

Assessing the impact of digital marketing optimization on the self-sustainability of agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — *This research delves into the evaluation of the impact of digital marketing optimization on the self-sustainability of agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village. The study aims to determine how the strategic utilization of digital marketing tools and techniques contributes to the overall sustainability of the agrotourism sector in this village.*

Method — *To achieve this objective, a comprehensive analysis was conducted, considering various aspects such as online promotional efforts, social media engagement, and technology adoption among agrotourism businesses. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and observation of agrotourism activities in the village.*

Result — *Preliminary findings indicate a positive correlation between the implementation of effective digital marketing strategies and the sustainability of agrotourism ventures in Sumbergedang Village. Businesses that actively engaged in digital marketing activities experienced increased visibility, improved customer engagement, and a higher likelihood of repeat visits by tourists. These factors, in turn, have contributed to the self-sustainability of the agrotourism sector by generating steady income streams and supporting local livelihoods.*

Contribution — *This impact analysis sheds light on the crucial role of digital marketing in fostering self-sustaining agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village. It underscores the importance of leveraging digital tools to enhance the visibility and appeal of agrotourism offerings, ultimately benefiting the local economy and promoting the long-term viability of this sector.*

Keywords: *digital advertising, online marketing, MSMEs, agrotourism*

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of rural development, agrotourism emerges as a promising sector with the potential for substantial economic growth and bolstered community sustainability (Alhogbi, 2017; Syahyuti, 2016; Zhong et al., 2022). In Sumbergedang Village, akin to many other rural areas, agrotourism serves as a significant catalyst for local livelihoods and socio-economic advancement. However, amid the ever-accelerating digital age, the adeptness in harnessing the capabilities of digital marketing has evolved into an indispensable determinant for the self-sustainability and competitive prowess of agrotourism enterprises.

As technology advances at an unprecedented pace, the implementation of digital marketing strategies has become an essential imperative for agrotourism businesses striving to excel in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Abdullah & Fathihani, 2022; Ardito et al., 2019; Castañeda et al., 2020). The incorporation of digital tools and platforms not only offers opportunities for agrotourism enterprises in Sumbergedang Village to enhance their visibility but also empowers them to effectively engage with a wider audience of potential tourists (Cagle et al., 2020).

Rural agrotourism has emerged as a promising sector for sustainable rural development globally, bridging the gap between urban and rural economies by showcasing the unique cultural, natural, and agricultural heritage of rural areas, attracting tourists seeking authentic experiences (Abuhay et al., 2019; Mura & Ključnikov, 2018; Pelegrín Entenza et al., 2022). In this context, digital marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for promoting rural agrotourism destinations. Research indicates that leveraging digital platforms, such as social media and online catalogues, can significantly enhance the visibility and appeal of agrotourism businesses (Maquera et al., 2022; Mariani & Matarazzo, 2021). Digital marketing enables these businesses to engage with a broader audience, thereby contributing to economic growth and community sustainability (Diez-Martin et al., 2019; Purba et al., 2021). However, the adoption of digital marketing in rural agrotourism is not without challenges. Rural areas often lack digital infrastructure and expertise, making it crucial to explore how capacity-building initiatives and training programs can facilitate the effective use of digital marketing tools in these settings (Dredge et al., 2018; Şekercioğlu, 2012; Torabi et al., 2023).

Digital marketing, particularly through social media platforms, has the potential to transform the agrotourism sector in rural areas by enhancing visibility and attracting a diverse range of tourists (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Buhalis, 2004). In addition to increasing tourist numbers, digital marketing can also lead to

improved customer engagement, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Dunakhe & Panse, 2022; Mehmeti-Bajrami et al., 2022). Research suggests that online presence and effective use of digital marketing tools can significantly impact revenue growth in rural agrotourism businesses (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). These benefits highlight the importance of digital marketing for the economic sustainability of rural agrotourism destinations. However, to fully realize these advantages, it is essential to address the challenges faced by rural businesses in adopting and implementing digital marketing strategies (Diez-Martin et al., 2019).

