Virtual Ethnography of “Padang Halal Tourism”: A Case study on City Branding

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Abstract
The use of website and social media in government digital marketing has not yet properly known by tourist and potential investors. Mostly the information received was obtained from those who have been into the city, social media organized by private sectors, and netizens. Literally, the social media through the mouth-to-mouth marketing has become the communication channel of the city branding. This research aims at determining the social or cultural environment that influence the selection for social media, messages, and promotional activities used in establishing the brand awareness. Heretofore, the branding of Padang City was not characterized and customized, similar to other cities and regencies in West Sumatera Province. Besides that, the pattern and concept of halal tourism yet have been developed well even though Muslims were the majority of the population. The branding of Padang City has always been identified and integrated into the province, where they were included as the best city in “The best World Halal Tourism Destination” in Halal Tourism Award 2016. Therefore, this current research applied the virtual ethnographic case study in response to various texts and discursive interpretations on city branding communication related to language approach in communal discussion. The virtual ethnographic adopted from anthropology emphasizes on the importance of researchers’ involvement with the subject being researched in order to get comprehensive understanding on the particular social and cultural environment. The method taken was participant-observation utilizing the internet, where the researchers was immersed within the life of a social and cultural groups in collecting the data, and in gaining the understanding of the groups’ members perspective. This method involves many aspects of qualitative research rather than describing, explaining, or grouping words or actions of a member in a certain community in the internet. Observation and online interaction is regarded as a cultural reflection resulting to deeper understanding. Data collection was performed by having a thorough communication with the member of a particular culture or community such as Muslims community. The communication occurred was in accordance with the needs requiring the involvement, participation, physical contact, interaction, union, relationship, collaboration, and connection among those the members in the community, instead of through websites, servers, or keyboards. In addition, searching the documents in the form of pictures, videos, audios, log books, magazines, symbols, artifacts, and other related objects with the research was also carried out, in order to enrich the data obtained. The results of this research could be used as the recommendation for the government in improving the implementation of city branding, and essentially in developing the city branding theory.

Keywords: brand awareness, city branding, digital marketing, public relations, virtual ethnography

INTRODUCTION

A brand when is communicated well on a product, service, or other things, and associated with a city, the brand must be able to represent the appearance of the city, its facility, and the reasons for the city to receive attention. Thus, that townspeople and anyone who visits the city can briefly describe an image of the city. From comparative study” results on the city branding of Semarang City, found several weaknesses such as, there is no in-depth research and benchmarking on aspects that are the strengths, advantages, and uniqueness of Semarang City compared to other cities. As a result, the brand/logo/slogan that is compiled doesn’t reflect this city, especially those regarding the advantages, uniqueness, added value, and attractiveness. In addition, the selection of slogans/logos does not pay attention to the target group on an international scale, whereas in the era of openness and globalization,
competition between cities is already on a global scale. The brand campaign is relatively unoptimal, so the cooperation between the central and regional governments should be increased. It is to make the lace branding that will be sold is more extensive, wide, and varied.

To comprehend the city branding is acknowledging the expression of the city, the perceptions of its residents and other communities about its story, and the meanings and metaphors of the elements that compiled the city. Building or strengthening the image of the city can be done by: identifying the specific elements that make up the city and the existing design process, understanding the relationship between the elements that make up the city and the buildings and their built environment, expressing through their design, and understanding the responses of its residents and other communities to the story of the city. These five efforts are inseparable units to build or strengthen the image of the existing city.

Formal institutions and institutions of cooperation between the public sector, private sector, and communities outside the city government need to be established. Inter-stakeholder collaboration is needed in creating expanded access to cities, making innovations, responding to necessities, and engaging target audiences. Collaboration can occur within the scope of stakeholders within or outside the city. Collaborative engagement with the private sector or the community can be a limited funding solution. This form of collaboration will expedite the realization of the brand promise and create a sense of brand ownership due to the involvement of the institute within the city to act in the implementation of the strategy. Public discussion should be held periodically in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of this concept under the responsibility of the coordinator. Therefore, the concept is always “up to date” in the face of market changes. The distribution of the community’s role in what must be done in strengthening branding is clearly explained technically and conceptually. The who are involved are likely to interact directly with the target audience.

