

Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy of the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office in Increasing the Number of Tourist Visitors at Mutiara Beach

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

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This research aims to explore the integrated marketing communication strategy implemented by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office in an effort to increase the number of tourist visitors at Mutiara Beach. The research method used was qualitative with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. The results showed that the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office implements various communication channels, including social media, print and electronic advertisements, as well as direct promotional activities such as tourism festivals and exhibitions. In addition, collaboration with travel agents and local influencers helped to increase the attractiveness of Mutiara Beach. This communication strategy succeeded in increasing tourists' awareness and interest in the destination, which is reflected in an increase in the number of visitors. This research suggests that the Tourism Office continue to strengthen the integrated marketing strategy and consider feedback from visitors for further refinement.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is actively developing its potential as a tourism destination. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2017), Indonesia's current tourism development has increased by 25.68% in the 2015-2016 period (Fathanah, Wahyudi, and Purba 2018). One of the regions in Indonesia that has tourism potential is Central Buton in Southeast Sulawesi Province. The tourism potential of Central Buton includes natural and cultural tourism and is currently developing.

Central Buton Regency is one of the districts in Southeast Sulawesi Province that has a variety of tourism objects. The tourism potential includes Mutiara Beach, which is currently being developed by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office. The local government through the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office has made tourism an icon of regional economic growth. This is because Central Buton, known as the Land of a Thousand Caves, has a thousand and one interesting tourist sites, both natural, artificial and cultural tourism. With so many tourist expots, of course the local government strategy through the Tourism Office makes every effort to increase the number of tourist visitors.

There is currently a beach attraction that is a favourite and often visited by tourists, namely Mutiara Beach in Gumanano Village, Central Buton. This beach has the attraction of white sand and clear sea water. The success of the tourism sector in Central Buton cannot be separated from the role of the Central Buton Regency Government Tourism Office as a multitourism coordinator. It is anticipated that the Tourism Office will implement advanced and effective marketing strategies to promote tourism, thereby increasing the number of visitors to Mutiara Beach.

According to Priansa (2017: 94), communication on marketing is a field that combines communication and marketing science, resulting in a new study called marketing communication. Marketing communication involves using various communication techniques to convey information to the company's target market. Meanwhile, Kotler and Armstrong, as cited by Chrismardani (2014:

178), define marketing communication as a tool used by companies or agencies to inform, persuade, and remind consumers directly or indirectly about the products or brands they offer.

According to Shimp (2010), IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) is Defined as a process encompassing the planning, creation, integration, and implementation of diverse marketing forms communications such as sales promotion, advertising, event publications, and others. Meanwhile, The 4As (The American Association of Advertising Agency) states that IMC is a comprehensive marketing communication planning concept by assessing the role of each form of marketing communication (such as sales promotion, general advertising, marketing, public relations, and others) and combining them to achieve clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact (Belch and Belch 2009).

Therefore, an integrated marketing strategy or Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is needed to achieve a goal in developing and promoting tourism potential in Central Buton. Proper implementation of IMC will certainly support the development as well as maximum promotion of tourism potential in Central Buton, Southeast Sulawesi Province.

The aforementioned considerations motivate the author to investigate the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) activities conducted by the Central Buton Regency Government, specifically by the Central Buton Tourism Office, to increase the number of visitors to Mutiara Beach. This study also aims to understand how the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office promotes Mutiara Beach as a primary holiday destination to attract tourists. This explanation highlights the critical role of marketing communication strategies in tourism development, aiming to achieve goals and attract visitors, thereby positively impacting tourism potential. Therefore, research is necessary to understand how the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office's Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy enhances tourist numbers at Mutiara Beach.

2. Method

According to Bogdan and Taylor, a qualitative approach is a research method that generates descriptive data in the form of spoken or written words obtained through field observations (Moleong, 2008: 3). The collected data is then presented descriptively in a narrative format. This approach excels in presenting narrative data effectively (Santana, 2007: 82). The qualitative research method is particularly descriptive, producing data in the form of words gathered from interviews, documentation, and field observations by researchers. Additionally, this method involves in-depth analysis, allowing researchers to grasp the context and meaning of the collected data. Researchers typically spend extended periods in the field to observe, interact, and conduct thorough interviews with participants. The gathered data is then analyzed through coding and categorization to identify emerging patterns, themes, and relationships. Consequently, a qualitative approach provides a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon, offering a comprehensive and richly detailed depiction.

