activity aims to promote tourism in the Bukit area Lawang, North Sumatra. Based on the results of interviews with Mr Jo as Gunung Leuser National Park office staff, Bukit Lawang branch. "International marketing activities are already carried out on the hill Lawang and supported by the North Sumatra Tourism Office. This event has been attracting hundreds of participants from various countries, including the USA, France, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Netherlands. Held in Mount National Park Leuser, this annual event is part of the Asia Trail championship series Masters 2024, supported by the Indonesian Trail Running Association (ALTI), and is affiliated with the International Trail Running Association (ITRA) as well as Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc (UTMB). Featuring challenging tracks and Stunning natural views, this competition provides an experience like no other usually in the middle of the rainforest which is a natural habitat for orangutans Sumatra. Even though it's not a highland or mountain trail, it's a challenge still present in natural forest paths with varied terrain and river that cuts through dense hills. The positive impact of this event towards sports tourism is very significant, combining attractions tourism, entertainment and sporting achievements".

The results of implementing digital marketing in increasing tourist interest and visits to the Bukit Lawang Trekking tourist attraction are: 1) Ease of Access to Information. Many tourists will probably appreciate the ease of access to information about Bukit Lawang through marketing digitalization. Based on interviews with Tezin as a foreign tourist state: "The tourism marketing process in Bukit Lawang is carried out via the web provide more detailed information about tourist activities and attract interest visitors. 2) Visual Attraction: Tourists can be fascinated by interesting visual content, such as photos and videos that promote the natural beauty and trekking experience in Bukit Lawang. results of interviews with all of the visitors Bukit Lawang trekking: "I came to Bukit

Lawang only through the Web because I found it information about this place online and felt interested when looking photos on the Web and youtube to explore them. When I search holiday destinations that offer natural adventure and natural beauty Incredibly, Bukit Lawang emerged as one of the best choices. I do a search on the activities and accommodation available on the Hill Lawang through websites and online ordering platforms, and finally decided to book my trip directly via the Web." 3) Availability of Tour Packages and Special Offers: tourism managers in Bukit Lawang, such as Sumatra Ecotravel, offer various trekking tour packages specifically designed to meet the needs and preferences of diverse tourists. This was also carried out using the results of interviews with Dinamika as tourists abroad, namely: "One of the factors that really influenced my decision to choose Bukit Lawang as a trekking destination is because of its comfort and convenience The convenience offered by all-inclusive tour packages I need it during my trip. Ability to get packages includes accommodation, experienced guides and meals is a big plus for me as a tourist take a tour package (2 Day Tour) for 2 days with the same feeling safe, comfortable and quiet because all accommodation for food etc. is already in place prepare carefully, so that I can enjoy the beauty of the flora and fauna fauna with satisfaction". 4) Recommendations from Influencers or Travel Bloggers: If Bukit Lawang is promoted by respected travel influencers or bloggers, positive perceptions towards the application of digital marketing may increase. Based on the results of the interview with Mr Tio as a visitor, namely: "I came to Bukit Lawang and booked accommodation through someone blogger who creates content about villas in Bukit Lawang through an account YouTube Ibenk Dregs of Coffee, who reviews accommodation in Sumatra Orangutan Explore. I booked accommodation via the Orangutan Explore website at a price of 250 thousand for an inside bathroom".

The impact of implementing the Tourism Marketing Program on Tourist Visits at the Bukit Lawang Tourist Attraction is that it can increase foreign tourist visits in 2023.

Type of Tourism	2021	2022	2023	2024 (January - February)
Domestic Tourism	1.099	7.419	5.153	547
International Tourism	7	5.466	16.739	2.230

Source :Taman Nasional Gunung Lauser, (2024)

The implementation of the tourism marketing program has had an impact positive towards increasing foreign tourist visits to tourist attractions

Trekking Bukit Lawang from 2021 to 2022, with a surge in numbers tourists from 7 to 5,466. Despite stagnation in 2023 and beginning of 2024, a significant increase in 2022 shows effectiveness of marketing programs. Although visits tend to be stable in period, there is potential for further improvement with evaluation continuously And adjustment strategy marketing. Need Also consider seasonal factors and tourism trends that may influence fluctuations in tourist visits from year to year, and high season occurs in June, July, August, September, October. The implementation of the tourism marketing program has had an impact positive towards local tourist visits to the Bukit trekking tourist attraction Mace. A spike in visits from 2021 to 2022, from 1,099 to 7,419 tourists, showing the program's success in attracting interest local tourists. Although there are fluctuations in visits over the years next, such as the decline in 2023 and early 2024, the role Marketing programs remain significant in increasing the number of visits. Continuous evaluation is necessary to understand the factors influence fluctuations in visits, while expanding coverage marketing and adjusting strategies to promote Bukit's uniqueness Lawang to local tourists in order to achieve stability in tourist visits in the long term.

