The Internet Marketing of emerging Local Muslim Tourist Destination in Banyuwangi, Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the use of internet marketing in emerging local Muslim tourist destination in Banyuwangi, Indonesia, named Santen Beach. Since 2017, Santen Beach has been branded by the local government as Sharia Beach; the beach that complies with Islamic Sharia values. This sharia branding of the beach has brought an interesting idea of looking at how the management of the beach utilizes internet in order to promote the beach and supports its branding. This research employs qualitative approach, by interviewing beach's officers and visitors. The results show that the use of internet marketing in Santen Sharia Beach has not been optimal.

Keywords: Internet marketing, Internet, Tourism, Destination

El marketing en Internet de UN destino turístico musulmán local emergente En Banyuwangi, Indonesia

Resumen

Este documento tiene como objetivo analizar el uso del marketing en Internet en un destino turístico musulmán local emergente en Banyuwangi, Indonesia, llamado Santen Beach. Desde 2017, el gobierno local ha calificado a Santen Beach como Sharia

Beach; La playa que cumple con los valores de la sharia islámica. Esta marca sharia de la playa ha traído una idea interesante de ver cómo la administración de la playa utiliza internet para promover la playa y respaldar su marca. Esta investigación emplea un enfoque cualitativo, al entrevistar a los oficiales y visitantes de la playa. Los resultados muestran que el uso del marketing por internet en Santen Sharia Beach no ha sido óptimo.

Palabras clave: Marketing en Internet, Internet, Turismo, Destino

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the world's major and fastest growing sectors (Cornelissen 2005). Some scholars maintain that tourism has potential to be a means for improving regional economies, particularly through its ability to create employment, export earnings and revenue for both the government and individuals (Cornelissen 2005). In Indonesia, tourism is one of Indonesia's mainstay industries. According to Badan Statistik Indonesia (Indonesian Statistical Agency), in 2018, the number of international tourists who visited Indonesia was 12.27 million (Kemenpar, 2019). This number has increased by 2.63% on September 2019 (Kemenpar, 2019).

One of tourist destinations in Indonesia is Santen Beach in Banyuwangi, East Java. Since 2017, the local government has branded the beach as sharia beach; the beach that complies with Islamic values (Battour & Ismail, 2016). The idea of creating and branding the beach as Sharia Beach has initially been triggered by the fact that Indonesia

is the biggest Muslim country in the world. This may open an opportunity to create the destination that suits and comforts Muslim market (Garjito, 2019).

When it was just opened, the beach was full of visitors. The number of visitors reached 90 visitors per day, with the income of Rp. 27.000.000/month. Unfortunately, the number of the beach's visitors has gradually gone down. In 2018, the number of the visitors was down to 75 people per day. Certainly, it affected the profits of the beach, which fell to only Rp. 9.000.000 per month (interview with the staff of the beach).

The decrease of the number of visitors may indicate that there is inaccuracy in marketing and promotion management. As a right publication will support the marketing of destination (Morrisan, 2010), an interesting publication of the beach is supposed to support the development and marketing of the beach. Therefore, this paper discusses how the utilization of technology, in this case is the use of internet and website, in marketing Santen Beach. This research will provide both practical as well as theoretical contributions. In practical side, this research will provide feedbacks and input for the local beach officers to promote the destination well. In theoretical side, this paper will enhance knowledge in the development of local tourist destination as well as Islamic tourism literature in general.

Tourism marketing has a vital role in the success of destination. It refers to any expenses and activities that are designed to expand tourism. This includes advertising, publicizing, or distributing information for the aim of attracting tourists; developing strategies to

increase tourism; operating tourism promotion agencies; and funding marketing of special events and festivals managed to attract tourists (Morrisan, 2010, Praveenkumar, 2015).