According to Coviello, Milley, & Marcolin digital marketing is the use of the internet and other interactive technologies to create and connect dialogues between the firm and identified consumers. They also argue that e-marketing is part of e-commerce. Digital marketing such as the use of social media that is widely used by marketers can facilitate sales promotion. Likewise, Padang City Branding carries out its marketing through digital marketing because due to widerange coverage and cheap cost. The existence of social media is a means for consumers to disseminate information in the form of texts, images, audios, and videos to many institutes, both between firms to consumers and vice versa.

The development of technology can be used to develop the business world. One of them is marketing communication activities that requires utilizing the digital era in controlling market share. The concept of digital marketing is to utilize a wide area of media such as television, radio, mobile devices to the internet. The media will provide infographics about various products marketed by the company, especially the emphasis on an item brand or service. Digital marketing is the most powerful means to inflate the brand of a product or service. Digital marketing can reach all people, anytime, in any way, and anywhere. Of course, it is far superior to conventional marketing which is limited in time, location, and user reach. It is highlighted by Putri & Fithra which states that there is an influence between online marketing campaigns and consumer habits in choosing an item or service. Social media is the media of choice that is preferred by the public. This is supported by the existence of cellular phones that provide features connected to the internet. Thus, anyone can access their social media quickly, easily, wherever they are. The development of communication technology makes the information disclosure and changes the information dissemination patterns.

At this time, information production can be done by non-institutionalized institute. This means that currently anyone seems free to spread information without going through a
gatekeeper. It other words, today’s social media have a high enough control and a large enough power to influence the public that an organization cannot do. In addition, technological advances can make information spread widely and quickly so that people can find out various information about a product or service before potential consumers determine and purchase these products. Communication as a strategy in promoting city branding is carried out through various media. The role of online media is the main access in promoting the city with the information needed by the target audience. The government’s official website becomes a one-stop service and representation of the city as well as a strong initial impression of the target audience towards the city. In addition, the government can also use popular social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and You Tube. On the other hand, the use of websites and social media in government digital marketing is rarely known by tourists and potential investors. This times, they get information from people who have visited the city, social media managed by the private sector, and netizens. This shows that social media facilitated by mouth-to-mouth has become a city branding communication channel.

Ethnography is typical research involving ethnographers to participate as observers, either flagrantly or surreptitiously to observe what is happening in day-to-day lives. In its development, ethnographic practice undergoes increasingly clear changes. Ethnography is not simply defined as a method or technique of collecting data and research disciplines based on culture, but rather as a combination of organizing concepts between observation and interview techniques to record the dynamics of people’s behavior. Thus, ethnography has the ability to explore digital relationships.

Furthermore, research exploring the digital world is termed netnography. Netnography is a recent study of communication and consumer behavior using computer media, contributing to the debate about the definition of ethnography on the internet. In contrast, Hines points out that ethnography in cyberspace aims to provide a distinctive understanding of the significance and implications of using the Internet and is named virtual ethnography. She states that the socio-cultural anthropology method that is applied appropriately can provide theoretical understanding and help determine the smooth dynamics of relationships in the online world. Ethnography on the internet is a new qualitative research method by adapting some features of traditional ethnography to study culture and cultural practices that arise in text-based communication through computer media. Study case of virtual socio ethnography has been applied as a response to various texts and discursive interpretations of city branding communication related to the language approach in communal discussion. The adopted virtual ethnography from anthropology emphasizes the importance of the researcher's involvement with the subject (researched people) to gain an understanding of the social environment or particular culture that affects brand awareness.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

This research described problems related to the understanding and experience of padang halal tourism hashtag users on Instagram, one of the social media platforms. This method could add new insights because it could open a detailed and complex virtual ethnography in building city branding.

