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The Use Of Content Marketing To Improve The Sharing Economy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the issues and challenges in implementing and adopting the sharing economy concept. More specifically, the paper intend to identify how CM can maximize the implementation of the sharing economy concept in tourism industries of the Lake Toba region. The type of research used is qualitative with a descriptive approach. Data were obtained by means of observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews with the communities and entrepreneurs who have been applied the sharing economy concept and have implemented CM on different social media platforms. The study identified three critical factors of CM that influence the implementation of the share economy concept in Lake Toba region, namely, relevant to current market, trust and engagement. The researcher suggested that entrepreneurs in the Lake Toba tourism industry add CM, especially short videos, to their business strategy.

Keywords: Content Marketing, Sharing Economy, Tourism, Lake Toba.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of Covid-19 has demonstrated the necessity of digitalization in practically all industries, including tourism. According to UNWTO (2020), 100-120 million direct tourism employment are at stake, as are USD 910 billion to 1.2 trillion in tourist exports - foreign visitor expenditure. At this time, efforts are required to revitalize the tourism industry, especially for Indonesia which shows that foreign tourist arrivals in August 2020 were just 164,970, a -89.22% year-on-year decrease (BPS, 2021).

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The Lake Toba region is one of the five super-priority tourist destination in Indonesia. This means that the government is working on developing tourism in the Lake Toba area so that it may compete with Bali, also known as "The New Bali". In line with the physical development, The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MOTCE), emphasises that internet promotions and campaigns should be maximised to raise awareness in markets around the world (Kemenparekraf, 2020). Nowadays, the decision to travel based on the influence of content is becoming an increasingly common behaviour. Destination Analysts (2019) noted that out of 2,000 American tourists, 61% of them get travel inspiration when looking for tourist content on social media. The use of content as a marketing tool, or "content marketing (CM)," is considered effective because it provides all information related to the travel experience that can be accessed anytime and anywhere (Breidbach et al. 2014; Brodie et al. 2013). Even Alaei et al. (2019) stated that the implications of content shared through social media also influence the image and performance of tourism.

The sharing economy concept has been growing in popularity lately as it offers an alternative to traditional methods of tourism. Studies have found that the sharing economy in the tourism industry encourages community engagement (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Sigala, 2015). The sharing economy is a way of using the internet to connect people who have things they can spare with people who might need them, such as rooms, cars, meals, and local knowledge. Through the sharing economy, the tourists get better value for money with reduced costs, meaningful social encounters with locals and authentic tourism experience. This has occurred due to a change in consumer desires, followed by the growth of peer-to-peer (P2P) SMEs to create integration in interaction (Abrate & Viglia, 2017; Acquier et al. 2017; Davidson et al. 2018).

One of the key challenges for businesses in the sharing economy is how to improve their share ability and increase user engagement in order to maximise the benefits of these concept. As we known, tourism in general is not lacking in attractiveness, but it needs the right marketing tools to keep up with the changes. Through this research, the researchers aim to make both theoretical and practical contributions. The study's theoretical purpose is to contribute to academic research by identifying intriguing CM practices. To begin, consider how CM affects the application of the sharing economy concept in the Lake Toba region's tourism industry. Furthermore, which social media platforms are most commonly used as CM tools? Practically, the findings and recommendations will be of interest to industries looking for inspiration and best

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practices to meet the problems of their digital marketing context and redesign their business functions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Conten Marketing (Cm)

To understand digital CM conceptually, the researcher will describe it in two parts. First, content is a form of information that describes product and service. In industry analysis, content appears together with applications so that the term digital content. Digital content is not only aimed at attracting the attention of potential customer but also turning them into new customer (Karkar, 2016). The main characteristic of digital content are informative, accessible, and relevant (Koiso-Kantila, 2004). Informative describes meeting the emotional needs of customers (Lieb, 2012), where accessibility describes the ease of communication (Werthner & Ricci, 2004), product promotion and distribution (Matteo & Zotto, 2015). This has an impact on long term relationships in building engagement and trust (Naidoo & Hollebeek, 2016), and when used as a marketing tool it provides mutually beneficial relationships for customers and the business.

