

## OPTIMIZATION OF INSTAGRAM USAGE AS A DIGITAL MARKETING PLATFORM IN LUMBAN SILINTONG VILLAGE

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### Abstract

The village of Lumban Silintong has great tourism potential, but it has not been maximized optimally, especially in terms of digital marketing. The village is facing several issues in promoting its tourism potential, including unappealing content and the absence of posts on the official Instagram account in 2024. This research aims to identify the constraints in promoting Lumban Silintong Village and create strategies to optimize the use of Instagram as a digital marketing platform. The research method used is qualitative, with data collection through interviews, observations, and literature studies. The data analysis technique is thematic qualitative analysis. The constraints in promoting Lumban Silintong Village indicate three main issues: first, the lack of engaging content due to minimal creative content production; second, insufficient attention and concern from local human resources towards tourism development; and third, fragmented promotion carried out by residents through personal social media accounts, which are not well-coordinated. The strategy to optimize the use of Instagram includes improving content quality through digital training, training human resources to enhance digital marketing skills, and more centralized management of promotions through the village's official accounts. Recommendations include consistent management of the Instagram account, regular training for local human resources, and collaboration with influencers and external parties to expand the promotional reach. The implementation of these strategies will help maximize the tourism potential of Lumban Silintong Village through more effective digital marketing. These findings also offer valuable insights for other rural tourism destinations aiming to enhance their digital marketing efforts and boost their tourism sectors.

**Keywords:** Constraint, digital marketing, instagram, optimization, strategy

### A. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is defined as the social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes ((UNWTO), 2008). This study adopts the definition of tourism by ((UNWTO), 2008). In the digital era, marketing has evolved significantly, with digital marketing playing a central role in attracting customers and engaging them through various online platforms (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatem, 2015). Social media marketing, particularly on platforms like Instagram, has become essential for promoting brands and destinations (Chaffey, 2011).

Social media offers opportunities to increase visibility, share information, and engage with customers through conversations, content sharing, and building relationships (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Its potential is harnessed for enhancing visibility, disseminating information, obtaining feedback, event invitations, and prompt responses (Masele & Rwehikiza, 2022). The digital-native generation frequently uses these platforms to search for

information and make purchasing decisions (Ibrahim, Ahmad, Hassan, Noor, & Ramli, 2022); (Juhaiddi, et al., 2024)).

Social media in tourism influence, the behavior of visitors, service providers, offer stakeholders, and tourism destinations. In the tourism industry, social media have made a huge impact on the way people search for and share information, and even make decisions about their destination. Since tourism-related products and services are relatively expensive and involving, travelers generally collect and review copious information for their decision-making processes (Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2019).

Among them, since its launch in 2010, Instagram has grown to become a popular photo-based platform for brand awareness (Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, & Murphy, 2018) and cultural tourism promotion (Lazaridou, Vrana, & Paschaloudis, 2017)

Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has played a significant role in the new era of media funded by advertisers driven by the algorithmic and participatory culture of digital platforms. Although it did not have an advertising model when Facebook (now Meta) bought it for \$1 billion in 2012, marketers and advertisers had already been creatively experimenting with Instagram as a platform to interact with audiences. They also envision how advertising, analytics, and retail services can be integrated into the platform, approaching Instagram not just as a marketplace for attention and participatory promotion culture, but also as a new type of virtual "department store." Two years after they acquired it, Facebook gradually introduced a paid advertising model, integrating Instagram's promotional culture into Facebook's practices and business model. Instagram now generates more than a quarter of Meta's advertising revenue. (Frier & Grant, 2020). Popular social networking sites include Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, where destination marketing organizations, including national tourism organizations, post information on attractions and events, while inviting followers to share their own experience and opinion through images, videos or text (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013) (Roque & Raposo, 2016) (Uşaklı, Koç, & Sönmez, 2017)).

In the village of Lumban Silintong, there is a significant problem regarding promotion and content management. Based on interviews with members of the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis), it was found that the content on the official Instagram account of Lumban Silintong Village is considered unappealing. The Pokdarwis member assigned to manage the account stated that there is no creative content capable of engaging the audience and sparking interest in visiting the village. The last post on the village's official Instagram account was on February 21, 2024, which makes the existing content less engaging and unable to attract potential tourists. Additionally, villagers tend to promote the tourism potential through personal social media accounts, which are often uncoordinated and less professional. This reflects a lack of attention to tourism development among local human resources, negatively impacting the village's image and appeal as a tourist destination.