On the other hand, the study case approach is a research approach that focuses on one observable and analyzable particular case to its completion. Through the study case, the researchers can examine more deeply an event in the reality of life. Broadly, study case is a more appropriate way of using how or why questions, if the researcher only has limited
opportunities to monitor the events being researched, and if the research focus is on contemporary phenomena in real life situations. The single study case in this research highlights the behavior of individuals/groups/events on Instagram with the problem of city branding "Padang Halal Tourism". It is significant where the researchers are the research’ instruments itself, to obtain comprehensive and detailed information about virtual ethnography in building city branding. 

In addition, there should be in-depth understanding on the activities and policies carried out by Padang City Public Relations in conducting digital marketing, and promoting brand awareness as one of the marketing communication activities of "Padang Halal Tourism", besides building brand awareness of Padang City Branding products. The object in this research was virtual ethnography in building City Branding. Whereas, the research’ subject was "Padang Halal Tourism" which is obtained through observations, interviews, documentations and library researches.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A hashtag can appear if an account uses or includes it in uploaded photos or videos, and can be used repeatedly either by the same account or different accounts. The hashtag #padanghalaltourism is one of the hashtags available on Instagram. This hashtag has less than 100 posts, six posts to be exact. The hashtag was first used on the @minangtourism account which uploaded an image and caption from @ticindonesia.id about the testimony of tourist Ahmed Ordemis from New York on the same date, August 26, 2017.

The most 'likes' on #padanghalaltourism reached 681 likes obtained by the @minangtourism account, while the most comments were obtained by the @maulanasaptaji account for six comments. The total number of #padanghalaltourism posts since 2017 has only reached six posts, one post of which was done by two accounts taken from the tourist testimonial of Ahmed Ordemis described earlier.

The hashtag #padanghalaltourism can be said as a less active one compared to other hashtags that include the word "padang", such as #padang (8.9 million posts, #padangpadangbeach (143 thousand), #padangpanjang (472 thousand), #padanghits ( 210 thousand), #padangsidimpuan (196 thousand), #padangpariaman (121 thousand), #padangfoodgram (114 thousand), padangsidempuan (100 thousand)), #lokerpadang (223 thousand), #masakanpadang (266 thousand), #semenpadang ( 138 thousand nasipadang (225 thousand), #padanggoldshop #olshoppadang (1 million), #padangfreeongkir (126 thousand), (49.5 thousand), #kepitingsauspadang (64.7 thousand), #rendangpadang (112 thousand), #bigsizepadang ( 170 thousand) , and #satepadang (101 thousand).

The last post of #padanghalaltourism appeared on February 9, 2019. This means that from that date until this research was conducted there were no more posts using #padanghalaltourism. From the six #padanghalaltourism hashtags, there are several types of posts: promotional pamphlets for events in the Mandeh Tourism Area, short profile videos of the Baiturrahmah Mosque, short videos of traditional Minangkabau cuisine, photos of Baiturrahmah Mosque, and photo testimonials of tourist Ahmed Ordemis from New York who returned to Indonesia to explore halal tourism.

Data Finding

In uploading content via Instagram, users can use the hashtags sign where they can only include a maximum of 30 hashtags in each posting. To create a hashtag, users simply include it in the caption of the posting or story by using the fence symbol (#). If the user includes a # sign
followed by topics, the hashtags that have been used will appear along with the number of postings using that hashtag. For example, in #padanghalaltourism, because it has been used before, suggestions will appear even though it only writes "padang". The maximum number of characters for the username and full name is 30 characters. For additional information in the Bio is a maximum of 150 characters.

The media document level in cyber media analysis reveals what constitutes cultural artifacts in virtual ethnography. At this level, the published text will be the center of attention, whether in the form of sentences, photos, audios, videos, or other visual representations. The produced texts show ideology, social background, political views, cultural uniqueness, to represent the identity of the public, not only to represent the user' opinions. The media document level is the entrance to see how culture occurred.

