



ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL TOURISM COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AT SWEEMBATH NATURAL BATHING TOURISM IN NAGA SOPA VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes digital tourism communication management at Sweembath Natural Bathing Tourism in Naga Sopa Village, with particular attention to how digital communication is planned, implemented, and evaluated in a locally managed natural tourism destination. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving tourism managers, local community members, tourists, and village officials. The findings reveal that digital communication management has utilized Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok as promotional channels; however, its implementation remains fragmented and unsystematic. The main weaknesses are reflected in the absence of structured content planning, inconsistent content production, limited audience segmentation, and the lack of formal evaluation based on digital engagement indicators. These limitations indicate that digital media are still used primarily as spontaneous promotional tools rather than as part of an integrated tourism communication strategy. The study contributes to digital tourism communication studies by highlighting the managerial challenges of community-based natural tourism destinations in rural contexts. Practically, the findings suggest the need to strengthen digital communication capacity, develop a content calendar, improve digital infrastructure, and establish periodic evaluation mechanisms to enhance destination visibility and visitor interest

Keywords: *digital tourism communication; communication management; social media; tourism promotion; community-based tourism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a strategic sector that not only serves as a source of economic growth but also as a space for the production of local identity, social interaction, and the development of regional potential. In the context of regional development, the success of a tourist destination is determined not only by its natural beauty or the availability of facilities, but also by the management's ability to build effective communication with potential tourists.

Communication is a crucial instrument in promoting a destination's appeal, shaping its image, and influencing people's decisions to visit. Therefore, tourism communication management needs to be understood as an integral part of destination development strategies, particularly for local tourist attractions that are still managed simply and based on community participation (Yasir, 2021).

Developments in information and communication technology have shifted tourism promotion patterns from conventional models to faster, more interactive, and participatory digital models. Social media such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and various other digital platforms are now the primary channels for tourists to seek information, compare destinations, read reviews, and develop initial perceptions of a destination. In this context, digital tourism communication no longer functions solely as a tool for disseminating information but also as a space for shaping experiences, image, and audience engagement. Digitalization enables tourist destinations to reach a wider market, but at the same time, it requires message planning, content consistency, audience literacy, and digital data-based evaluation for effective promotion (Syaiful et al., 2025).

The Sweembath Natural Baths in Naga Sopa Village, Bandar Hulan District, Simalungun Regency, is a local natural tourism destination with potential for development through digital tourism communications. The main attractions of this destination lie in its natural springs, clear water, pristine environment, and the socio-cultural values inherent in the lives of the local community. However, this potential is not yet fully supported by a planned and sustainable promotional management system. Simple tourism management, limited supporting facilities, and suboptimal use of digital media present challenges in increasing destination visibility. However, for village-based tourist destinations, digital media can be a crucial tool for expanding promotional reach without the high costs associated with conventional promotion.

Several previous studies have shown that digital media plays a significant role in the development of natural tourism destinations and tourist villages. Maulana et al. (2025) found that integrating digital marketing communications and community participation can increase the attractiveness of tourist villages, despite still facing limitations in human resources and digital infrastructure. Huwae et al. (2024) also emphasized that promoting natural tourism destinations through social media can increase destination visibility, but its effectiveness is highly dependent on consistent content management. Meanwhile, Hia et al. (2025) showed that Instagram, as a visual medium, can increase tourist interest in hot spring destinations, although its management is not always strategic. Similar findings are also seen in research by Ansori et al. (2025), Islah Perwita et al. (2025), and Tanjung et al. (2024), all of which emphasize the importance of digital strategies in strengthening tourism promotion.

Although these various studies have discussed the use of social media and digital communication strategies in tourism promotion, studies specifically analyzing digital tourism communication management in village-based natural spring destinations are relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused on the effectiveness of social media as a promotional tool, while managerial aspects of communication, such as planning, implementation, evaluation, audience segmentation, message consistency, and management constraints, have not been thoroughly explored. However, from a tourism communications perspective, the success of destination promotion is determined not only by the presence of social media accounts but also by the manager's ability to develop

targeted communication strategies, build engagement with audiences, and continuously evaluate digital responses (Bungin, n.d.; Syaiful et al., 2025).

