

Cultural Hegemony of the Karo People in Building Tourism Brands on Instagram

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the cultural hegemony of the Karo people in building their tourism brand on Instagram. The type of research used in this article is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Through the analysis of content shared by the Karo community on Instagram, this study identifies patterns of dominance of Karo nature and culture images in efforts to promote their tourism destinations. The results of the study reveal that the cultural hegemony of the Karo people in building tourism brands on Instagram is based on three factors. These include the dominance of local culture representing the beauty of nature, culture, customs, and arts; the use of local language and terms; and the participation of the community in efforts to preserve the environment and utilize social media as a promotional tool as an impact of globalization and modernization in Karo tourism content on Instagram. Overall, this research provides deep insights into how the cultural hegemony of the Karo people influences the building of their tourism brand on Instagram.

Keywords: Tourism Brand, Cultural Hegemony, Karo Community



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as the largest archipelago country in the world, boasts natural and resource wealth that makes it one of the popular tourist destinations. Although these potentials and resources have not been fully optimized, the tourism sector in Indonesia remains vast. It includes cultural tourism and natural beauty that certainly provide significant benefits if managed effectively [1].

In the current era of globalization, the tourism sector plays a role in national economic growth. Tourism is one of the strategic sectors, contributing to foreign exchange earnings, creating jobs, and stimulating investment growth. To advance this sector, the government undertakes various efforts and designs policies to support tourism progress in each region [2].

Based on the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 10 of 2009, Chapter II Article 3, it is stated that the main objective of tourism is to meet the physical, mental, and intellectual needs of tourists through recreational and travel activities, as well as to increase state income to achieve community welfare. Tourism is expected to drive local economic growth, and with effective management of remarkable natural resources, it will generate revenue and promote sustainable development in the region [3].

Karo Regency in North Sumatra is renowned as one of the tourist destinations visited by many tourists. Its enchanting natural beauty attracts visitors from various regions to enjoy the available potentials at the location. The more exposed the tourist attractions, the better the management, encompassing natural, culinary, historical, and artificial tourism. Particularly, the tourist destinations in Gundaling I, Berastagi District, Karo Regency, North Sumatra.

The presence of tourism is expected to increase the foreign exchange revenue of Karo Regency, especially in Berastagi District. The Karo Regency Government has issued a regional regulation, namely Karo Regency Regional Regulation Number 05 of 2012 concerning Business Service Fees. This regulation governs the development of tourism businesses with the aim of increasing regional income from tourism object fees and general public income, expanding job opportunities, and supporting tourism business activities. This regulation also aims to introduce and utilize the natural, cultural, agricultural, and regional craft potentials. Indirectly, tourism makes a significant contribution to the original revenue of Karo Regency [4].

The use of social media Instagram as a platform to promote tourism by the Karo community can reflect their cultural dominance in the shared content. The phenomenon where local cultural elements, such as traditional clothing, traditional houses, and customary activities, become an integral part of Karo tourism branding on Instagram. This reflects the efforts of the Karo community to build a unique and authentic tourism image that reflects their cultural identity [5].

Furthermore, it can be observed how the Karo community actively engages in promoting their tourist destinations through Instagram. They might use specific hashtags, share personal experiences, or invite their

followers to visit tourist spots in Karo, all of which contribute to building a strong tourism brand on the platform.

In tourism marketing, communication plays a very important role as it is one of the main aspects of promoting tourist destinations. Seomanagara, as quoted in Farida Hamid U. (2014), emphasizes that a good understanding of communication is crucial to ensure that the conveyed information can have the desired impact and achieve the set targets. Effective communication in tourism marketing should be able to enhance knowledge and insights and encourage positive attitude or behavior changes in consumers [6].

Communication can also be viewed as a synergistic effect between two or more individuals. As social beings, humans highly value interaction; through such interaction, communication and message delivery or exchange of thoughts occur to achieve a common goal [7].

Social media is a digital platform or service that allows users to create, share, and exchange information, content, ideas, and more in the form of text, images, or videos. It enables users to connect and interact with others online, forming social networks, and participating in various activities such as sharing thoughts, commenting, liking, and discussing various topics. Some examples of social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. Social media has become an essential part of daily life for many people worldwide, influencing how we communicate, interact, and access information [8].

