



Digital activism for sustainable tourism: Management of social media Instagram @travelxism through voluntrip activities

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Digital Activism
Instagram
Sustainable Tourism
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Voluntrip

The advancement of information technology is rapidly transforming corporate communication activities. Social media platforms like Instagram have become a practical alternative for companies to promote a social movement, as demonstrated by the Instagram account @travelxism. This research aims to understand how digital activism efforts for sustainable tourism are carried out by the Instagram account @travelxism through Voluntrip activity content. The research method employed is qualitative with a case study approach. The research findings indicate that the practice of digital activism in fostering sustainable tourism through Voluntrip activities includes the following: 1) Build a social media account that focuses on environmentally friendly travel by utilizing the feeds, stories, highlights, reels, and mentions features; 2) Implementing the concept of sustainability, which includes volunteerism, charity, news, and visual action; 3) Optimizing visual actions that contain sustainable management, social-economy, culture, and environmental content; 4) Voluntrip content is uploaded regularly 3-4 times a week during prime time.

1. Introduction

The advancement of information technology has facilitated communication through various tools and methods, eliminating geographical and time constraints. As a result, they can quickly and easily receive disseminated information (Supriyadi et al., 2021). One manifestation of this technological progress is the emergence of social media, which has transformed corporate communication practices and rapidly revolutionized Public Relations strategies. Social media is a tool corporations can utilize to implement direct communication targeting stakeholders (López-Arceiz et al., 2020).

One of the industries that utilizes social media is the tourism industry. Many people can explore the attractions and culture of a destination through social media platforms (UNWTO, 2015). One aspect that is receiving increasing attention is sustainable tourism, especially after the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) announced in 2017 to the global community to strive to raise awareness of the contribution of sustainable tourism (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017).

In the modern world, sustainable tourism has become a central concept in development and tourism that significantly impacts the economy, environment, and society (Hastuti et al., 2022). This concept is supported by the research findings of Utami (2022); they assert that the key to sustainable tourism is to leverage tourism for higher purposes, not just recreation. The concept offered by Higgins and Desbiolles is the management of tourism to account for ecology, human well-being, and the future of the environment.

In previous research, we retrieved information from articles published based on the articles indexed in Scopus over the last 10 years related to digital activism and sustainable tourism (Tsiakali, 2018). Dambrauskienė et al., (2022) explained the transformation of whale hunting traditions into whale

tourism as an alternative to preserving cultural heritage through sustainable tourism. Wearne's article makes it clear that it refers to the context of tourism and environmental issues. Environmental issues and tourism are also discussed by Chen & Wu (2021), who examines how greenhouse gas emissions from tourism travel impact the climate. His research results are quite interesting, showing that land travel, especially trains, is more environmentally friendly than using air travel routes.

If Pahrudin et al., (2021) primarily focus on environmental issues, Nieamah & Purwoko (2021) delve more into innovation as a part of sustainable tourism. The issue of sustainable tourism offers a diversity of new and original tourism, one of which is to engage the participation of local communities with the goal of enhancing a strong sense of identity for tourists. It is the strength of these local communities that plays a forefront role in promoting the concept of sustainable tourism, as seen in Shahid et al., (2022), who explains that sustainable tourism is oriented towards an educational role, such as reducing the exploitation of animals through knowledge-based education regarding the prohibition of the animal trade.

As previously explained, sustainable tourism extensively discusses environmental issues, community participation, and education. However, ecological issues within the scope of sustainable tourism should also encompass a campaigning role. Nowadays, the issue of sustainable tourism can be campaigned for by utilizing internet technology (Tiwari et al., 2021). The form of activity that operates technology to disseminate digital messages is digital activism. Dluzewska & Rodzos (2018) describe digital activism as a social movement using technology to voice opinions. What is particularly interesting is that digital activism is associated with social activities that employ technology, like the issues of sustainable tourism, which emphasize environmental concerns, exploitation, and educational roles through internet platforms. T.Rochelle (2017) explain that political, economic, and social norms are contextual factors that influence digital activism.

One of the social media platforms increasingly used to promote travel destinations and campaign for sustainable tourism principles is Instagram. In 2021, there were 1.21 billion monthly active users on Instagram, accounting for more than 28 percent of global internet users, and there will be 1.44 billion monthly active users, comprising 31.2 percent of global internet users by 2025 (Statista, 2023). With its primary focus on visual content, Instagram allows users to share photos and videos of their travels while conveying the importance of preserving the environment, culture, and local communities.



Fig. 1. The search for recent articles on sustainable tourism in the last ten years, from 2013 to 2023, was conducted (source: Scopus.com analyzed in VosViewer).