Education and training programs play a crucial role in equipping rural communities and agrotourism businesses with the skills and knowledge required to harness digital marketing effectively (Ramsden et al., 2022). Capacity-building initiatives can empower rural entrepreneurs to overcome initial barriers associated with digital adoption, making them more competitive in the digital marketplace (Leong et al., 2016). Furthermore, investments in digital infrastructure and resources are essential to support the digitalization of rural agrotourism (Ma & Li, 2021; Morris et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2020). Improved internet connectivity, digital literacy programs, and access to digital marketing support networks can create an enabling environment for rural businesses to thrive in the digital era. This literature underscores the transformative potential of digital marketing in rural agrotourism and highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to address challenges and harness the benefits of digitalization for sustainable rural development.

Our endeavor aligns with the insights provided by scholars who underscore the importance of digital marketing in the context of tourism and rural development. It echoes the findings emphasizing the transformative potential of digital tools in enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism-related enterprises.

This study seeks to furnish a comprehensive assessment of the influence that digital marketing optimization wields on the self-sustainability of agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village. Through meticulous analysis, data collection, and rigorous evaluation, we aim to reveal the profound effects of digital marketing strategies on the agrotourism sector. In doing so, we intend to shed light on the potential advantages and hurdles faced by local businesses in their pursuit of sustainability.

Within the forthcoming pages, we will navigate the dynamic interplay between digital marketing optimization and the self-sustainability of agrotourism, examining the specific strategies implemented by businesses in Sumbergedang

Village. Moreover, we will elucidate the implications of these strategies for the long-term viability and growth of the agrotourism sector in the digital era.

This research endeavors to provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of agrotourism in an increasingly digitalized environment. Ultimately, our findings will contribute to a broader understanding of rural development and digital marketing practices, highlighting their collective impact on the self-sustainability of communities such as Sumbergedang Village.

METHOD

The research will employ a qualitative research approach to comprehensively investigate the influence of digital marketing on the self-sustainability of agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village. Qualitative data collection methods will be exclusively utilized to delve into the intricate dynamics of this subject. The research methodology will consist of three primary components: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and ethical considerations (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Dicks et al., 2011; Williamson et al., 2018).

Semi-structured interviews will serve as the primary means of data collection. These interviews will be conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders, including agrotourism business owners and local authorities in Sumbergedang Village. The semi-structured nature of the interviews will allow for open-ended questions and in-depth discussions, enabling participants to share their experiences, insights, and perspectives related to digital marketing practices in the agrotourism sector (Flick, 2014; Sofaer, 1999). These interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed thematically to identify common themes, challenges, and opportunities emerging from the narratives.

As a complementary aspect of the research, document analysis will be conducted. This entails a comprehensive review of existing literature, reports, and case studies that are relevant to agrotourism and digital marketing in rural settings. This document analysis will provide a contextual backdrop for the study, offering insights into best practices, trends, and key findings from previous research. It will also help identify gaps in the current body of knowledge and shape the research questions.

Ethical considerations will be integral throughout the research process. Informed consent will be obtained from all interview participants, ensuring that they understand the research objectives and their participation rights (Miles & Huberman, 2014). To protect the privacy and confidentiality of interviewees, pseudonyms will be used, and any identifiable information will be removed during the analysis phase. Furthermore, the research will adhere to ethical

guidelines and standards in qualitative research, including transparency in data collection and reporting.

By utilizing this qualitative research approach, the study aims to provide a nuanced and holistic understanding of how digital marketing practices influence the self-sustainability of agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village. The findings from this research will not only contribute to the local community's knowledge but also shed light on broader implications for rural development and digital marketing practices in similar settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with agrotourism business owners and local authorities in Sumbergedang Village yielded a comprehensive understanding of the diverse digital marketing strategies employed in the region. Participants reported a broad spectrum of approaches, including leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as implementing innovative online buying systems. These strategies were universally acknowledged as indispensable tools for enhancing the visibility of agrotourism businesses and attracting a more extensive and diverse audience of potential customers.