Instagram has also consolidated its position among the top social media platforms since the report in October 2022, with the company recently announcing that it has 2 billion monthly active users. This places the platform on a level comparable to WhatsApp, which remains stable, although Meta now reports that WhatsApp attracts 2 billion daily active users, making its monthly user count likely even higher [9].

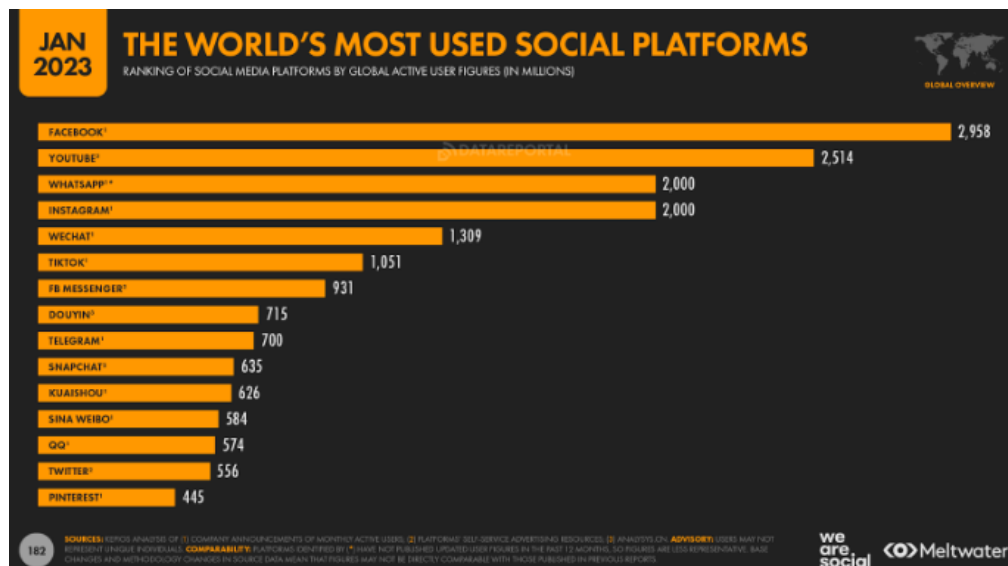


Figure 1. Social Media Users Chart

Based on this, social media becomes a highly potential platform for promoting tourism due to its wide reach and ability to reach various market segments. Many people use social media as a source of information about tourism development trends. With various experiences they gain when visiting tourist attractions, they often share them through their personal accounts. Unknowingly, people who see these posts may become interested in visiting the tourist spots [10].

New media, as a convergent platform and emerging social media, has significant benefits in facilitating internet access, expanding services, and becoming a more advanced tourism branding tool than traditional media [11]. Especially, social media applications like Instagram attract many users due to continuous innovations by the platform. While other social media platforms like Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Twitter remain relevant in sharing information, Instagram becomes a popular choice due to its focus on visuals and creativity that allows users to stay up-to-date with the latest trends. Thus, the use of social media, especially Instagram, can be an effective tool in promoting tourism and creating a positive image for tourist destinations [12].

The utilization of technology as a means to promote various beneficial aspects of a product in the future will become a common activity, considering the advancements in social media that ease the marketing

process, including tourism marketing [13]. Social media even helps provide clear information through attractive content in the future. The potential of social media is very important in efforts to introduce the tourism industry sector, especially in Gundaling I Village, Berastagi District, Karo Regency, North Sumatra.

The Karo community, one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia, has a rich and unique cultural heritage, including customs, language, art, music, and distinctive traditions. The cultural hegemony of the Karo community can also influence various aspects of life, including social relationships among community members, as well as their interactions with outside communities [14]. In the context of tourism, the cultural hegemony of the Karo community can be a major attraction for tourists interested in exploring and experiencing the unique culture of the Karo ethnic group.

Despite strong cultural potential, the lack of knowledge and skills in effectively using social media to build a tourism brand can hinder promotional efforts. Therefore, to address these challenges, a holistic and collaborative approach is needed between the government, local communities, tourism practitioners, and social media experts. Investment in training, digital infrastructure, creative promotional campaigns, and concrete steps for branding tourism through Karo culture is necessary.

Based on the above explanation, the problem statement in this article is how the cultural hegemony of the Karo community builds a tourism brand on Instagram.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the supporting data in this article, there are several previous studies with similarities and differences. Among them is the study titled "The Role of the Department of Tourism and Culture of Karo Regency during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Case Study in Gundaling Hill)" by [3]. The difference between this previous article and the current one lies in the substance of the discussion. This article discusses the government's role in enhancing the Karo tourism sector amid COVID-19.