Figure 1 shows the research through scholarly articles indexed in Scopus over the past ten years. Using the VosViewer application, four clusters emerged. The first cluster featured age, trophy hunting, digital activism, legacy, and limitation discussions. The second cluster focused on academic activism, sustainable transformation, and tourism. The third cluster encompassed studies on climate justice, insight, and intergenerational rights. The fourth cluster centered around research on a sustainable future, tourism development, and whaling heritage. In the last decade, there have been approximately 15 articles related to sustainable tourism, including the variable of digital activism. Indicates that

digital activism and sustainable tourism issues still need to be more researched. Over the ten years, the prominent issues have revolved around climate, sustainability, development, and heritage.

Based on the explanation above, this research will focus on examining the digital activism efforts undertaken by the Instagram account @travelxism through the Voluntrip activities by delving deeper into how the social media management strategy of @travelxism can influence the perceptions and participation of its followers in supporting sustainable tourism.

@travelxism is an Instagram account that focuses on travel and exploring tourist destinations and has attempted to adopt a sustainable tourism approach in its social media management strategy. Through the Voluntrip activity content, the Instagram account @travelxism aims to engage its followers in being more conscious of sustainability in tourism and encouraging positive actions that support the principles of sustainable tourism.

The Voluntrip activity is part of sustainable tourism aimed at creating sustainable tourism through environmentally conscious activities. Since tourism contributes to 8% of carbon emissions on Earth, environmental activities such as beach clean-ups, mangrove tree planting, sea turtle releases, and the like are necessary.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative method to elucidate phenomena Kriyantono (2019) with a case study approach to acquire in-depth knowledge (Rahardjo, 2017). The research object is the Instagram social media account @travelxism from August 2022 to August 2023. Data collection techniques include interviews Sugiono (2016) and documentation using purposive sampling. The interviewees are the social media management team of Instagram and the CEO of Travelxism. The collected data is then analyzed using the flow analysis models technique by Miles & Huberman (2012), and data source triangulation is conducted to ensure data validity (Moleong, 2017).

3. Result and Discussion

Building an Environmentally Based Travel Social Media Account

@travelxism is an Instagram account that seeks to address environmental issues stemming from tourism, such as environmental degradation, waste, and, more specifically, carbon offset concerns. Tourism contributes 8% of global emissions, with 49% attributed to transportation services (T.Rochelle, 2017). The environmental issues addressed are then digitally campaigned through content on Instagram. The content on @travelxism advocating for environmental issues revolves around the "Voluntrip" activities.

Voluntrip comprises a series of environmentally conscious activities based on sustainable tourism. The primary objective of Voluntrip activities is to offset the carbon footprint generated during Travelxism's tourism activities. Another goal is to promote sustainable tourism practices through content on the Instagram account @travelxism. This approach is known as digital activism.

Thurlow & Mroczek (2012) explains digital activism as activities organized within digital networks by non-state actors motivated by digital versions of traditional activism practices. Digital activism enables high interaction and networking through posts, discussions, and digital campaigns.

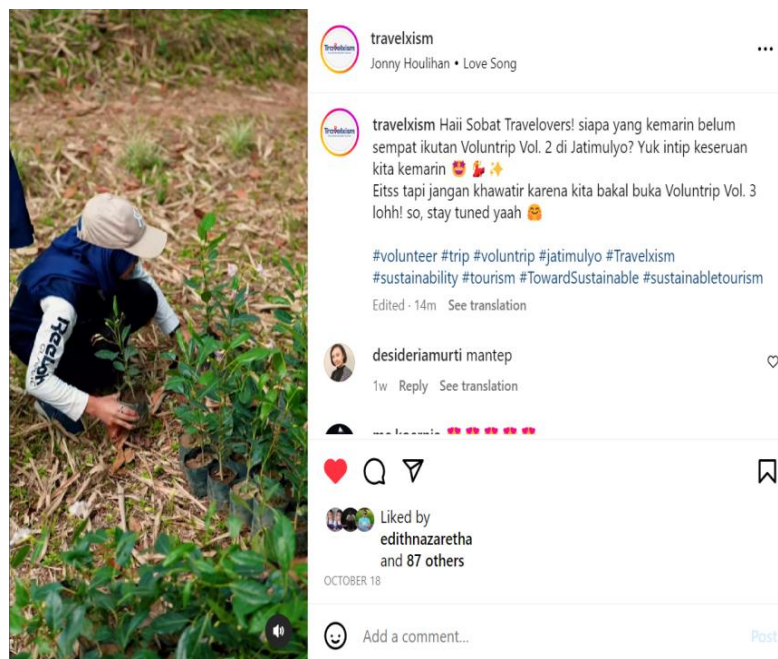


Fig. 2. Digital activism content through voluntrip activities by planting trees on Instagram

Source: Instagram @travelxism

The first digital activism effort undertaken by the @travelxism account is to optimize its Instagram social media management. In this regard, @travelxism maximizes the utilization of Instagram features and the packaging of Voluntrip activity content. Instagram features related to the Voluntrip activities include the feed, story, and reel features for conveying sustainable tourism messages. In the activities To enhance public trust, the mentioned feature is employed.