In addition, digital marketing is generally used to describe marketing activities carried out through platforms digital. Digital marketing utilizes the use of technology so that consumers can be directly integrated with product and service information regardless of place and time (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatema, 2015; Denning, 2016). Lifestyle changes and intense competition have encouraged the entrepreneurs to adopt relevant strategies by utilizing digital content as a marketing tool or digital CM.

From the various literatures, digital CM was defined as the activity of creating and disseminating content that influences brand value, relevance, and consumer engagement (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Monhart et al., 2015). The applications that are considered effective in supporting digital CM activities are social media (Simsek & BatuhanDincel, 2019). For the purposes of this research, digital CM refers to product and service promotion activities through social media.

Currently, social media has played a role in driving the development of the tourism industry. Technological developments and the inherent use of technology by society have changed the entire perspective of the tourism industry (Mathew & Soliman, 2020). The entrepreneurs are increasingly actively using social media to expand markets, interact, and build engagement. Social media is integrated directly into the market, but

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the relatively low costs make it an integral part of the marketing strategy (Ebrahim, 2019).

Kim & Ko (2010) identified five main strengths of social media, namely interaction, entertainment, trends, customization, and word of mouth (WOM). For the tourism industry, these five strengths are a source of information which according to Matloka & Buhalis (2010) can enhance the image and popularity of a tourism destination. The social media used for the purposes of this research are Tiktok and Instagram because these social media are widely used by the entrepreneurs to reach the customers.

Sharing Economy (SE)

SE is a concept that emphasizes the sharing of unused assets to improve efficiency and sustainability. The terms "sharing economy," "collaborative consumption," and "peer to peer economy" are among the most commonly used to characterize the phenomena of P2P sharing of access to underutilized goods and services, with a focus on use and accessibility over ownership (Schor & Firzmaurice, 2015). SE involves a diverse set of stakeholders, with individual customers serving as the primary stakeholder and mostly drawn to SE for financial reasons (Hossain, 2020).

There have been many previous studies that prove the application of SE in the tourism industry, such as hospitality service (Juliao et al, 2022) and experience (Paulauskaite et al, 2017; Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The online platforms also help SE start-ups by giving their customers access to a diverse selection of products and services, many of which are of excellent quality but less expensive than their traditional counterparts (Shaheen, Mallery, & Kingsley, 2012). Therefore, SE enables destinations to better respond to demand through alternative service offerings.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. For qualitative research, this study try to explore and understand the meaning derived from social problems (Creswell, 2003). A descriptive approach is used in this research to process the data obtained in the form of words and images (Moleong, 2010). In this case, researchers made related observations through related social media that promote tourism goods and services provided directly by local communities. The data and problems in this study can be collected and examined effectively using a descriptive qualitative technique.

The researcher conducted the primary data from interviews with several respondents identified through snowball sampling. Secondary data is collected from

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various sources such as previous research, documentation, as well as related websites and social media, especially MOTCE official accounts. The data collected will be reduced, presented, and conclusions drawn through triangulation activities to increase one's understanding of research data and findings, while minimizing the weakness of data credibility by providing evidence in the form of similar or supporting data (Sugiyono, 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of SE for the Lake Toba Region tourism industry will be discussed further. In this paper, the terms "customer", "tourist" and "traveller" are used interchangeably to describe the relationship between SE and CM.

The Sharing Economy in Tourism Industry in The Lake Toba Region

Sharing economy in tourism context have become as one of the economic sectors where sharing economy has recorded a tremendous growth. Accomodation is considered to be the largest and important sub-sector in the tourism industry in terms of meeting the needs of tourist. Observations show that many residents' homes have been converted into guesthouses, private motorbikes have been converted into tourist vehicles, and it is not uncommon for residents to use their ancestral heritage as a tourist attraction. Through interviews, Agus said that "*from the beginning the community helped each other provide accommodation when tourists came in large numbers*." Economic benefits are recognised as the main motivation for community involvement in P2P accommodation, while offering the traditional experience that tourists seek. Research indicates that tourists should no longer be seen as a buyers but ' a co-producers who actively create their own experiences' (Kuhzady et al. 2020), because they are care about environment, local culture, and experiences to make decisions about staying longer or revisit (Kim et al. 2017) .