Through the procedures described at the media room level, users can upload content in the form of photos, videos, or texts with various topics. In #padanghalaltourism (until September 2022) there are six postings with two postings in the form of videos with a duration of approximately one minute. The postings contain several halal tourism topics, starting from the promotion of watching the metropolitan artists in Mandeh Tourism Area, visiting the Baiturrahmah Mosque, introducing traditional Minangkabau cuisine, and testimonials from foreign tourists who return to visit.

The postings are presented in several forms according to the creativity of the user or the creativity of others which are reposted in the form of pamphlets, photos, and videos. Typography, graphic design, photos/documentations that are popular have not yet been occurred. In #padanghalaltourism hashtag, there is a 1-minute video uploaded. Most of the users post images produced/edited by others or repost other users' posts, both from Instagram and other social media. It is not certain that there is an account of an organization group that forms a separate team of editors in charge of creating/editing the content.

The media object level is the level that reveals user activities and interactions or between users. The research data comes from the text in a cyber media as well as the context presented around the media. This level emphasizes how a text is responded to or the interactions on a text in cyber media. To see whether there is interaction between Instagram users, the researchers make observations on the posting with #padanghalaltourism hashtag. Interaction occurred on several postings, where many did not get the comments. Even if there are comments, there would be only six comments at most. However, the comments made are not related to the topic or in the form of advertisements.

From the researchers' observations, some #padanghalaltourism users interact in their postings by replying to followers' comments or other users who comment on their postings. The comments are in the form of speech and sometimes emoticons are added. There are those who comment on image or video content, users, or even advertising through comments. Almost all #padanghalaltourism postings are public, or can be seen by all users, whether they follow or not. The comment section is not hidden, although it is often not replied by the account owner.

The level of media experience in cyber media analysis reveals how the people or community members are in the real world. Researchers reveal the reality behind the uploaded or created text besides motivation and its effects. At this level, the researcher connects real life (offline) with virtual life (online). Hines [10] agrees that the occurrence on the internet is actually not much different from what happens in the real world.

Through the cyber media, users can post their daily activities showing the real-life side of users. Therefore, it can be seen all the postings have specific intent and purpose, along with the desired and undesired impact on its users. All things showed through cyber media are not just a collection of texts for themselves, but there is always a reason for the occurrence of the texts.
In the posting with #padanghalaltourism, there are postings and interactions in the comments section that show conditions in the real-life of users. The comments on the postings describe a real incident experienced by the @ain_irene account after watching a video of Minangkabau cuisine: “Aahhh ... it is so painful to watch it from distance ... awesome !!!” who responded to a posting about traditional Minangkabau cuisine.

Data Analysis

There were four levels of cyber media analysis applied in analyzing the data adapted from Nasrullah. Instagram social media has a character that is quite open in uploading media texts, starting from the feed postings, as well as responses in the comments section. Although there are some settings that allow other users to not be able to view or access. Instagram policies are made in line with the users’ personal needs. So, they can set the appearance of their own account based on their preferences, to be seen public or only shared with a few friends. However, users must still comply with all the provisions of the Instagram application itself. It is also applied in the hashtags sign. Since the hashtags on Instagram are public, so any Instagram user can access (view, use or create) the hashtag. There is no content filter for sorting out the content with appropriate hashtags, thus all users can use any hashtag taken from any postings.

The analysis of this research was done by examining the Instagram posting inserting #padanghalaltourism hashtag, where most of the postings were visual and audio-visual forms. Visual forms inserting #padanghalaltourism were photos, videos, and graphic designs. While the audio-visual was commonly in the form of short videos. The form of the uploaded video was recording footage of live show, while the content of the upload was contained of two types, content about worship and food worship.