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the management of digital tourism communication at the Sweembath Natural Baths Tourism in Naga Sopa Village and identify the obstacles faced in its implementation. The study focuses on how digital communication is planned, implemented, and evaluated by tourism managers through social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of digital tourism communication studies, particularly in local community-based natural tourism destinations. Practically, the results of this study can serve as evaluation material for tourism managers and village governments in designing more systematic, consistent digital communication strategies oriented towards increasing tourist attraction and interest.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to gain a deeper understanding of digital tourism communication management at the Sweembath Natural Baths in Naga Sopa Village, Bandar Hulan District, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study does not aim to statistically measure relationships between variables, but rather to interpret the processes, patterns, strategies, and obstacles of digital communication that occur within the natural context of local tourism destination management. In qualitative research, social reality is understood as a dynamic and contextual phenomenon, thus the researcher acts as the primary instrument in collecting, understanding, and interpreting field data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research focuses on three main aspects: digital communication planning, communication implementation through social media, and evaluation of communication conducted by tourism managers in promoting the Sweembath Natural Baths.

The research subjects were determined purposively, taking into account the informants' direct involvement in the management, utilization, and reception of digital tourism communication messages. Research informants included the Sweembath Natural Baths Tourism management as the party implementing digital promotion, the local community as part of the destination's social ecosystem, tourists as recipients of promotional messages, and village officials as those playing a role in supporting tourism policy and development. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to gather information on digital communication strategies, experiences, obstacles, and evaluations. Observations were conducted by observing tourism promotional activities, social media usage, and the actual conditions of the destination. Documentation was used to examine social media content, photos, videos, and other supporting documents relevant to digital tourism communication practices. The use of multiple data collection techniques aimed to gain a more comprehensive understanding and avoid reliance on a single data source (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, all interview, observation, and documentation results were selected and grouped based on research

themes, such as content planning, social media usage, publication consistency, audience response, and human resource and digital infrastructure constraints. Furthermore, the data is presented in narrative form so that the pattern of findings can be read systematically and linked to digital tourism communication theory. Conclusions are drawn gradually by interpreting the relationship between field findings and the research focus. To maintain data validity, this study uses source triangulation, technical triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information from managers, the community, tourists, and village officials, while technical triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking is carried out by reconfirming important information with informants to strengthen the credibility of the research results (Miles et al., 2014; Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of Digital Tourism Communication Management at the Sweembath Natural Baths Tourist Attraction in Naga Sopa Village

The digital tourism communication management at the Sweembath Natural Baths in Naga Sopa Village demonstrates that the management has an initial awareness of the importance of digital media as a means of promoting tourist destinations. This awareness is evident in the use of several social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, to introduce tourist attractions to the wider public. However, the use of digital media has not yet fully developed into a planned, directed, and sustainable communication system. From a digital tourism communication perspective, social media serves not only as a place to upload photos or videos, but also as a space for interaction, building a destination image, delivering up-to-date information, and managing relationships with potential tourists (Syaiful et al., 2025). One manager stated, "We have indeed used social media for promotions, usually through Instagram, Facebook, and sometimes TikTok. But there is no specific schedule; only when there are new photos or activities, we post them." This quote demonstrates that digital media is being used, but it is still spontaneous and not yet part of a systematic communication strategy.

In terms of planning, research findings indicate that management lacks a well-developed digital communication design. Communication planning should include identifying the target audience, determining the destination's key message, selecting appropriate digital channels, developing a content calendar, and establishing indicators for evaluating promotional success. However, the practice at Sweembath Natural Baths remains limited to using social media as a promotional tool without specific audience mapping. In tourism communication theory, the destination communication process must be built through an integration of messages, media, communicators, and tourist characteristics to foster positive perceptions of the destination (Bungin, n.d.). A manager informant stated, "We don't have a specific target yet, but the important thing is that people know there are natural baths here. We usually post about the location, the water, and the visitors." This statement indicates that promotional messages are still oriented towards general introductions and are not directed at specific segments, such as families, young people, local communities, or visitors from outside the region.

In terms of implementation, the management's digital communication still faces consistency issues. While social media has become the primary promotional channel, posting intensity is not yet consistent. This situation demonstrates a gap between awareness of the importance of digital promotion and the technical-organizational capabilities required to implement it sustainably. Consistent content is crucial for building destination visibility, maintaining audience attention, and increasing opportunities for digital engagement. Huwae et al. (2024) emphasized that social media can increase the visibility of natural tourism destinations, but its effectiveness depends heavily on consistent content management and the manager's ability to maintain interaction with the audience. This aligns with the statement of one community informant, "Sometimes people know about Sweembath from posts, but if the account has been inactive for a long time, people are less aware of whether the place is still busy or whether there have been any changes to the facilities." This statement indicates that irregular publications can impact potential tourists' perceptions of the sustainability and professionalism of destination management.

