

Tourism communication strategies of the tourism department of Rokan Hilir Regency in enhancing tourist visits to Bagan Heritage

Rizka Zahara^{1*}, Muhammad Najih Farihanto²

^{1,2}Communication studies, Ahmad Dahlan University, 55166, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: rizka1900030046@webmail.uad.ac.id, muhammad.farihanto@comm.uad.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Keywords

Tourism
Communication Strategy
Tourism Communication
Tourist
Tourism Department

Tourism enhances regional income. Rokan Hilir Regency, Indonesia, holds exceptional tourism potential named Bagan Heritage, spanning regions. To optimize, stakeholders employ robust communication strategies. The Tourism Department employs diverse strategies to develop Bagan Heritage, aiming to stimulate tourist interest. Thus, this study is titled "Tourism Communication Strategies of the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency in Enhancing Tourist Visits to Bagan Heritage." In this research, the exploratory technique of qualitative descriptive approach was employed. The objective of this technique is to obtain a comprehensive and holistic overview of the reality being considered. To gather the necessary information, the researcher conducted interviews with various relevant parties, engaged in direct observations at the tourism sites, and collected data through documentation. Subsequently, the researcher analyzed the obtained information by conducting a thorough examination of the data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In order to ensure the validity of the gathered information, the researcher performed comparisons, consolidations, and integrations of each piece of information obtained. The findings of this study indicate that through the implementation of tourism communication strategies, the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency can enhance tourist visits to the Bagan Heritage destination. However, despite promising results, these efforts have not been evenly distributed across all the tourist destinations in Bagan Heritage. Therefore, further endeavors are necessary to maximize the implementation of the key points of tourism communication strategies, ensuring their comprehensive impact throughout all the tourist destinations in Bagan Heritage.

1. Introduction

Tourism comprises two words, "Pari" and "wisata." "Pari" conveys the notion of revolving, encompassing, comprehensive, and repeated (Wibowo et al., 2019). On the other hand, "wisata" can be understood as a journey or travel, synonymous with the English word "travel" (Pendit, 2002). Consequently, the term "Pariwisata," as stated by (Suryani, 2017), can be inferred as the repeated or recurrent journey from one place to another. Additionally, according to Permatasari et al., (2020), tourism involves temporary travel from one place to another, undertaken individually or in groups, as an effort to seek harmony and happiness within the environment in its social, cultural, natural, and scientific dimensions (Astuti & Darma, 2019).

The Bagan Heritage tourism in Bagansiapiapi holds significant potential, for development, because its to high cultural value and strategic location (Rush & Et.al., 2000). However, the tourism strategies implemented, by the tourism department of rokan hilir regency in increasing visitor numbers, remain limited. As a result, the competitiveness of Bagan Heritage with city-center tourist attractions is relatively low (Moro & Rita, 2018).

Based on direct field observations by the researcher, Bagansiapiapi possesses a highly potential Bagan Heritage tourism site that can be maximally developed due to its cultural value, especially its strategic location (T.Rochelle, 2017), making it easily accessible for international tourists (Scorrano et al., 2019). Furthermore, this tourism spot includes historical structures that hold cultural heritage significance (Suharyanto et al., 2020). Despite the captivating tourism potential of Bagan Heritage, the strategies implemented by the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency have not yielded sufficient effectiveness in boosting tourist visits (Saputra & Roychansyah, 2022). This situation results in its competitiveness with city-center attractions being relatively insignificant. According to Putri et al., (2021), the tourism sector is a pivotal driver of economic growth and has the potential to elevate the city's economy.

This historical tourist destination holds significant historical value that can become a unique selling point. Therefore, it is essential to conserve and position Bagan Heritage tourism as an attractive site that will draw numerous visitors. Following the theory proposed by Tunggal and Saadja (2019) on communication strategies to enhance tourism visits, coupled with the fact that many tourists are unaware of Bagan Heritage, a pronounced imbalance is evident. Hence, the researcher will comprehensively examine the "Tourism Communication Strategies of the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency in Enhancing Tourism Visits to Bagan Heritage."