The feed feature employs images, text, and weighty descriptions to provide education awareness and create a valuable content archive that continually reminds @travelxism followers about these issues. The story feature uploads real-time updates about ongoing Voluntrip activities. Although this feature only lasts for 24 hours, there is a highlight feature that can permanently archive stories. The reel feature utilizes solid visual elements and narrative in short videos to convey messages in an entertaining, informative, and trending manner.

In efforts to build public trust, @travelxism utilizes the mentioned feature, which involves tagging other usernames or accounts to link to them directly. In this case, the accounts mentioned by @travelxism are their media partners, such as the Instagram accounts @visitingjogja, @genpiindonesia, and @stp_ampta_yogyakarta. These accounts have high credibility, strengthening @travelxism's digital activism efforts.

Digital activism efforts go beyond establishing a well-managed social media account by uploading content or actions on the platform. A robust and Sustainable concept or plan should underpin them. @travelxism recognizes the importance of external participation, whether in terms of labor or funds. Consequently, their first step is to seek volunteers and charities. Afterward, they construct news reports to communicate activity updates and conclude with visual representations summarizing the overall activity information, as seen in the following model.

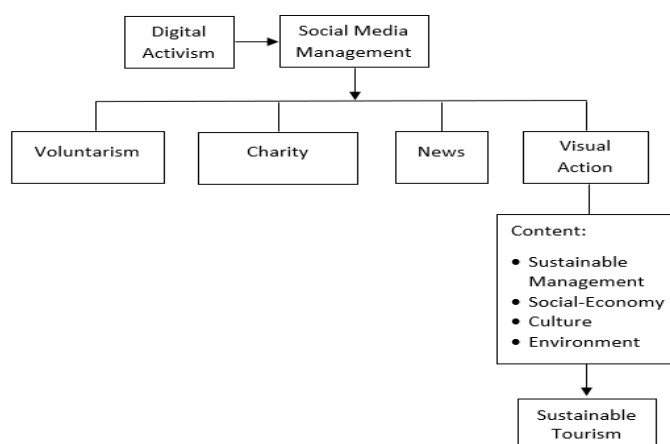


Fig. 3. The digital activism model through Voluntrip activity content. (Researcher's analysis results).

The strength of digital activism carried out by the @travelxism Instagram account lies in the visual actions, which include videos presenting information about sustainable tourism practices from Voluntrip activities. The presence of these visual actions aims to disseminate and implant information in the minds of followers about the content that is intended to be conveyed. Below is the content or the substance of the @travelxism Instagram account's visual actions:

Emphasizing Sustainable Management Practices

The sustainable management information displayed ensures that actions do not harm or deplete resources. In every Voluntrip activity content, the use of buses is consistently showcased. Public and mass transportation, such as buses, can transport many people simultaneously, making it more fuel-efficient. Therefore, its use can help reduce the number of private vehicles on the road, which, in turn, can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. Sustainable public transportation, like buses, is an example of sustainable management practices that can contribute to environmental goals. The @travelxism account effectively presents this information, encouraging responsible tourism practices and urging travelers to choose eco-friendly accommodations and reduce their carbon footprint.

Fostering Cooperation to Enhance Social-Economy

The social-economic information presented focuses on the involvement of external parties that impact the local economy. The @travelxism account demonstrates meaningful engagement with the local communities of tourism destinations in various ways. First, they involve local communities as tour guides, allowing them to actively participate in providing tourist experiences to visitors. Second, local community involvement in tree-planting events aligns with sustainable principles to empower the local community. Third, the account promotes local SME products and services, helping boost the economic income of the local community and providing incentives for continuing sustainable practices. Overall, involving local communities and supporting the local economy can effectively set an example of sustainable tourism practices for Instagram followers.