The digital content produced by Sweembath managers also tends to be documentary-based, rather than strategic. Most uploaded content simply depicts natural conditions, visitor experiences, or tourist activities. This type of content does have informative value, but it is not fully directed at building a strong destination narrative. In digital tourism communication, visual content should not only showcase tourist attractions but also construct experiences, emotions, local uniqueness, and reasons why tourists need to visit. Hia et al. (2025) showed that visual-based digital communication can increase tourist interest if managed in a planned and engaging manner. One tourist said, "I was interested in coming because I saw a friend's post and some photos on social media. But the information on the official account is not very complete, for example, about entrance fees, facilities, or road conditions." This quote shows that social media has played a role as an initial source of information, but has not yet fully met tourists' practical information needs.

From an evaluation perspective, digital communication management at Sweembath Natural Baths remains very limited due to the lack of measurable digital indicators. Managers do not routinely monitor the number of views, comments, likes, shares, follower growth, or audience responses as a basis for improving communication strategies. Yet, one of the advantages of digital media is the availability of interaction data that can be used to understand audience interests, behaviors, and responses. From a communications management perspective, evaluation is a crucial step in assessing whether the message has reached its target audience and produced the desired communication impact. One manager stated, "We don't really look at the number of likes or comments as evaluation material. Usually, when someone asks a question via message, we respond accordingly." This statement indicates that evaluation is still conducted reactively, rather than analytically. As a result, managers lack a solid foundation for determining the most effective content types in attracting tourists.

The main obstacle in digital tourism communication management at Sweembath relates to limited human resources. Managers lack specialized personnel who understand digital marketing strategy, social media management, visual content production, promotional copywriting, or digital data analysis. This results in social media

management being rudimentary and dependent on the manager's personal skills. Maulana et al. (2025) also found that limited human resource capacity is a major obstacle to developing digital marketing communications in community-based tourism destinations. A village official stated, "The potential of this place is actually huge, but it does need guidance. Managers need to be trained in how to create content, organize promotions, and use social media more seriously." This quote reinforces the point that digital communication issues are not just about the availability of social media accounts, but also concern the institutional capacity and competence of the actors managing them.

Beyond human resources, limited digital infrastructure is also a barrier that impacts the effectiveness of digital tourism communications. Unstable internet access can hinder the process of uploading content, responding to potential tourists' messages, and regularly updating information. In the context of village-based tourism destinations, digital infrastructure is a crucial factor because digital promotion relies heavily on connectivity. Without good network support, managers will struggle to maintain a consistent communication rhythm with their audiences. One manager stated, "Sometimes the signal is unstable, so uploading videos or photos is a bit difficult. That's also why we can't always update our posts." This obstacle demonstrates that digital communication management cannot be separated from the structural conditions surrounding the destination. Thus, the development of digital tourism communication requires support from various stakeholders, including the village government, tourism managers, the community, and relevant parties in providing supporting infrastructure.

Interpretatively, digital tourism communication management at Sweembath Natural Baths can be understood as a communication practice in transition from conventional to digital promotion. While managers recognize the importance of social media, they have not yet fully implemented communication management principles, which encompass planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. These findings confirm that the success of digital tourism communication is determined not only by the use of Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok, but also by the manager's ability to develop a messaging strategy, content consistency, audience interaction, and data-driven evaluation. Therefore, Sweembath Natural Baths requires strengthening digital capacity, developing a content calendar, developing a visual identity for the destination, mapping tourist targets, and regularly evaluating social media performance. If these elements can be strengthened, digital communication will serve not only as a promotional tool but also as a strategic instrument for building the destination's image, increasing tourist trust, and expanding the appeal of Sweembath Natural Baths as a village-based natural tourism destination.

Obstacles Faced in Digital Tourism Communication Management

The main obstacle in digital tourism communication management at Sweembath Natural Baths lies in the limited human resources with specialized competencies in digital communication. Social media management is still carried out in a simplistic manner by tourism managers without the support of a dedicated team that understands content planning, visual strategy, promotional copywriting, audience segmentation, and digital performance analysis. This situation results in digital communication not being run professionally, but rather spontaneously and depending on the managers' free time. One manager stated, "*We actually know social media is important for promotion, but there's no dedicated person to manage it. Usually, when there's a photo or event, we just post it.*" This

statement indicates that human resource constraints are not only related to the number of personnel, but also the knowledge capacity needed to transform social media into a strategic tourism communication tool. In the context of digital tourism communication, manager competence is crucial because digital media requires the ability to design messages, build interactions, and maintain a consistent destination image on an ongoing basis (Syaiful et al., 2025).