2. Method

The researcher employed a qualitative research method, aiming to obtain a comprehensive overview and delve into the ordinary context of the examined case. The research method utilized was qualitative descriptive (Faradies, 2020). Communication research strategy is a captivating technique that focuses on portraying the reality or qualitative aspects of a specific population or field with unquestionable and precise methods. The qualitative approach, as defined by (Siska, 2021), is a research form where the researcher, as a participant along with the informants providing data, collects and analyzes data as an integral part of the research process. In qualitative research, there are several data collection methods employed, namely: interview data collection, observation data collection, and documentation data collection (Qinyu & Zhuang, 2023).

3. Result and Discussion

The research findings regarding the Tourism Communication Strategies of the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency in Enhancing Tourism Visits to Bagan Heritage will be presented. This study encompasses interviews, observations, and documentation that have been conducted. These efforts encompass tourism communication strategies implemented by the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency to amplify the number of tourist visits each year.

3.1. Presenting the Results

1. Tourism Communication Strategy of the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency

This section examines how the Rokan Hilir Tourism Department can optimize its tourism communication strategy to enhance tourism and attract tourists to Bagan Heritage. The tourism communication strategy formulated by the researcher within the framework of the pre-established theory aligns with the strategic plan executed by the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency.

a. Marketing

Based on the researcher's observations, it was found that the marketing efforts of the Rokan Hilir Tourism Department are carried out through social media, billboards, and banners. This fact demonstrates the successful implementation of effective marketing strategies by the Rokan Hilir Tourism Department. In addition to targeting the local community, these promotions have also proven successful in attracting visitors from outside the city and even abroad.

The utilization of the aforementioned media channels is regarded as effective by both the researcher and the Tourism Department. Therefore, it is crucial to consistently maintain the use of these media platforms to ensure that information remains easily accessible to tourists.

b. Destination

Bagan Heritage boasts historical buildings, monuments, statues, historical sites, and captivating cultural attractions. Each tourist area within Bagan Heritage features these attractions. Based on the researcher's observations, there is an uneven distribution in the availability of supporting facilities and infrastructure at each destination. Currently, supporting facilities are only present at tourist destinations with actively used buildings, whereas other destinations that are no longer in use are lacking in terms of facilities and infrastructure. From interviews conducted with managers and tourists, variations in the completeness of facilities and amenities at these destinations were apparent. While some destinations have comprehensive facilities and amenities, others remain incomplete or even nonexistent.

c. Accessibility

Based on the researcher's observations, it can be concluded that the accessibility to tourist sites in Bagan Heritage is very good. This includes road access via private vehicles or public transportation. Accessibility to the tourist sites within Bagan Heritage located in Bagansiapiapi has seen a significant improvement in recent years. Accessibility to Bagan Heritage attractions in Bagansiapiapi, primarily by road, allows for easy access through private vehicles or public transportation.

d. Human Resources (HR)

Based on the researcher's observations, nearly all tourist areas within Bagan Heritage possess highly active Human Resources (HR) in advancing tourism in the region. This includes the active participation of the local community in preserving cultural attractions, as well as tourism managers who patiently serve visitors and continually share stories about the history of Bagan Heritage. This demonstrates the presence of quality HR in Bagan Heritage, supported by significant assistance and backing from the Tourism Department. The Tourism Department continues to play a role in providing sustainable planning and development for tourism in Bagan Heritage.

e. Tourism Institutions

Based on the researcher's observations, although there are already several tourism institutions in place, the roles of each of these entities have not yet reached their maximum potential and still require enhancement. Established tourism institutions include GenPI (Generation of Indonesian Charms), GENPARI (National Movement of Tourism Enthusiasts), Rumah Tamadun (House of Civilization), BTD (Bagan Tempo Doloe), and several other communities.

2. Implementation of Tourism Communication Strategy by the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency in Enhancing Tourist Visits to Bagan Heritage

When examining the execution carried out by the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency, two main factors in tourism promotion efforts can be identified. These consist of online tourism promotion and offline tourism promotion, which involves face-to-face interactions. Online tourism promotion is conducted through Instagram and the official website, while offline promotion involves organizing events such as leisure walking activities and traditional boat-burning events.