Next, the article written by [6] with the theme "Promotion Strategy for Tourism Development through Social Media in Suka Nalu Village, Barusjahe District, Karo Regency." The difference between this previous article and the current one lies in the discussion that uses the 5P theory promotion strategy and only uses social media for mere promotional purposes.

The following article discusses cultural hegemony in the communication of the Karo community in Guru Kinayan Village, Karo Regency [5]. The difference in this research lies in the substance of the discussion. The previous article focuses on cultural hegemony in communication within the Karo community, with a case example in Guru Kinayan Village, Karo Regency. Additionally, the aim of the first study might be more focused on understanding how Karo culture influences communication patterns at the local level, with a focus on one particular village.

Then, the article on utilizing Instagram as a promotional medium for the tourism potential of the Sleman Regency Tourism Office [15]. The difference between this previous study and the current article highlights the efforts of the Sleman Regency Tourism Office in utilizing the Instagram social media platform as a promotional tool to enhance the tourism potential in the area. Using various research methods such as observation, interviews, and content analysis, the study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of using Instagram in promoting tourism in Sleman Regency.

Next, the article discussing Instagram as a promotional medium for the South Sulawesi Department of Culture and Tourism [16]. The difference between this previous article and the current one lies in the substance and object of discussion. The previous article discusses how the Department of Culture and Tourism in South Sulawesi utilizes the Instagram social media platform as a tool to promote tourism destinations and cultural heritage in the region. This study might cover Instagram usage strategies, types of content posted, interactions with followers, and the impact on promoting tourism and culture in South Sulawesi.

Finally, the discussion on tourism branding strategies through Instagram in Parepare City [17]. The difference between this previous article and the current one lies in the substance of the discussion. The previous article discusses how to utilize social media to promote tourism.

All these previous articles provide relevant data and ideas to the author. Therefore, the urgency of this discussion is expected to help the Karo ethnic culture and other cultures in developing business forms in the tourism sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article employs qualitative research with a content analysis approach. In qualitative research, the researcher can delve into understanding how the culture of the Karo community plays a role in building their tourism brand through Instagram social media [18]. This research article relies on two data sources: primary

data sources and secondary data sources [19]. To obtain primary data, the research starts from Instagram accounts of individuals, communities, or institutions involved in promoting Karo tourism. Data from posted content, captions, hashtags, and user interactions can provide insights into how Karo culture is reflected in brand building for tourism [20]. Additionally, interviews are conducted with the Karo community, tourists who have visited Karo tourism destinations, and local stakeholders such as destination managers, local government, and tourism business owners. Content analysis includes articles, reports, and promotional materials related to Karo tourism in print and online media. Data from this content can be used to understand how Karo culture is represented and interpreted in the tourism context [21].

Secondary data sources to support this research are obtained from academic literature such as journals, books, and articles related to Karo culture, cultural tourism, tourism branding, and the use of social media in tourism promotion [22]. Relevant data collection techniques to understand how the cultural hegemony of the Karo community in building a tourism brand on Instagram social media include direct observation of the content posted by Instagram users related to Karo tourism. This can provide an understanding of how Karo culture is represented and promoted through the platform. Conducting content analysis on posts, captions, hashtags, and user interactions on Instagram accounts related to Karo tourism can help identify patterns, trends, and themes related to Karo culture in the tourism context [23]. Furthermore, interviews with Karo community figures, tourism stakeholders, and tourists who have visited tourism destinations in Karo can provide direct insights into perceptions, experiences, and expectations related to the development of the Karo tourism brand [24].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian intellectual and political theorist of the 20th century, developed the concept of cultural hegemony as part of his broader theoretical framework on social hegemony. According to Gramsci, hegemony is the process by which the dominant group in society manages to maintain and strengthen its position of power by controlling the beliefs, values, norms, and culture embraced by the general public [25].

Based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, several key concepts emerge, including culture, hegemony, ideology, intellectuals, and the state. Therefore, Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony illustrates the complexity of the relationship between power and culture in society and clarifies the importance of cultural analysis in understanding the dynamics of power and social change.

The rapid development of technology has changed the culture and lifestyle of contemporary society. According to survey data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), 63.52% of business actors utilize internet services for digital marketing, both through social media and marketplaces [26].