Another obstacle relates to managers' lack of a strong understanding of a planned digital communication strategy. Social media has been used as a promotional tool, but its use has not been based on systematic communication planning, such as determining the target audience, posting calendar, content themes, promotional language style, destination visual identity, and indicators of communication success. This shows that social media is still understood merely as a place to share photos and information, not as a space for managing relationships between the destination and potential tourists. A manager explained, *"Even if there's no specific strategy, the important thing is for people to see the atmosphere of Sweembath and know this place is still worth visiting."* This quote demonstrates that communication orientation is still at the destination introduction stage, not yet reaching the stage of establishing tourism branding and positioning. However, from a tourism communication perspective, destination messages need to be designed to build image, shape perceptions, and influence tourists' decisions to visit (Bungin, n.d.; Hia et al., 2025).

In addition to human resources and strategy, limited digital infrastructure is also a significant obstacle in managing digital tourism communication at Sweembath Natural Baths. Unstable internet connection quality hinders optimal content uploads, information updates, and audience interaction. These technical barriers result in slow responses to inquiries from potential tourists and irregular publication of updated information regarding destination conditions, facilities, entrance fees, road access, and tourist activities. One manager stated, *"Sometimes the signal is not good, so it's a bit difficult to upload videos or photos. As a result, posting can't be done regularly."* Interpretatively, these infrastructure constraints indicate that digital communication is not solely determined by the willingness of managers, but also by the availability of an adequate technological ecosystem. This finding aligns with Maulana et al. (2025), who emphasized that the development of digital marketing communications in community-based tourism destinations is often hampered by limited human resource capacity and digital infrastructure support.

The consistency of content production and publication is also a significant issue in the digital communication management of Sweembath Natural Baths. Published content lacks a regular rhythm, resulting in an unstable digital presence. When social media accounts are rarely updated, audiences may perceive the destination as inactive, underdeveloped, or poorly managed. One tourist stated, *"I've looked for information on social media, but the posts aren't very recent. So I don't know the latest conditions at the location."* This statement demonstrates how inconsistent content can impact the trust and interest of potential visitors. In digital tourism communication, consistent posting is crucial for maintaining visibility, strengthening audience retention, and building digital engagement. Huwae et al. (2024) emphasized that social media can increase the visibility of natural tourism

destinations, but its effectiveness depends heavily on consistent and targeted content management.

Another obstacle identified is the suboptimal evaluation of digital communication. Managers have not routinely utilized social media analytics features, such as the number of views, likes, comments, post reach, follower growth, or incoming messages, as a basis for assessing promotional effectiveness. Evaluations are still conducted informally based on general estimates, rather than on measurable digital data. One manager stated, *"We haven't really paid attention to the number of likes or comments. If someone asks a question via message, we just respond."* This quote demonstrates that digital communication is still reactive, rather than evaluative. In fact, in communication management, evaluation is a crucial step in determining whether the message has reached the right audience and generated the desired response. Without evaluation, managers find it difficult to determine which types of content are most engaging, the most effective posting times, or what information tourists need most. Therefore, weak evaluation makes it difficult to develop a data-driven digital communication strategy (Anisa, 2024; Islah Perwita et al., 2025).

Overall, the challenges in digital tourism communication management at Sweembath Natural Baths indicate that this destination is still in the early stages of digital transformation. Managers recognize the importance of social media but lack adequate capacity, strategy, infrastructure, content consistency, and evaluation mechanisms. These obstacles are not only technical but also managerial, as they concern how communication is designed, implemented, controlled, and developed sustainably. A village official asserted, *"Sweembath's potential is actually huge, but it needs support to make its digital promotions more organized, frequent, and engaging."* This statement underscores the need for collaboration between tourism managers, village government, the community, and supporting parties to strengthen digital communication capacity. With improvements in human resource training, content calendar development, increased internet access, utilization of social media analytics, and strengthening destination branding, Sweembath Natural Baths' digital communication can evolve from mere spontaneous promotional activities to a more professional, participatory tourism communication strategy that will have an impact on increasing tourist appeal (Tanjung et al., 2024; Maulana et al., 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that digital tourism communication management at Sweembath Natural Baths in Naga Sopa Village has begun utilizing social media as a means of promotion and dissemination of destination information, particularly through Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. However, its management is still not systematic because it is not supported by structured content planning, consistent implementation, clear audience segmentation, and digital data-based evaluation. The research findings indicate that digital media has contributed to increasing the visibility and presence of Sweembath Natural Baths in public spaces, but has not been fully able to drive a significant increase in tourist visits. This condition is influenced by limited human resources competent in the digital field, a low understanding of tourism communication strategies, limited internet infrastructure, and the absence of a mechanism for sustainable communication evaluation. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of managers,

developing content strategies, increasing publication consistency, and institutional support are essential for digital tourism communication at Sweembath Natural Baths to develop into a more professional and effective promotional strategy that has an impact on increasing the destination's attractiveness.

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