Currently, the internet has recognized effective for advertising, marketing, distributing goods, services, and information (Alcántara-Pilar, Armenski, Blanco-Encomienda., & Del Barrio-García, 2018). The information-intensive nature of the tourism industry advises a significant role for the Internet and Web technology in promoting and marketing a destination (Alcántara-Pilar, Armenski, Blanco-Encomienda., & Del Barrio-García, 2018). Tourism is regarded to be right for marketing on the web because of its heterogeneity, intangibility and dependence on the visual manifestation of tourism products and services (Morgan, & Pritchard, 2002). The unique characteristics of the internet such as an easy access, low cost, global reach and information abundance has made it the vital communication channel for online travelers and destination-marketing organizations (Heung, 2003). Additionally, potential tourists can simply interpret the perceived value of different destinations and their tourism products and services by using the internet (Heung, 2003). Thus, the internet is considered to be the first point of providing information for tourists (Buhalis & Licata, 2002).

One of the functions of tourism promotion is sending messages about a destination (Morrissan, 2010). Promotion is needed by an organization to inform a new product, to remind if the product is available for the target consumer, and to persuade them to buy (Yuksel and Akgul, 2007). Related to that, Butler (2006) noted that in a context

of building and development of a tourist destination, tourism promotion will be affected by condition and situation of a destination and it will indicate what kind of phase the destination is. Information about destination is a factual representation of factors that affect tourism service business (Yuksel and Akgul, 2007).

Interactive marketing is an online activity and program which is designed to involve customer or prospective customer and directly or indirectly ask for awareness, improve the company's image, or sell products and services (Kotler & Keller, 2009:174). The newest marketing communication channel is the electronic channel. The advance of technology, mainly the internet through the facility of World Wide Web (www), makes interactive communication through mass media possible. Internet provides market and consumers bigger chances to interact and individualize in a communication (Adisaputro, 2010:280). The usage of website and internet is essential in order to promote tourist destination. Internet could be the main tool as the reference for getting information about a destination (Morissan 2010).

Besides as a promotional media, internet's function is also as an independent marketing communication instrument. Due to its interactive characteristic, internet becomes an effective means to communicate to the consumer. Marketing practitioner also uses internet to do a more effective and efficient direct selling, personal selling, and public relation activities. Nevertheless, advertisement in mass media still has important role as a means of inviting the consumer to visits the company's website (Morissan, 2010:23-25).

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs qualitative approach. A variety of research methods combining semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis were employed to provide triangulation of data. Interviews and observations were conducted on 2019. Information was taken from bureaucracies, communities, and visitors. Data analysis involved transcription and reduction in Bahasa Indonesia, and then translated into English for presentation, interpretation, verification and conclusion. The interviews were transcribed in Indonesian and translated into English by the researcher, a native speaker of Bahasa Indonesia. Purposive sampling was conducted to select the local tourism officers. They were purposively selected based on their role as a tourism board officer who has knowledge or is in charge of tourism marketing of Sharia Beach and destinations in Banyuwangi.

3. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

In this digital era, an interactive marketing is expected to give significant impact toward the development of tourist destination (Morissan, 2010). This idea has been understood well by the management of the beach. This is evident in frequently used statements of the officers such as "internet is important" and "online media is incredible for promoting the beach". The same expressions that show agreement toward the usefulness of the internet also come

from the visitors. These are, "the online media is vital nowadays", "the internet is significantly important". These similar responses may indicate that there were similar awareness both from the officers and the residents that internet is vital for promoting tourist destination.