4.1. Create a Discussion

Based on the research findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation processes, the researcher will now enter a crucial phase in this study. In this phase, the researcher will delve into an in-depth discussion and analysis of the collected data using the framework that has been previously designed. This framework encompasses relevant theories and has been structured to provide a robust guide in comprehending and analyzing the research outcomes accurately. By employing pertinent theories, the researcher will elucidate and investigate the findings derived from the data, identify emerging patterns or relationships, and offer a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

1. Tourism Communication Strategy of the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency
 - a. Marketing

In the endeavor undertaken by the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency to enhance tourist visits, they have undertaken meticulous planning to formulate various communication strategies aimed at achieving the desired outcomes. This action aligns with the concept of communication strategy, which can be elucidated as a process that combines communication planning and management to achieve predetermined objectives, as articulated by Effendy in Jandevi, (2019) book "Communication Planning and Management".

One of the communication strategies implemented by the Tourism Department is the utilization of Tourism Communication approach, involving various highly relevant elements. Within the context of tourism communication, there are several components that play pivotal roles in achieving success, including marketing aspects, destination development, enhanced accessibility, human resource development, and establishment of tourism institutions. This is expounded in the book "Tourism Communication: Marketing and Destination Branding" authored by (Bungin & Burhan, 2008). Therefore, the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency employs strategies that emphasize these aspects to optimize tourism communication, aiming to achieve the desired objectives.

In the effort to enhance tourist interest, the Tourism Department implements various components, one of which is marketing. Within the Tourism Department, marketing plays a pivotal role and has its own dedicated unit responsible for this field, known as the Creative Economy Tourism Marketing Division. All activities related to marketing are conducted by the team in the marketing division, including promotional activities and the like. The Tourism Department also adopts a marketing approach that involves various media as the primary means to market and promote tourism. Additionally, the Tourism Department regularly organizes various events both within and outside the region as part of their promotional strategy, in line with the presence of the creative economy.

Disseminating information through various media is considered effective as it aligns with the communication elements encompassing information source, conveyed message, utilized media, information recipients, and intended effects (Morissan et al., 2010). In the context of the Tourism Department, information originates from them, while promotion and marketing constitute the messages conveyed to the public or prospective visitors. Social media and print media are utilized as means of message delivery. The primary objective is to reach the community and tourists as the recipients of information, with the hope of generating positive effects from the communication efforts. Based on data gathered from interviews and observations, it can be understood that the Tourism Department has endeavored to implement all these communication elements (Morissan, 2015).

- b. Destination

Based on the research data obtained through interviews and personal observations, it is evident that Bagan Heritage tourist destination encompasses all the essential elements of tourism. From historical buildings, monuments, and statues to historical sites and cultural attractions, everything is available there. Tourists who visit acknowledge that Bagan Heritage holds a strong allure, with its ancient buildings rich in history and enjoyable cultural attractions. This destination frequently becomes a favorite choice among both local and international tourists.

In concurrence with Bungin's explanation Teguh et al., (2020), it can be asserted that a tourism destination must possess various supporting elements encompassing attractions involving scenic views, attractions, culture, traditions, religion, history, and various other aspects. Additionally, tourism facilities also play an integral role as supporting amenities for the tourist destination, catering to various needs and visitor satisfaction in enjoying their travel experiences (Swacha & Ittermann, 2017).

On the part of the Tourism Department itself, over the past 2 years, they have gradually been developing several flagship destinations that possess more prominent attractions or distinctiveness compared to other destinations (Sefira Ryalita Primadany, Mardiyono, 2013). These efforts are carried out with the aim of continuously enhancing the regional tourism potential and attracting tourist interest to visit these destinations. With the availability of all essential elements within the tourism industry at the Bagan Heritage tourist destination, tourists have a variety of choices they can explore. From

captivating historical buildings, impressive monuments or statues, enchanting historical sites, to captivating cultural attractions. Destination managers and the local community also play an active role in promoting the places they oversee by leveraging the unique features of these destinations. At times, they utilize word of mouth methods to describe the historical beauty present at the tourist site to others in the community.