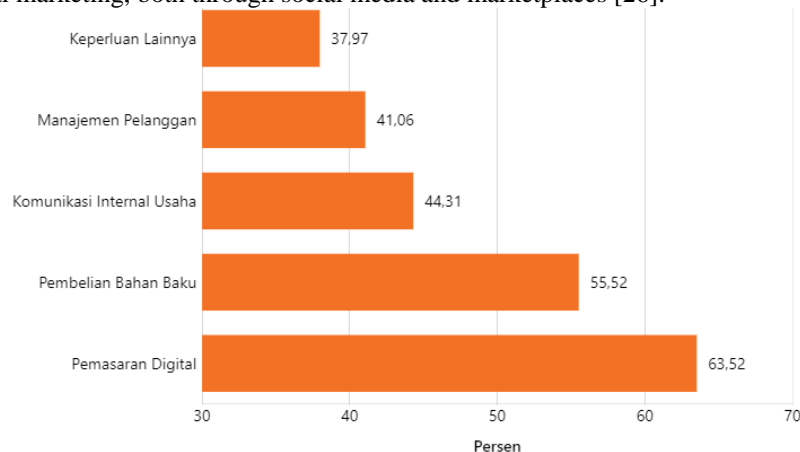
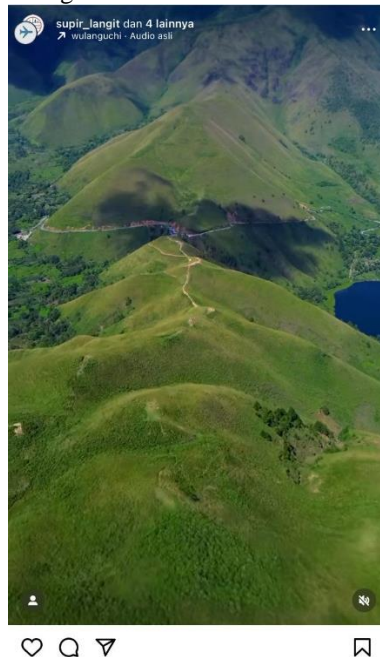


Figure 2. Digital Entrepreneurs Utilizing the Internet for Business

Based on the data presented above, it can be seen that the digital economy impacts lifestyle changes, including marketing methods, transactions, and other public practices. In the context of the cultural hegemony of the Karo community in building a brand image on social media, it has successfully attracted other communities and foreign tourists. This development is due to their fertile and well-maintained homeland, which attracts tourists to visit or vacation. Therefore, in the observations conducted on the content uploaded on Instagram, several findings include:

1. Local Cultural Dominance

The Karo people are one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the North Sumatra region, Indonesia. The Karo people are believed to originate from the Proto-Malay ethnic group that migrated to North Sumatra in prehistoric times. They are part of the Batak ethnic group, which historically has diverse cultures, languages, and traditions. The original region of the Karo people is located in the Karo highlands, particularly around Karo Regency and parts of Deli Serdang Regency. This area is known for its beautiful natural scenery, including volcanoes such as Mount Sinabung and Mount Sibayak, as well as fertile fruit and vegetable gardens. This can be demonstrated by the image below.



Source: Accessed Through Instagram Application on Visit Sumut Account

The use of social media, especially Instagram, has become an essential strategy in promoting tourism destinations. Amid globalization efforts, local communities often strive to maintain and promote their unique culture and heritage. This study aims to explore how the Karo community uses Instagram social media to build and promote their tourism brand by highlighting the dominance of local culture.

The Karo community has an organized social structure, emphasizing family values and mutual cooperation. They have a strong customary system that regulates various aspects of social life, including marriage, inheritance, and traditional customs.



Source: Accessed Using Instagram Application on Carrame1 Account

Content uploaded by Instagram users highlights the richness of the local culture of the Karo community, including traditional customs, typical cuisine, natural tourism, and cultural arts such as dance and music. Additionally, the reason for the high intensity of visitors and viewers of the natural beauty content in the Karo region is due to visitors frequently sharing their photos when visiting the Karo region, then sharing those experiences in the form of videos or photos, so many individuals or community groups who follow those accounts see and know the natural beauty of the area. This indirectly gives a stimulus response to other users who see the content, then respond by thinking that the Karo region is an area with beautiful nature and attractive tourist destinations.