On the other hand, tourists increasingly desire low-cost services. This is made possible in the context of the sharing economy, but it requires trust on both sides. Bernard said that "*we don't know who the tourists are, and vice versa. Our goods are often damaged or lost*." It is clear that the sharing economy brings financial benefits, but the risks need to be minimised for both sides. This situasion proves once again that trust is still one of the main factors for the success of P2P consumption in Lake Toba region.

CM capability building

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Most P2P tourism businesses in Lake Toba region are still run in a traditional way, with promotional activities not fully dependent on the Internet. However, the development of internet, particularly the booming of social media during pandemic of Covid-19 has changed the circulation of information. Researchers found that the Covid-19 pandemic was a turning point for entrepreneurs, who realised that the market could be reached through social media. Lisa said in the interview that "*now you can't do business without social media. People want something simple and fast*." In line with this, Afni, an innkeeper in the Tuk-tuk area, stated that "*the content we have uploaded has answered the curiosity of tourists. They immediately know what kind of room they want to order or what the view is like*". The interview illustrates that content is a form of information that is relevant to current market conditions. As a result, tourists and business people can connect regardless of space and time constraints (Yasmin et al. 2015; Denning, 2016).

At that point, CM is able to fill the information gap that builds trust on both sides which can be verified and evaluated. Bernard said "*before there is an agreement with potential customers, social media must be the first filter to build trust. From there, we know who is interested, curious, and who will become our customer*." This is supported by the tendency of potential tourists to use social media as a source of information and travel recommendations (Oliveria, Araujo, & Tam, 2020; Bilgihan, Barreda, Okumus, & Nusair, 2016). This explain why the previous studies quite often put social media under the umbrella of sharing economy (Frenken & Schor, 2017; Laurell & Sandstrom, 2017; Bernardi, 2018).

As a promotional tool, CM encourages engagement on a cognitive and emotional level (Schamari & Schaefers, 2015). Cognitive engagement is reflected in content that shows information - experiences, discussing - giving opinions, evaluating - recommending and providing feedback on anything relevant (Seraj, 2012; Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2010; Sashi, 2012). Afni said "*initially our content was to introduce our guesthouse, but over time we started directing them to the nearest tourist attractions*." Agus added "*over time, the content between entrepreneurs is interrelated, which shows th creation of collaboration*." The results of these interviews are evidence of the community's collaborative efforts to build trust and reputation, which play an important role in the tourism industry (Gregory & Halff, 2017; Guttentag, 2015).

In addition, the emotional level is reflected in the number of 'views', 'likes', 'shares' and 'comments' on the content being shared. In an interview with Lisa, it was noted that "*comments can affect people's trust in the products we sell, especially when our posts are reposted*". Afni added that "*we are most active on Tik-tok because we can see the number*

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of views". The interview shows that CM can be used to increase the desire to travel, while promoting new offers and increasing online interaction. In line with this, Tari explained that "*since the new normal era, we often ask guests to provide reviews through content. We automatically repost each other's content because they provide honest reviews that convince potential travelers."* Based on the results of these interviews, the researcher concluded that content is considered to leave a strong impression on the audience because of its ability to build engagement and trust. According to several previous studies, engagement and trust create a mutually beneficial relationship between