3. Result and Discussion

Mutiara Beach in Central Buton is a picturesque natural tourist destination in Southeast Sulawesi. Known for its fine white sand, crystal-clear waters, and stunning landscapes, the beach attracts numerous tourists seeking its serene and exotic ambiance. Besides its natural beauty, Mutiara Beach offers various recreational activities such as swimming, jet skiing, and sunset watching. Although infrastructure development around the beach is ongoing, it adds to the allure and tranquility cherished by many visitors. Mutiara Beach is an ideal spot for those wishing to experience the pristine natural beauty of Central Buton.

Interviews with the Head of the Tourism Office, office staff, and local businesses near Mutiara Beach revealed their communication strategy, which utilizes multiple channels including social media, the official website, and collaboration with local media. Emphasizing platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for their wide reach and cost-effectiveness, they employ storytelling to showcase the history and uniqueness of Mutiara Beach to attract visitors. Additionally, the Tourism Office collaborates with local businesses to offer enticing tour packages and partners with educational institutions for research and educational activities at Mutiara Beach. Continuous promotion through various media channels before and during events plays a crucial role in their strategy.

This study aims to identify and analyze the integrated marketing communication strategy implemented by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office to boost tourist visits to Mutiara Beach. Data collected through interviews, documentation, and field observations are presented descriptively in narrative form.

3.1. Presenting the Results

Based on the results of the interview, it was found that the Tourism Office has an important role in carrying out integrated marketing communication strategies to increase tourist visits when conducting tourism promotions. The marketing communication strategy implemented by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office is in the form of advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct and online marketing. Overall, the integrated marketing communication mix includes five elements, each of which has its own uniqueness (Tjiptono, 2015: 392). Here are the five elements of integrated marketing communications:

Advertising. The significance of advertising in marketing lies in its ability to ensure that products or services can reach potential buyers or visitors dispersed widely. Advertising, as defined by Hermawan (2012), encompasses any form of nonpersonal promotion aimed at promoting ideas, goods, or services conducted by a company. Advertising serves as a communication tool utilized by the Tourism Office to promote Mutiara Beach tourism. According to Tjiptono (2015: 399), advertising refers to any form of paid presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services sponsored by an identified entity. In their integrated marketing communication strategy, the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office utilizes platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube for advertising purposes, and has also gained coverage from television media such as Kompas TV.

Seles Promotion. Sales promotion is a communication method employed by the tourism office to offer discounts during significant events when promoting Mutiara Beach tourist attractions. According to Tjiptono (2015: 399), sales promotion involves various short-term incentives aimed at encouraging product or service trials or purchases. In the integrated marketing communication strategy implemented by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office, sales promotions are conducted through diverse activities or events held on important dates such as August 17th, 1st Muharram, Eid al-Fitr, and other significant occasions. These events provide opportunities for the marketing team to promote tourism and offer a 30% discount on entrance tickets for visitors. Major events frequently take place at Mutiara Beach tourist attractions, making it a focal point for significant activities.

Public Relations. Public relations is a program implemented by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office to cultivate a positive image while informing and promoting Mutiara Beach tourism. According to Tjiptono (2015: 399), public relations encompasses various programs aimed at enhancing or safeguarding the reputation of an organization or its offerings. In their integrated marketing communication approach, the Tourism Office engages in public relations activities through collaborations with multiple agencies, negotiations with event sponsors, and outreach efforts to various institutions to promote awareness of Mutiara Beach tourism.

Public relations (PR) plays a crucial role in marketing, as defined by Hermawan (2012), involving a range of promotional activities within a program focused on building an organization's reputation. According to Cutlip and colleagues as cited in Morissan (2010), PR activities encompass publicity, marketing, public affairs, issue management, lobbying, and investor relations, all aimed at maintaining positive relationships with the general public.

Personal Selling. According to Nikels Wiliam, personal selling involves face-to-face interactions aimed at creating, improving, and maintaining mutually beneficial exchanges (Hermawan, 2012). Personal selling serves as a direct sales approach used by the tourism office to promote Mutiara Beach tourism in Central Buton Regency. Tjiptono (2015: 399) further describes personal selling as face-to-face interaction with potential buyers to deliver presentations, address inquiries, and secure orders. In the integrated marketing communication strategy implemented by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office, personal selling activities include engaging with tourism-related agencies, offering complimentary camping experiences, and conducting promotions at various event venues on Mutiara Beach.