DISCUSSION

This part allows you to elaborate on your results findings academically. You must not put numbers related to your statistical tests here; instead, you have to explain that numbers here. You have to compile your discussion with academic supports to your study and a good explanation according to the specific area you are investigating,

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The efforts made by tourism managers to digitalize tourism marketing have succeeded in increasing tourist visits to Bukit Lawang. The implementation of this program has gone well, as evidenced by the creation of a digital tourism book by the Langkat Tourism Office and the creation of a tourism website by business actors, local guides, company guides, the local government, and local residents. Apart from that, marketing via social media, interesting content, and international activities also contributed to increasing visits.

The results of the application of digital marketing in increasing tourist interest and visits to the Bukit Lawang Trekking tourist attraction show that the application of digital marketing is effective in increasing tourist interest and visits. This is proven by the ease of access to information, visual appeal, availability of tour packages and special offers, as well as recommendations from travel influencers or bloggers. The increase in foreign tourist visits from 5,466 in 2022 to 16,739 in 2023 shows the positive impact of digital marketing. However, there was a decrease in local tourist visits from 7,419 to 5,153 in the same year. This is caused by the lack of interest of local residents in trekking and their preference, which is more inclined towards the Bukit Lawang river tourist attraction.

Suggestions for overcoming these obstacles are in digital marketing and social media optimization in consistently managing interesting and informative

content on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Use high quality photos and videos that show the natural beauty and trekking activities in Bukit Lawang using Hashtag Campaigns and Contests and Giveaways.

The optimal platform for promoting trekking tourism in Bukit Lawang is YouTube, for promoting trekking tourism in Bukit Lawang. The use of YouTube can provide virtual tours and tutorial experiences to video viewers. These videos can be optimized through titles, descriptions, and tags containing relevant keywords to increase visibility on YouTube and Google search engines.

FURTHER STUDY

This study will comprehensively discuss various aspects related to digital tourism, with a specific focus on the use of social media in promoting tourism destinations, including how platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are used to attract tourists. In addition, this study will delve into the online marketing strategies employed by tourism managers, whether through websites, booking applications, or digital advertising, which play a crucial role in increasing the visibility of tourist destinations. The study will also review digital reservation and booking systems, particularly how this technology simplifies the process for prospective tourists when planning their trips, from purchasing tickets to arranging accommodations. Furthermore, this research will explore how the tourism experience can be enhanced through digital technology, such as the use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) applications, and how this impacts tourists' perceptions and satisfaction with the destination they visit. Additionally, the study will examine the role of online travel review platforms, such as TripAdvisor, in shaping the reputation of destinations and influencing travelers' decisions in selecting their preferred locations.

The research will be specifically focused on the trekking tourism site in Bukit Lawang, a region renowned for its tropical beauty and its orangutan population as a primary attraction. The scope of the study will be limited to this area to understand how digital technology developments can be optimally applied in the local context. This research will also examine how digital technology, including social media and tourism applications, can be utilized to promote Bukit Lawang as a leading ecotourism destination. Another focus will be on how tourists use digital technology while visiting Bukit Lawang, such as planning trekking activities, accessing information about local flora and fauna, and using technology to share their experiences in real-time through various social media platforms. This analysis is expected to provide in-depth insights into the potential of tourism digitization in this area, as well as the economic, social, and environmental impacts it generates. Furthermore, the study will explore how local community participation can be enhanced through the use of digital technology in tourism operations, creating synergy between the local community and modern technology to support the sustainability of ecotourism in Bukit Lawang.

Future research should focus on developing a deeper understanding of how digital technology can be leveraged to increase tourist engagement and strengthen the relationship between tourism managers and local communities.

Future studies could explore the application of technologies such as blockchain for ticketing and visitor data management, as well as how artificial intelligence (AI) can help create more personalized and interactive tourist experiences. Moreover, it is important to examine the long-term impacts of digitization on environmental sustainability in natural tourist destinations such as Bukit Lawang, including how technology can support ecosystem conservation and raise tourists' awareness of the importance of conservation. Future research could also broaden the geographical scope, comparing Bukit Lawang with other ecotourism destinations in Indonesia that are also adopting digital technology, to understand patterns of success and the challenges encountered in the process of tourism digitization across different regions.

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