The hashtag itself is used to collect certain topics or themes according to the desires of the user. In this case, #padanghalaltourism is inserted by users in their posting with halal topics without being given entertainment/comedy or referring to issues/problems/characters that are currently trending. Nevertheless, there are users who insert #padanghalaltourism hashtag in their posting that are unrelated to halal tourism. Some of the postings are self-made and some are forwarded from other users.

From the experience level of cyber media analysis, it can be analyzed the motivation and effects for cyber media users. The researcher focuses on the motive for using #padanghalaltourism in the Instagram postings. These motives are based on the theory initiated by Dennis McQuail. Through his notion, it can be said that the Instagram users’ motives inserting #padanghalaltourism in their postings are as follows.

1) Interpersonal Utility Motive
This motive is the encouragement to carry out social interactions with others in cyberspace. In this case, there are several variants among them; the motive for sharing information, the motive for searching for chat material, the motive for adapting to the friendship environment, and the motive for expressing opinions. Hence, their motive for using #padanghalaltourism is to collect votes and share information related to halal tourism, no one intends to express their opinion.

2) Information Seeking Motive
Information seeking motive is an encouragement to search and get certain information that a person needs. There are only several variants in this motive, they are: the motive for finding out up-to-date information, the motive for confirming issues, the motive for controlling, the motive for searching reading materials. Meanwhile, there may be many tourists and investors...
looking for reading materials for photos, videos, and graphic designs, where the users can use #padanghalaltourism to provide tourism materials or references, including halal culinary.

3) Convenience Utility Motive

The Convenience utility motive is a comfort motive, that is the existence of an encouragement that causes comfort in accessing it. #padanghalaltourism users feel comfortable using the Instagram application and insert #padanghalaltourism hashtag in their postings, that they can do it continuously and even on a scheduled basis.

Entertainment motive is an urge to complete the need for entertainment or enjoyment. It is not used as an escape from pressure or negative emotions even though it is the reason for using #padanghalaltourism. The account owner containing #padanghalaltourism through photographs, videos, and graphic designs also has no intention to post humor content only.

Self-Presentation as a Motive for Using #padanghalaltourism

Aside from the motives above mentioned, photographs, videos, and graphic designs are also a form of self-presentation for users. Other users or observers can find out the goal of making photographs, videos, and graphic designs of #padanghalaltourism to show the users self-image.

The use of #padanghalaltourism is aimed to form their virtual identity, proven by the posts inserting #padanghalaltourism. After doing the research, there are two strategies that Instagram users use in designing their self-image through their posts by including #padanghalaltourism, they are:

1) Ingratiation

The characteristics used in this ingratiation strategy are by saying positive things about others or saying a few negative things about themselves, to express simplicity, familiarity and humour. Through #padanghalaltourism, ingratiation strategy is used to self-present in forming a virtual identity.

2) Competence

This strategy aims to make the users regarded as skilled and qualified. Its characteristics include recognition of abilities, achievements, performance, and qualifications. This recognition of the users skills is proven by many likes and comments obtained in their postings. Nowadays, the number of likes can be used to measure the penchant of other user, and the number of likes or comments shows that the users with #padanghalaltourism have achievements and skills in the meme field.

3) Exemplification

The strategy aims for users to be regarded as morally superior or have higher moral standards. The general characteristics are ideological commitment or militancy, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline. There are no accounts that use the exemplification strategy in their posts inserting #padanghalaltourism, because they assume the postings in #padanghalaltourism would be inappropriate/diverge from the included hashtag theme and want to fill the #padanghalaltourism hashtag by uploading the content that is in accordance with halal tourism rules.

Cyberculture in Activities #padanghalaltourism

Ethnography on the internet is an adaptation of several features of traditional ethnography and is used to examine culture and cultural practices within the text-based communication through computer media [11]. In the #padanghalaltourism activity, this cyberspace is quite strong. Cyberculture is the study of social phenomena related to the internet and other forms of network communication, such as online communities, online multi-player games,
social networks, utilization of computers, and mobile internet applications are also directed to unification or integration of communication. The #padanghalaltourism activity is a form of mixed communication (verbal and nonverbal) related to the internet network and forms a virtual community based on da'wah meme.