However, even though the officers of the beach recognize that the internet is vital, the management of the beach does not fully apply the interactive marketing. This is confirmed by the absence of special website for the beach. There is no particular website that provides complete information about Santen Beach. The only available website is focusing on informing all tourist destinations in Banyuwangi as general. The promotion of Santen Beach in the website only appears as a part of Banyuwangi tourism website, which is available on https://banyuwangitourism.com/ (see Picture 1). This finding is irony. As mentioned above, as all involved in tourism marketing of the beach have been aware of the importance of internet for destination, the fact shows that they have chosen not to use the internet maximally.
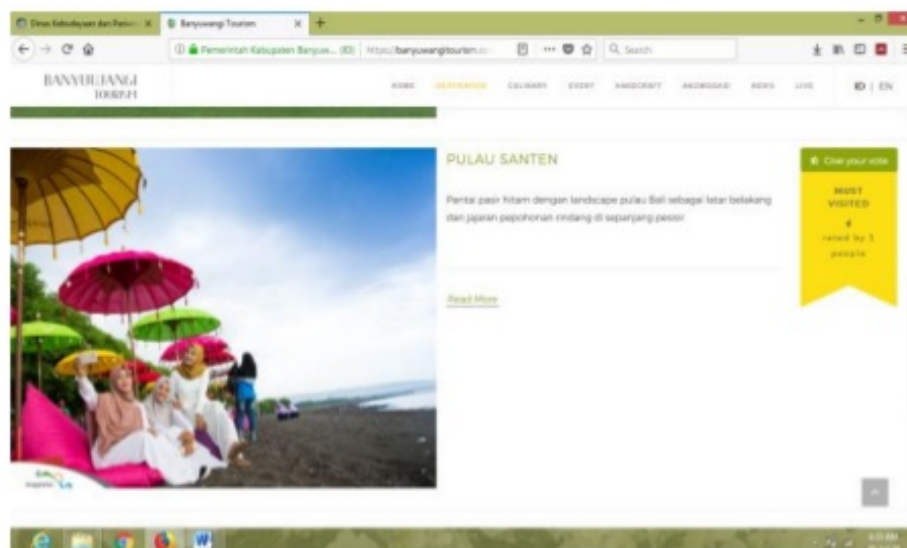

Figure1: Web of Santen Beach

The absence of website the Santen Beach creates disappointment amongst visitors as the website only provides little information about the destination.

I do not see any much information at the beach. They should create much more interesting web so we are interested to visit there (Indah, visitor). There is not much information at the web. We want to know more such as the history of the beach, what's on the beach, but not much info about it. Disappointed as I don't get any completed information about the beach (Linda, visitor).

As the visitors used the word "should" indicates that they ask for more complete information. Also, the statements above show their confusion if the information is lacking. The voices of visitors above also provide input for the management as the management should create better website that shows clear and complete information about the beach. In this case, the website that may provoke positive perception about tourist destination (Alcantara-Pilar et.al, 2018) as well as may be functioned as the provider and link between visitors and the destination becomes less optimal for the beach. The above statement, '…as I don't get any completed information about the beach' strengthens the idea that the available website fails to provide information for the visitors. Thus, the connection and positive perception about tourist destination is weak or may be lost.

Even though there is no special website for Santen Beach, the promotion of the beach has also utilized social media. The promotion has been conducted through social media like Instagram, WA,

Facebook, You tube and other social media. Some of the interviewees confirm that.

I advertise the beach by promoting it on my social media account. I don't do that often. I do that once in a while (Yulian, the Management of Sharia Beach)

I promote it by using WA (WhatsApp) group. I share the information about Sharia beach to my friends in my WA group, like my senior high school group (Fendy, Village Leader)

I utilize my personal social media. My friends of Santen beach management also post (news about Santen beach) to their social media (Yulian, the Management of Sharia Beach).

Besides, the information of the beach also spreads by the visitors' private blogs. Many visitors admitted that they read about the beach through visitors' blogs and its reviews. Not from the website originated from the beach management.

I read the reviews on people blogs…the picture of beach looks nice..then I come here (Nuri, visitor)

Yes, I know this beach from Instagram and blog. There are also some online news which talk about this Santen Sharia beach (Indah, visitor).

Figure 2: Sharia beach's visitor's posting.

Source: Documentation of visitor

The use of blogs for promoting destinations supports the findings of the study conducted by Lin and Huang (2006). The study shows that internet blog written by Taiwanese engineer who traveled to Greece, unexpectedly, becomes a hit and helps to promote tourism to Greece.

The aforementioned quotations reveal that the information distribution efforts about Santen Sharia Beach are still conducted partially; only through the management's or visitors' social media. There are no any massive and specific efforts from the side of the beach management to promote the destination online. The reliance on visitors' information for promotion may bring difficulties as the content of promotions could not be controlled. Those who are happy with the experiences may share good experiences, but those who have negative experiences may share negative information.

Confirming this minimal promotion on web and internet, the management argues that this action is costly and therefore it is hard for them to afford that. Indeed, the existence of an interesting website which provides complete information about the beach is a particular challenge for the management.