Showcasing Culture Sustainability

The cultural information presented encompasses the unique characteristics of the local destination that upholds environmental-friendly principles and minimizes plastic use. The @travelxism account provides information about traditional local food consumed during Voluntrip activities, such as "Nasi Dekon," a typical dish from the Jatimulyo Village. By highlighting and promoting environmentally friendly and plastic-free local culinary experiences, the @travelxism account contributes to public awareness of the importance of preserving culture and the environment in tourist destinations. Furthermore, this can enhance the local community's income, in line with the principles of sustainable regional economics in sustainable tourism.

Raising Awareness about the Environment

The environmental information presented primarily focuses on tree-planting activities, which are highlighted also. Tree planting is an effective way to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The trees planted also serve as oxygen providers, offering ecological benefits and creating a more comfortable experience for visitors. They, in turn, serve as a reminder of the importance of balancing exploration and environmental preservation in tourist destinations. By emphasizing tree planting as part of sustainable tourism, the @travelxism account contributes to increasing public awareness of the significance of environmental conservation in the face of climate change and global warming, aligning with the principles of sustainable tourism.

Efforts to maximize the visual actions of Voluntrip activities on the @travelxism Instagram account are also supported by message determination, specific targeting, and a strategic approach through personalized greetings for followers and particular hashtags.

Determining Messages and Targeting Specific Audiences

The information presented by the @travelxism Instagram account regarding Voluntrip activities is centered primarily on carbon offset. This information serves as the key message in the digital activism efforts. The choice of this issue is based on the actual activities carried out by Travelxism as a traveler and explorer of tourist destinations. Focusing on the carbon offset issue demonstrates that the @travelxism account aims to educate its followers about this environmental concern. @travelxism provides information on how the contributions from Voluntrip activities can help reduce the impact of carbon emissions, as reflected in the visual actions.

The target audience of the @travelxism Instagram account consists of students, environmental enthusiast communities, and media partners who also focus on the carbon offset issue. It Aligns with Travelxism's mission of involving more stakeholders in practicing sustainable tourism (Belias et al., 2023). Establishing a target audience is essential for effective information dissemination (Oborin, 2023). The three primary target audiences for Voluntrip content are perceived to share similar characteristics. Students serve as agents of change in society, environmental enthusiast communities are groups focused on environmental preservation efforts, and media partners assist in spreading information. All three can connect based on common interests, beliefs, and shared interests (Xu, 2023).

Greeting names and hashtags as a strategic approach

The @travelxism Instagram account employs a unique and specific way to deliver and optimize information. First, they have given a unique name to the Voluntrip audience, referring to them as "Rangers." This distinctive designation for the Voluntrip audience as "Rangers" is an intelligent step in building a solid community. Special appointments can motivate @travelxism followers to engage in sustainable efforts actively. Beginning each content post with this term creates a friendly atmosphere and a strong sense of closeness and reminds the audience of the account's mission to support sustainable tourism. It is an effort to maintain awareness and attention to sustainability issues every time followers see a post from the account (Freeda Maria Swarna M et al., 2023).

Second, hashtags are #TowardSustainable, #SustainableTourism, and #Voluntrip. Using specific hashtags like #TowardSustainable, #SustainableTourism, and #Voluntrip effectively organizes content and makes it easier for the audience to find relevant information about sustainable tourism issues. Hashtags also assist in expanding the reach of the content, as other Instagram users interested in these issues can discover @travelxism's posts through these hashtags.

After determining the form of visual actions, the information presented to be driven by specific messages and targets, and the use of unique names and hashtags, the final step taken by the @travelxism account is to upload content. It is crucial to determine how far the information will spread as part of digital activism efforts to promote sustainable tourism practices. The @travelxism account uploads Voluntrip content 3 to 4 times a week. Content is uploaded regularly to create continuity in communication with followers. It is one of the key elements in digital activism efforts because it allows the account to maintain awareness and followers' attention regarding sustainability issues. This consistency also creates expectations among followers about when they can expect new Voluntrip activity content. The content is scheduled to be posted in the late afternoon as the "prime time" or during the moments when @travelxism followers are most active on Instagram. It can enhance the reach of the content.

4. Conclusion

The digital activism efforts conducted by the @travelxism account through the Voluntrip activities involve several strategic steps. Firstly, they established a social media account focusing on eco-friendly travel, utilizing key features such as feeds, stories, highlights, reels, and mentions. Secondly, they execute the sustainability concept, starting with the search for volunteers, establishing charity initiatives, building news, and concluding with visual actions. Thirdly, they optimize visible actions as a digital activism strength through multiple phases, including determining the information presented, specifying messages and target audiences, and creating unique names and hashtags. Fourthly, they upload content 3 to 4 times weekly during the "prime time."

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