Nevertheless, it is important to develop all the destinations within Bagan Heritage, not just specific flagship destinations. By promoting even development across all tourist destinations, it will provide additional benefits for all stakeholders involved in the tourism industry and enhance the overall number of tourist visits.

c. Accessibility

In the tourism industry, it is crucial to ensure the smoothness and ease of access to tourist destinations. This factor greatly influences the increase in tourist visits to Bagan Heritage. With the availability of convenient and affordable access for tourists, it will stimulate an upsurge in visits to explore the beauty and uniqueness of the tourist destinations in Bagan Heritage. In this context, it is imperative to emphasize that the aspect of accessibility, as mentioned in Bungin Burhan (2019), plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success of a tourism destination. Key points to consider encompass the ease of transportation access, both by land and sea, as well as the provision of clear maps or guides for tourists. Furthermore, the construction and maintenance of supporting facilities such as parking areas, public restrooms, and environmental cleanliness also constitute factors that cannot be disregarded. All of these elements contribute to an enhanced experience for tourists and foster an increase in visits to tourism destinations, including Bagan Heritage.

According to statements from interviewed tourists, they affirm that the road access to tourist destinations in Bagan Heritage is relatively easy and comfortable. This is attributed to the central location of the tourist sites within the city, resulting in smoother road access and minimal effort required to find the correct routes. The utilization of public transportation such as cycle rickshaws (becak) also greatly assists tourists, as they can be directly taken to their destinations without the need to consult a map. Furthermore, the road conditions around the tourist destinations are well-paved. However, a few tourists have also highlighted a drawback, namely the lack of road signs at certain points (Wibowo et al., 2019).

From various information sources, including the Tourism Department, tourists, site managers, and local residents, it has been revealed that the accessibility of destinations within Bagan Heritage is not yet fully optimized and requires improvement from various stakeholders within the tourism industry. Particularly, there is a deficiency in directional signs or signboards that serve as guidance for tourists. The researcher also highlights this aspect as an area needing further attention, as directional signage for the attractions still appears to be underdeveloped.

d. Human Resources (HR)

According to perspective Bungin & Burhan, (2008), there is an understanding that being welcoming towards tourists is a crucial factor in the success of tourism, which is demonstrated through a hospitable attitude and the ability to provide relevant information about available tourist attractions.

Based on interviews with the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency, it was found that individuals interested in participating in tourism activities are expected to engage in relevant tourism-related orientation and undergo training or workshops related to the field of tourism. This effort is aimed at providing a deeper understanding of tourism to the community and enhancing their knowledge and skills in managing and developing the region's tourism potential. Through these orientation and training processes, it is anticipated that the community will be better prepared and capable of actively contributing to the sustainable and competitive preservation and growth of tourism visits to Bagan Heritage.

The results of interviews with the researcher indicate that the statements provided by tourists align with the plans and expectations established by the management, local residents, and the tourism department at the Bagan Heritage site. The tourism department also emphasized the significance of organizing events or activities aimed at enhancing public awareness about the existing tourism potential in Bagan Heritage. At each tourism destination within Bagan Heritage, both the management

and local residents actively engage in tourism-related activities at their respective locations. The majority of them actively participate in efforts to promote tourism in the area. Local communities are given the opportunity to contribute based on their skills and interests in various fields they pursue.