Therefore, a comprehensive strategy is needed to optimize the tourism potential of Lumban Silintong Village through digital marketing. This research aims to identify the constraints faced by the village in promoting its tourism potential and to develop strategies for optimizing the use of Instagram as a digital marketing platform. The goal is to improve the quality of promotion and attract more tourists to the village by enhancing engagement through the Instagram platform.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative method, which allows the researcher to understand and delve deeply into the issues faced in promoting the tourism potential of Lumban Silintong Village through digital platforms. The approach used is descriptive, which means providing an in-depth description of the existing phenomena based on data obtained from informants and field observations. Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: interviews, observations, and literature study.

Interviews were conducted involving key informants consisting of two members of the Pokdarwis (tourism awareness group), a village resident, and the village head. The selection of

these informants is based on their roles and knowledge regarding tourism and village development. They were chosen for their direct involvement in the tourism promotion activities, providing a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and potential in developing digital marketing through Instagram. The inclusion of these individuals is essential for gaining insights from both the management and community perspectives. The population in this study consists of residents and tourism actors directly involved in tourism promotion activities in Lumban Silintong Village, including managers and village community members who play a role in digital marketing. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling, a method of selecting respondents or informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This technique allows researchers to select individuals who possess deep knowledge or experience regarding the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to obtain rich, in-depth information from participants who can provide significant insights related to the research topic (Creswell, 2014).

The selected informants include village social media account managers, villagers actively promoting tourism, as well as digital marketing experts and local tourism practitioners. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with these selected informants, observations of promotional activities carried out by the village community, and literature studies to examine digital marketing strategies and social media management in the context of tourism.

The data analysis technique used is thematic qualitative analysis. Data analysis in qualitative research involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction includes sorting and filtering information relevant to the research focus. Afterward, the filtered data is presented in the form of narratives, tables, or diagrams to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships. The final stage is drawing conclusions, where the researcher analyzes the presented data to draw relevant conclusions and formulate recommendations based on the findings. (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

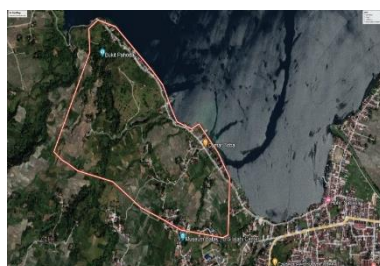
### C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before discussing the formulation of the problem, here is the location of the Lumban Silintong tourist village and the attractions available in the Lumban Silintong village.

At the beginning of 2007, Lumban Silintong became a popular recreational destination due to its beautiful natural scenery. "The tourist attraction has a selling point that can be compared to other tourist locations, so it's no surprise that this place has become the top choice for enjoying a holiday with family." The white sandy beach is a choice for a recreational destination located three kilometers from the city of Balige. In addition to the clean white sand, there is the "Pahoda" hill that rises up, offering a stunning panorama of the surroundings of Balige city that can be clearly seen from the top of Pahoda Hill. However, it is unfortunate that the minimal arrangement has caused tourism in Lumban Silintong to start to fade. As time went by, several new tourist villages were formed around the city of Balige, which had a significant impact on the tourist village of Lumban Silintong.

Lumban Silintong village is located in the Balige sub-district, Toba Regency. The boundaries of Lumban Silintong village are as follows:

1. North: Lake Toba
2. South: Hinalang Village, Pagar Batu Village
3. East: Pardede Onan Urban Village
4. West: Longat Village, Tarabunga Village



**Figure 1. Map of Lumban Silintong Village**

Source: The tourism awareness group of Lumban Silintong Village, 2024

Accessibility to the Lumban Silintong Tourism Village is via a paved road as illustrated in the following picture:



**Figure 2. Accessibility to the Lumban Silintong Tourism Village**

Source: Researcher Document, 2024

Some tourist attractions in Lumban Silintong Village include Pahoda Hill, Lumban Silintong Beach, and Jongguran Waterfall.



**Figure 3. Pahoda Hill, Lumban Silintong Beach, and Jongguran Waterfall.**

Source: Researcher Document, 2024

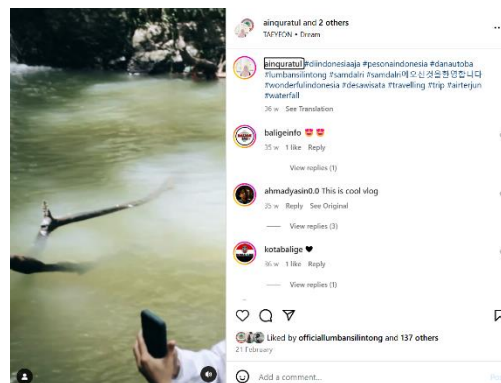
The digital promotion efforts carried out by the Lumban Silintong Village Government are focused on introducing Lumban Silintong Tourism Village through social media, especially Instagram, by managing the village's official account to share engaging and informative photo content, while also utilizing other platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok.