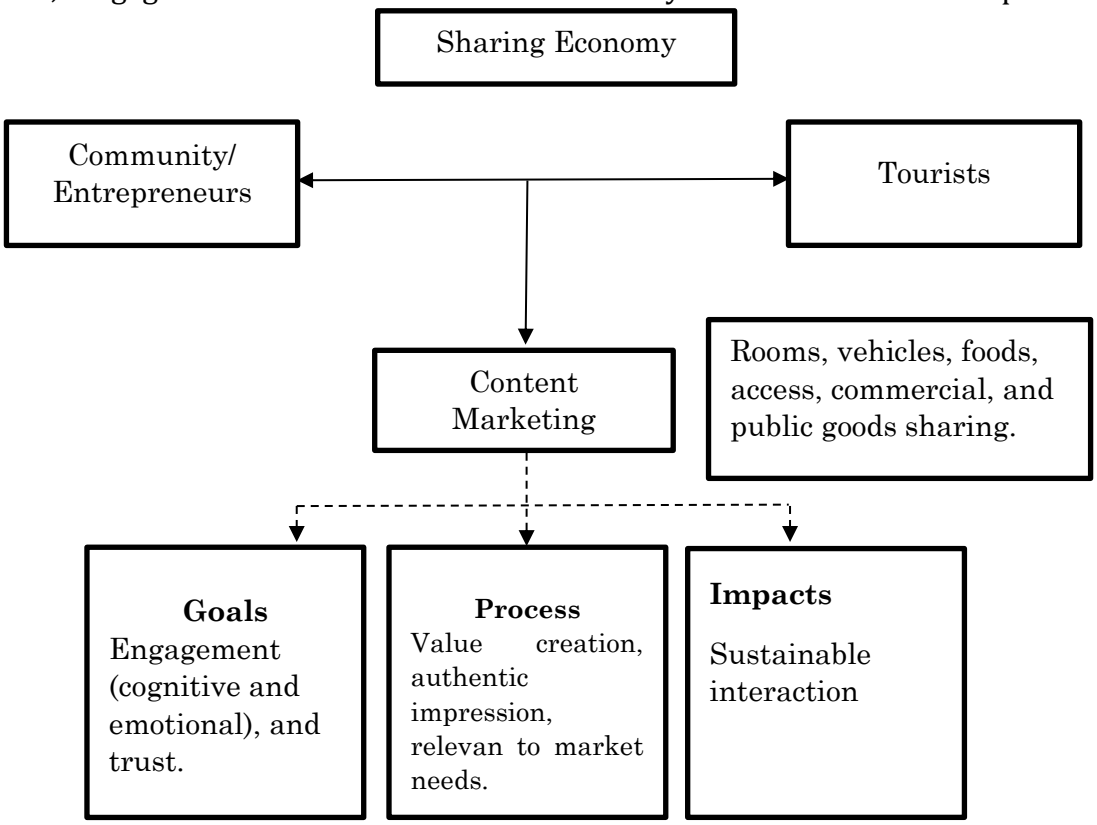


Figure 1 Impact of CM under the Sharing Economy

consumers and business people (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Rancati & Gordini, 2014).

Of the various types of content, short videos are considered more informative because they leave a strong impression on the audience, which Cheng et al. (2020) strongly recommend video-blogging (vlog) because it is considered an effective CM. Tari said: "*The video gives an authentic impression where photos can sometimes be deceptive.*" This means that the more reliable the information of the content, the more attractive the destination's online presence and the greater the opportunity to solving tourists'

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problems. How Afni added: "*at least we produce one content every week, wheter it's a promotion or answering a questions by short video*." The interview indicate that content is a key component of CM techniques. Therefore, the value of content becomes a task that cannot be ignored. Holliman & Rowley (2014) said that a good content will generate a positive response and vice versa. This is one of the steps to build sustainable interactions.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

As more traditional tourism information services needs to change and adapt their approaches. Basically, CM is a business strategy aimed at addressing the information needs of customers (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017; Kose & Sert, 2017), thus that the use of CM is considered relevant to the needs of tourists, especially in the new normal era after the pandemic of Covid-19.

The conclusion of the results of this study is that CM provides flexibility for entrepreneurs to reach the market because it is considered relevant to current market needs. In addition, CM is able to influence trust and encourages engagement on a cognitive and emotional level which is an inhibiting factor in the application of the sharing economy concept for Lake Toba tourism. Futhermore, short videos are a type of CM that is considered effective in increasing the destination's online presence. Therefore, the researcher suggests that entrepreneurs utilise CM in the form of short videos that are informative and give an authentic impression to leave a strong impression on the audience. A limitation of the study was that it did not extend to how tourists responded to CM post. This is an area for further research that can help validate the propose framework.

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