Based on interviews with the Tourism Department, tourists, managers, local residents, and personal observations, the researcher found that the development of Human Resources (HR) in Bagan Heritage tourism has experienced a significant improvement compared to previous years. Active engagement of both the community and tourism managers in tourism activities has made a substantial contribution to the government's efforts to develop tourism in Bagan Heritage. Through various positive endeavors undertaken at the tourism sites, such as promoting, preserving, and enhancing service quality, they have successfully generated the most significant positive impact—increased tourist visits to Bagan Heritage.

e. Tourism Institutions

Tourism institutions constitute a series of entities tied to the tourism industry, including tourism planning and management. Domestic regulations and public policies play a significant role in positively influencing the development of tourism (Zowislo, 2019). Therefore, tourism institutions need to optimize their roles in tourism planning and management, as such actions can lead to regional tourism growth and subsequently enhance the number of tourist visits. The Tourism Department acknowledges that the presence of tourism institutions provides a clear contribution in supporting various tourism-related activities. Each tourism institution has specific roles and functions according to their respective fields, which collectively offer significant assistance in the realm of tourism activities.

The results of interviews with tourists reveal that the existence of tourism institutions, particularly BTD (Bagan Tempo Doloe), provides significant assistance for their tourist visits. These tourists acknowledge that these tourism institutions play a crucial role in offering more comprehensive and in-depth information about various attractions in Bagan Heritage. With the presence of tourism institutions like BTD, tourists feel more aided in obtaining knowledge about tourist attractions, facilities, accessibility, and other essential information that influence their experience while visiting Bagan Heritage.

Based on the researcher's observations, tourism institutions have already been established, as previously explained. The existence of these institutions provides convenience for both local and out-of-town tourists who visit, and they can also gain more in-depth information about the history and various tourist destinations in Bagan Heritage, thanks to the assistance from these institutions. Managers or local residents in each destination have fulfilled their duties and functions effectively. However, there is a need for development and enhancement in the planning and management of tourist destinations in each location. There are several aspects that need improvement in maintenance to ensure that the heritage sites from the Dutch era can be well-preserved.

In this context, the theory of tourism communication is highly relevant to the situation unfolding in the Bagan Heritage tourist destination. Studies within tourism communication are closely related to the planning and development of tourism undertaken by the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency.

2. Implementation of Tourism Communication Strategies by the Tourism Department Rokan Hilir Regency in Enhancing Tourist Visits to Bagan Heritage

In this discussion, it is essential to note that promotional activities through social media have not reached their maximum potential. There are several weaknesses that need to be addressed, such as the underutilization of the official website for tourism promotion. Additionally, it is crucial to incorporate YouTube and TikTok accounts as part of the promotional strategy, considering the vast number of users on both platforms. Furthermore, the use of Instagram has not fully harnessed its potential due to a lack of captivating content that can engage tourists, such as cinematic videos, beautiful photography, or a well-organized and aesthetically pleasing feed. Although the Instagram account of the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency has 2,146 followers, further efforts are still required to enhance the appeal and effectiveness of promotions through this platform. Despite the suboptimal utilization of online media, the Tourism Department of Rokan Hilir Regency continues to implement effective offline communication. They organize various events, such as leisure walks and traditional boat

burnings, to enhance the number of visitors to Bagan Heritage. These events proceed smoothly and successfully in attracting visitor interest.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the marketing strategy using social media in Bagan Heritage tourism has shown potential but requires further development. The tourist destinations in Bagan Heritage offer attractive features, but improvements are needed in facilities and infrastructure. Accessibility to these destinations is generally good but can be enhanced, particularly in terms of signage. The active involvement of Human Resources has positively impacted the development of Bagan Heritage tourism. While tourism institutions have been established, there is room for improvement. The implementation of effective tourism communication strategies across all destinations is necessary.