Many things to prepare for online promotions, right, such as human resource, fund, right (Bandi, the Management of Sharia Beach)

Indeed, the promotion through website needs a lot of money. We prefer banner and billboard anyway (Rivan, the Management of Sharia Beach)

Similar to the response of Rivan above, The Government of Cultural and Tourism Office of Banyuwangi also stated that Santen Beach promotion effort is mostly conducted more through billboards and magazines, rather than through online media.

We advertise the beach by placing a big billboard at Blambangan Park about the list of tourist destinations in Banyuwangi. Besides that, we also promoted the beach through magazines which exhibit the beauty of Sharia beach. Not so much using online (Rivan, the Management of Sharia Beach)

There was not so much online promotion, I guess. However, the local government placed billboards in the Blambangan Park, containing list of all destinations in Banyuwangi. Not only focusing on Sharia Beach (Fendy, Village Leader).

Relying on manual and conventional as well as traditional marketing has made Santen Beach less known by wide community. The management should think to redesign the website of the Beach

and improve its promotion through online media. This new method of marketing is completely different from traditional methods, but has the potential for huge impact for the destinations. All the management of the beach as well as the local Government should change their way to promote the destination from traditional methods to online marketing method. Using non-conventional, high-impact approaches can achieve a benefit in the competitive tourism market by taking the promoted destinations closer to their target visitors (Lin, Huang, 2006).

The less used of online promotion also shows that Sharia Beach is not the priority of the government of Banyuwangi. As the staff of Tourism and Cultural Board of Banyuwangi maintains that there is no special treatment in promoting Santen Beach, as they have to pay the same attention to other destinations in Banyuwangi. The remarks below show this.

We look after tourism in Banyuwangi in general, for all destinations, including Santen Beach. We are responsible for introducing each service to tourists with every promotion carried out. We also collaborate with travel tours and drivers here to invite their guests to destinations, especially a new destination in Banyuwangi (Andi, Banyuwangi Tourism and Cultural Department)

What is clear is that we have a travel catalog on the website. We facilitate tourists to visit Banyuwangi such as bringing them for a city tour and so on. We also have Pokdarwis (community to manage tourism) that usually promote tourism in Banyuwangi (Andi, Banyuwangi Tourism and Cultural Department)

In terms of the management of the beach, the findings show that there is also a sense of "it is not my business" in the management of Beach. Many responses answered that statement. People only concern to what that would be their task, and not really care to other people duty. This causes some reluctant to help or even care with the works of other.

I was appointed as the manager who is in charge of the Sharia Beach. I am here only assigned to manage the finance and facilities of the Sharia Beach. The rest is like a promotion is the duty of Banyuwangi Tourism Board. So, all promotion becomes their business. Not us. (Hudi, the management of the Beach)

Promotion is our duty. Bu, remember not all destinations in Banyuwangi has become our responsibility to look after (Farid, Banyuwangi Tourism Board)

The remarks above reveal that there is a lack of coordination amongst those who are in charge of promotion of the beach. Again, the promotion of the beach has been conducted partially. It has only been conducted by some appointed staff. While promotion and marketing should involve all staff to handle, in this beach it is conducted partially. People only care what it becomes their business. Also, there is a lack of clarity and absence of instructions with regard to promotional strategies of the beach in Banyuwangi which indicates the low priority afforded marketing. It is little wonder, therefore, that the management of the beach and the tourism board officers prioritized the other destinations rather than Santen Beach.

In addition, Sharia branding which is considered unique branding for the beach, in fact, is not quite mentioned by the officers. It may reveal that the officers do not pay attention towards the beach branding. Consequently, the branding has been weak and unheard by the visitors as well.

The promotion through internet though is totally different from traditional approaches, but has the potential for enormous impact. All marketing personnel should move beyond traditional methods and be much more original when seeking to attract international tourists. Using non-conventional, high-impact approaches can achieve an advantage in the competitive tourism market by bringing the promoted destinations closer to their target customers (Lin, Huang 2006).

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to analyze the use of internet in promoting Santen Island. The research found that Santen does not emphasize the use of technology or website as the means of promotion. Lack of funding and the position of Santen Beach as a non-prioritized tourist destination have made Santen beach promotion through website does not become the main focus. Sharia branding, however, is not something that attracts the attention from the local government and the management.

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