Based on cultivation theory, used to understand how long-term exposure to mass media, particularly television, can influence a person's perceptions and worldview:

- a) Perception of Karo Nature: Through continuous exposure to the content of Karo's natural beauty on social media, users can develop cultivated perceptions about the area. They may perceive Karo nature as very beautiful and attractive, even if they have never visited in person. Repeated exposure to stunning natural scenery can influence their perception of the area.
- b) Idealization of Nature: Cultivation theory also states that mass media often idealize the depiction of the world they present. In the context of Karo nature, social media content may tend to present breathtaking and spectacular natural scenery without showing the negative aspects or environmental issues that may exist. This can cause users to develop a very positive view of Karo nature without considering the more complex reality.
- c) Influence on Environmental Policies and Practices: Continuous exposure to the content of Karo's natural beauty on social media can also influence attitudes and behaviors related to the environment. If users are inspired by the displayed natural beauty, they may be more inclined to support sustainable policies or practices in maintaining and protecting the natural environment of Karo.

Although cultivation theory provides valuable insights into how mass media can influence perceptions and attitudes, it is essential to remember that its influence can vary among individuals and depend on factors such as cultural background, personal experience, and other environmental factors. Moreover, the interactive nature of social media can moderate the cultivation influence, as users can participate and interact with the content they consume.

2. Use of Local Language and Terms

The official language of the Karo community is the Karo language, which belongs to the Austronesian language family. They have distinctive cultural wealth, including customs, dance, traditional music, and famous wood carving arts. Karo culture is also influenced by religion and traditional beliefs, with many rituals and traditional ceremonies still practiced today. Besides natural beauty, the Karo ethnic group has its language. This is a form of heritage from ancestors and the richness within it. One iconic language and term that visitors always remember is "mejuah-juah."

Based on interviews with sources from the Karo region, "Mejuah-juah" in its meaning encompasses physical and mental well-being, peace, tranquility, high spirits, and balance and harmony between humans and their fellows, the surrounding nature, and God. These three aspects form an inseparable unity.

3. Community Participation

Based on observations, the rapid development of social media today is recognized by the Karo community as a tool that can be used to present their culture, tourism, and other aspects so that the community participates in building the tourism image of their region on the Instagram platform.



Source: Accessed Through Instagram Application Journal Karo

Through various visual content and narratives they share, they present the natural beauty, cultural wealth, and unique experiences that can be enjoyed in Karo. Using local language and terms strengthens their cultural identity and attracts the attention of users worldwide. As local tourism ambassadors, they enthusiastically promote tourist destinations such as hot springs, beautiful lakes, volcanoes, and fertile fruit gardens. Not only sharing content, but the Karo community is also actively involved in interacting with other users, providing recommendations, and answering questions. By being supporters and developers of the tourism community on social media, they play a crucial role in introducing and promoting Karo tourism to the outside world, making Instagram one of the main platforms in building their tourism brand.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Although the Karo community is actively involved in building their tourism brand on Instagram, there are several aspects that need to be critically examined. The dominance of natural and cultural images of Karo in shared content may attract tourists' attention, but it also raises questions about the diversity and complexity of tourist destinations in the region. Does the image built through Instagram truly reflect the reality on the ground, or is it merely a selectively chosen representation? Furthermore, the utilization of local language and culture can be a strength in reinforcing Karo identity, but in this era of globalization, can these efforts withstand the dominant currents of global culture that may erode the authenticity and uniqueness of local culture?

The impacts of globalization and modernization are also critical concerns, as some content shows the influence of modern lifestyles and global trends in tourism. This raises questions about the extent to which the development of Karo's tourism brand follows conventional models of modern tourism, which may compromise environmental sustainability and cultural authenticity for commercial gain. Thus, while the active participation of the Karo community in promoting their tourism is commendable, it is essential for them to remain critical and astute about the dynamics at play and to ensure that their efforts in building the tourism brand do not sacrifice the cultural and environmental values they inherit.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data presented in the previous information, three factors have been identified as the hegemony of the Karo community in utilizing Instagram as a medium to build their tourism brand. These include the dominance of local culture that represents natural wealth and local customs and culture, the use of language and terms that become iconic and memorable to other visitors, and the participation of the community in building that image.

Additionally, the active participation of the Karo community in promoting their tourism on Instagram is a positive step in increasing the visibility and popularity of Karo's tourist destinations. The dominance of

natural and cultural images of Karo, as well as the utilization of local language and culture, strengthens the identity of Karo tourism and attracts tourists seeking authentic experiences.

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