5. References

- Astuti, K. A., & Darma, G. S. (2019). Community-based tourism: measuring readiness of artificial intelligence on traditional village. In ... *journal of ...* download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id. [http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=1222990&val=10886&title=Community-based tourism measuring readiness of artificial intelligence on traditional village](http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=1222990&val=10886&title=Community-based%20tourism%20measuring%20readiness%20of%20artificial%20intelligence%20on%20traditional%20village)
- Bungin, & Burhan. (2008). Analisa Data Penelitian Kualitatif. In *Analisa Data Penelitian Kualitatif* (Vol. 7, Issue 2).
- Bungin Burhan. (2019). Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif: Aktualisasi Metodologi Ke Arah Ragam Varian Kontemporer. In *metodologi penelitian kualitatif aktualisasi metodologis ke arah ragam varian kontemporer*.
- Faradies, H. I. (2020). Strategi komunikasi city branding pemerintah kota Pekalongan dalam mempromosikan world's city of Batik. *COMMICAST*, 1(1), 20. <https://doi.org/10.12928/commicast.v1i1.2413>
- Jandevi, U. (2019). Communication strategy to improve women's political participation in Indonesia. *International Journal of Communication and Society*, 1(2), 68–81. <https://doi.org/10.31763/ijcs.v1i2.46>
- Morissan. (2015). Periklanan: Komunikasi Pemasaran Terpadu. In *Jakarta: Prenada Media Group*.
- Morissan, Wadhani, A. C., & Hamid, F. (2010). *Teori Komunikasi Massa: Media, Budaya, dan Masyarakat*. PT Ghalia Indonesia.
- Moro, S., & Rita, P. (2018). Brand strategies in social media in hospitality and tourism. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality ...* <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-07-2016-0340>
- Pendit, N. S. (2002). Ilmu Pariwisata. *Pariwisata*.
- Permatasari, I., Wijayanto, A., & Kristina, D. (2020). The Strengths and Weaknesses of Extensive Reading using Wattpad; Students' Perceptions. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v5i2.292>
- Putri, D. A., Susilowati, M. H. D., & Semedi, J. M. (2021). Tourist attraction and tourist motivation in the Patuha Mountain Area, West Java. *Indonesian Journal of Geography*, 53(1). <https://doi.org/10.22146/IJG.52415>
- Qinyu, S., & Zhuang, X. (2023). Research on strategies to enhance the effectiveness of financial information dissemination under the background of rural revitalization. *International Journal of Communication and Society; Vol 5, No 1: June 2023*. <https://doi.org/10.31763/ijcs.v5i1.1052>
- Rush, & Et.al. (2000). Pengantar Sosiologi Politik. *Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada*.
- Saputra, A., & Roychansyah, M. S. (2022). Penerapan Smart Tourism Destination di Tiga Destinasi Wisata Kota Yogyakarta. *Jurnal Sinar Manajemen*, 9(1), 122–129.
- Scorrano, P., Fait, M., Maizza, A., & Vrontis, D. (2019). Online branding strategy for wine tourism competitiveness. ... *Journal of Wine Business ...* <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWBR-06-2017-0043>

- Sefira Ryalita Primadany, Mardiyono, R. (2013). Analisis Strategi Pengembangan Pariwisata Daerah. *Administrasi Publik*.
- Siska, S. (2021). Hierarchy of human needs in the main character of beauty is a wound by Eka Kurniawan. *Commicast*, 2(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.12928/commicast.v2i1.2734>
- Suharyanto, A., Barus, R. K. I., & ... (2020). Photography and Tourism Potential of Denai Kuala Village. ... *Sciences (BIOHS) Journal*. <http://biarjournal.com/index.php/biohs/article/view/153>
- Suryani, A. I. (2017). Strategi Pengembangan Pariwisata Lokal. *Jurnal Spasial*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.22202/js.v3i1.1595>
- Swacha, J., & Ittermann, R. (2017). Enhancing the tourist attraction visiting process with gamification: Key concepts. *Engineering Management in Production and Services*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1515/emj-2017-0031>
- T.Rochelle. (2017). Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017. *World Travel & Tourism Council*.
- Teguh, M., Anandari, P., & Bungin, B. (2020). Aktivitas Public Relations Di Mall Ciputra World Surabaya. *Communicology: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 8(1), 1–17.
- Wibowo, T. W., Bustomi, A. F., & Sukamdi, A. V. (2019). Tourist Attraction Popularity Mapping based on Geotagged Tweets. *Forum Geografi*, 33(1). <https://doi.org/10.23917/forgeo.v33i1.8021>
- Zowisło, M. (2019). From the volume Editor: Some remarks on sport from its historical-cultural horizon. *Studies in Sport Humanities*, 25. <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0013.7838>