In #padanghalaltourism, there is the absence of communication integration in the fields of entertainment and education. The entertainment aforementioned is related to the form of photographs, videos, and graphic designs adapted from amusing and entertaining things, whereas education itself means not only informing but also desiring changes from readers/users, which is realized in the form of information and halal tourism values.

CONCLUSION

As a matter of fact, social or cultural environment that influences the hashtag #padanghalal tourism in Instagram social media is Islamic Culture, even though it has not truly reflected in the video of Minang Cuisine, and the promotional pamphlets of the metropolitan artists’s arrival to Mandeh Tourism Area. The message delivered by the users in each of their posting besides #padanghalaltourism has not elaborated the concept of “Padang Halal Tourism” itself. Even the users from the business sectors are also hesitated to upload their business’ advertisements. After carrying out the observation and analysis, it can be concluded that the users of #padanghalaltourism in Instagram has four motives, they are: first is interpersonal utility, where the users spread the related information with halal tourism through photographs, videos, and graphic designs including the #padanghalaltourism hashtag as their creation and promotion without their personal comments concerning the concept. Second is information seeking motive, where the Instagram’ users post the photographs, videos, and graphic designs with the halal tourism attached as the theme in order to attract tourists and investors. Third is convenience utility concept. This concept describing the Instagram’ users are convenient using #padanghalaltourism hashtag in their postings frequently and even being scheduled. For the purpose of this research, there are only six posting from five Instagram’ account that can be detected. Fourth is entertainment morive. There is only one account posting the promotion on the arrival of national level artists to Mandeh Tourism Area by using the hashtag that can convince the tourists and investors that the entertainment in this area is halal.

In addition, the hashtag #padanghalaltourism is also used in representing its users through three strategies. First is ingratiation. It is when mentioning the negative sides of the users in order to show their simplicity, familiarity and humor, and humility through photographs, videos, and graphic designs. They want by posting those uploads they can attract other users to give their comment and interact through the postings due to the event similarity. Second is competence. It is a recognition of the users’ ability determined by the like sign and comments obtained on the hashtag. The amount of these like signs and comments received can be used as the measurement of other users’ preferences. The bigger the number of the like signs and comments received, the higher the achievements and skills of the users in photography, videography, and graphic design.

However, it is hardly found the exemplification here, it is when the users of #padanghalaltourism hashtags assume that the other postings of the hashtags are not in line with the theme, so that they should post another posting which they consider more appropriate. The three strategies mentioned previously show that this #padanghalaltourism is used only for displaying the self-image or virtual identity of the Instagram’ users.

There are three stages reflected from the way the users create their postings by inserting the #padanghalaltourism hashtag, namely the information seeking, editing/ layouting, and
uploading stage to social media. Majority the users create and edit their own postings even though there are some others who share other users’ content by stating the source.

The users of #padanghalaltourism hashtag spread the information and the value of halal tourism through photographs, videos, and graphic designs by inserting the hashtags in their Instagram postings. In other words it shows their spirit of sharing to others. Despite the unclarity in the content and indicator of halal tourism, these users are still willingly to share the related information of #padanghalaltourism to others.

On the other hand, in the midst of the cyberculture development in this millennial era, not all Muslims contend to show their works, point of views, virtual identity and their halal tourism through the #padanghalaltourism hashtag, regardless their acknowledgment of the internet as one of the alternative ways in seeking for halal tourism information in line with the development of technology. It is shown from only six postings of #padanghalaltourism hashtag from five Instagram accounts that can be found. Considering the fact that the fear occurred in the community concerning the “Padang Halal Tourism” city branding that might limit the chances in reaching non-Muslim’s tourist and investors.

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