Based on observations in October 2024 on the Instagram social media platform, the followers of Lumban Silintong Tourism Village 229 people. Here is the Instagram social media of Lumban Silintong Tourism Village.



**Figure 4.** Promotion of Lumban Silintong Tourism Village  
Source: Instagram Lumban Silintong, 2024

The official village Instagram account last posted on February 21, 2024, as illustrated in the following picture:



**Figure 5.** Post on the Instagram account of the Lumban Silintong tourist village  
Source: Instagram Lumban Silintong, 2024

One of the main strategies to promote Lumban Silintong is through its official Instagram account. However, observations in October 2024 revealed that the Instagram account has only 229 followers, and the last post was made on February 21, 2024. This highlights a major gap in content creation and engagement, which limits the effectiveness of digital marketing.

The study identified three key obstacles to effective digital marketing for Lumban Silintong. First, the lack of creative content on the official Instagram account has led to limited audience engagement. The account is not regularly updated, and posts are unappealing to potential visitors. Second, local human resources are not sufficiently involved in tourism development efforts. Many residents lack the necessary skills and knowledge to manage digital marketing effectively, and their participation is often limited due to insufficient incentives. Third, tourism promotion is largely managed through personal social media accounts, which are uncoordinated and lack professionalism.

The findings of this study align with the work of (Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, & Murphy, 2018), who emphasize the importance of Instagram for increasing brand awareness and enhancing the image of tourism destinations through visual content. Similar research by (Kietzmann, Hermkens,

McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011)) also underscores the value of direct interaction between organizations and audiences on social media to foster engagement and trust, which is critical in tourism marketing. Additionally, studies by (Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2019) highlight that tourists often rely on social media content and reviews to make informed destination decisions, stressing the importance of high-quality and consistent digital content.

To address these challenges, this study proposes several strategies to optimize Instagram as a digital marketing tool for Lumban Silintong. First, enhancing the content quality by providing targeted digital training to local human resources will help improve the creativity and visual appeal of Instagram posts, making them more engaging for potential visitors. Second, skill development for local human resources is crucial, with digital marketing training aimed at equipping community members with the necessary skills to effectively manage and promote the village's Instagram account. Third, implementing centralized management of promotions will ensure a more structured and coordinated approach to managing the official Instagram account, leading to consistent and professional content updates. Lastly, collaborating with influencers and external partners will help amplify the reach of the village's promotional efforts, extending its visibility to a broader audience and attracting more tourists.

These strategies align with best practices in digital marketing for tourism and can significantly enhance the village's visibility and attractiveness as a travel destination. By improving content quality and increasing consistency in promotional efforts, Lumban Silintong can better position itself in a competitive tourism market.

In conclusion, while Lumban Silintong has a wealth of tourism potential, its digital marketing efforts need to be strategically optimized to enhance engagement and attract more visitors. Through the implementation of the proposed strategies, the village can harness the full potential of Instagram and other digital platforms to achieve greater success in tourism promotion.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The constraints in promoting Lumban Silintong Village's tourism potential can be summarized into three key issues: first, the lack of engaging content due to minimal creative content production; second, the insufficient attention and involvement of local human resources in tourism development; and third, the promotion efforts conducted by the village residents being limited to personal social media accounts, which are uncoordinated and lack professionalism. The strategy to optimize Instagram as a digital marketing platform for Lumban Silintong Tourism Village includes enhancing the quality of creative content through targeted digital training, improving the digital marketing skills of local human resources, and implementing more centralized management for promotions through the village's official accounts. To improve the effectiveness of these efforts, recommendations include consistent management of the Instagram account, regular training for local human resources, and collaboration with influencers and external parties to expand the reach of promotional activities. By implementing these strategies, Lumban Silintong Village is expected to better harness its tourism potential and enhance its appeal to potential tourists, ultimately improving its visibility and competitiveness through more effective digital marketing.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the long-term impact of digital marketing strategies on local community engagement and tourism growth. Additionally, practical implementation of these strategies in other similar rural areas could provide valuable insights into the scalability and adaptability of the proposed approach.

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