Online Marketing. According to Kotler (2009), online marketing involves companies or agencies interacting with consumers through online and electronic media. Internet marketing utilizes internet

technology to deliver messages to a large audience simultaneously and instantly over a specific timeframe. The benefits of using the internet as a promotional platform are significant. The Tourism Office engages in online marketing communication via the internet, disseminating promotional messages through email, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups. These messages contain details about various promotions available at Mutiara Beach. Information is shared through Instagram profiles, Facebook pages, and email addresses targeting potential tourists. The database utilized includes email addresses, Instagram, and Facebook accounts collected from guestbook data during beach visits. This enables Pokdarwis Jurug Village to broadcast updates via email, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups regarding tourism developments at Mutiara Beach.

How to Attractively Promote the Social Media Instagram of the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office. The Central Buton Regency Tourism Office's @visitbuteng Instagram account showcases the natural beauty of Mutiara Beach, which is dazzling with white sand and clear sea water. In this account, visitors can find inspiring visual content, such as photos of tourist activities, stunning sunsets, and unique stories about local cultural activities. Each post is designed to pique the interest of potential visitors by showcasing an authentic snapshot of life around Pantai Mutiara. By using creative hashtags such as #ExploreButonTengah and #PantaiMutiara, @visitbuteng not only promotes this destination to domestic and foreign tourists but also builds a community that cares about preserving the nature and local culture of Central Buton Regency.

The Instagram account @visitbuteng of the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office is also an active platform in informing interesting events such as cultural festivals, photography competitions, and water sports activities held around Mutiara Beach. Followers of this account can follow the latest developments and get detailed information about each event held. In addition, @visitbuteng also acts as a source of inspiration for travellers to plan their visit to Central Buton Regency, by providing travel tips, recommendations for local eateries, and information on available accommodation. With active interaction from its followers, the account is building a solid online community and positively supporting the growth of tourism in the area.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that the integrated marketing communication strategy employed by the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office has successfully boosted the number of tourists visiting Mutiara Beach. Utilizing social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube has enabled the tourism office to reach a broader audience at a cost-effective rate. Collaborating closely with local businesses to offer tour packages and other amenities has also yielded positive outcomes. Observations in the field reveal that visitors are satisfied with the facilities provided and enjoy the natural beauty of Mutiara Beach.

The Central Buton Regency Tourism Office has implemented a highly effective integrated marketing communication strategy aimed at increasing tourist visits to Mutiara Beach. This strategy leverages major social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube as primary channels for promoting the destination to a wide audience. Regularly updated content showcases the beach's natural beauty through captivating photos and videos depicting its atmosphere. Embracing technology and digital media as central tools in this strategy has expanded opportunities to reach and engage with target audiences effectively and promptly. Through these platforms, promotional efforts not only resonate with domestic tourists but also capture the interest of international visitors keen on experiencing Mutiara Beach. Creative content presentation has been instrumental in fostering strong engagement with followers and enhancing brand visibility for the destination.

Implementing this integrated marketing communication strategy will significantly benefit the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office in achieving their objectives. By integrating various marketing communication elements such as advertising, sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing, and online marketing, they can build robust brand awareness, attract more visitors, and enhance overall visitor satisfaction. This approach also provides flexibility to adapt to evolving market dynamics or specific external conditions, such as holiday seasons or local events. Leveraging technology and digital media enables the Tourism Office to efficiently reach their target demographic and foster greater interaction with potential visitors. Overall, the implementation of an integrated IMC strategy will support the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office in effectively and sustainably increasing visitor numbers at Mutiara Beach.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of an integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy has significantly contributed to the increased number of visitors at Mutiara Beach. The Central Buton Regency Tourism Office has successfully employed diverse marketing communication tactics, including advertising, sales promotions featuring discounts and contests, public relations initiatives, direct marketing via email, and digital marketing efforts to achieve their goals.

Strategic advertising, attractive sales promotions, and robust public relations campaigns have effectively heightened awareness of Mutiara Beach. Direct marketing through email campaigns and visitor satisfaction surveys has played a role in maintaining and enhancing visitor numbers. Furthermore, leveraging social media platforms and digital advertising has enabled the Tourism Office to reach a broad audience.

Throughout the implementation process, the Central Buton Regency Tourism Office has adapted their strategies to accommodate changing market trends and holiday seasons, demonstrating flexibility in their efforts to boost visitor numbers. Thus, the integrated IMC strategy has demonstrated its effectiveness in consistently increasing visitor arrivals at Mutiara Beach.

In conclusion, the success of an integrated marketing communication strategy in promoting tourism destinations like Mutiara Beach serves as a valuable model for other tourism agencies seeking to attract more visitors.

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