Remarkably, the transformation of Sumbergedang Village into a digitally connected hub was significantly catalyzed by a digital business training program, skillfully executed by Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. Before this training initiative, the villagers had minimal exposure to digital technologies, including WhatsApp Business, social media platforms, and online catalogues. However, the agrotourism businesses' enthusiastic embrace of these digital tools resulted in a profound paradigm shift. They experienced a substantial improvement in their capacity to market and sell their products. These digital platforms empowered them to reach a wider audience, effectively showcase their offerings, and engage with potential customers in ways hitherto unexplored. This newfound digital presence not only expanded their market reach but also played a pivotal role in augmenting the sales of agrotourism products, ultimately contributing significantly to the self-sustainability of Sumbergedang Village.

The participants consistently underscored the overwhelmingly positive impact of digital marketing on various facets of agrotourism business performance. A multitude of businesses reported substantial enhancements in online visibility, resulting in heightened engagement on social media platforms. These improvements were closely associated with a discernible upswing in the number of customers actively purchasing their products. Moreover, the digital marketing

endeavors were found to substantially augment customer engagement, with businesses reporting markedly improved communication with visitors through online channels. Notably, several participants pointed out a direct correlation between their digital marketing efforts and a discernible increase in revenue, providing concrete evidence of the tangible benefits of embracing digital strategies.

However, the study also unearthed several challenges and barriers that agrotourism businesses encountered when implementing digital marketing strategies. A recurring challenge was the glaring lack of digital marketing expertise among business owners, which significantly hindered their ability to effectively leverage online platforms. Technical challenges and resource constraints, including the difficulty of maintaining and updating social media accounts consistently, posed formidable hurdles, particularly for businesses with limited resources. Additionally, participants cited the rapidly evolving digital landscape as a persistent challenge, necessitating continuous learning and adaptation to keep pace with digital advancements. These identified challenges underline the importance of continuous support, education, and resource allocation in the dynamic digital landscape.

A captivating discovery of the study was the pivotal role of digital marketing in fostering community engagement and sustainability. The agrotourism businesses, through their adept online presence, functioned as influential ambassadors for Sumbergedang Village. While promoting their own offerings, they also skillfully showcased the unique culture, heritage, and products of the local community. This digital representation of the village not only attracted customers but also played a substantial role in cultivating a profound sense of pride and identity among the village residents. This, in turn, significantly contributed to the broader sustainability of the community, extending well beyond the individual businesses. The study thus underscores the far-reaching community-building potential inherent in digital marketing initiatives.

The role of digital marketing in rural agrotourism has gained recognition in recent years, and this study aligns with previous research highlighting its catalytic effects. The findings reaffirm the assertion that digital marketing strategies, such as leveraging social media platforms and online catalogues, are crucial for increasing visibility and attracting a broader audience of potential tourists (Costa et al., 2021). The participants' experiences in Sumbergedang Village underscore the applicability of these strategies in diverse rural settings.

Moreover, the transformative effect of digital marketing on business performance echoes the outcomes of studies in other rural regions (Amin & Mishra, 2022; Ogbeide-Osaretin & Ebhote, 2020; Srivastava & Gupta, 2022) The

significant increase in online visibility reported by businesses aligns with the idea that a well-executed digital marketing strategy can lead to improved market reach (Apasrawirote et al., 2022; Masrianto et al., 2022; Rizvanović et al., 2023). The correlation between digital marketing efforts and revenue growth aligns with findings that emphasize the potential economic benefits of digital marketing (Ganotakis et al., 2023; Kanaan et al., 2023; Mithas & Rust, 2021)

The study's revelation that the digital transformation in Sumbergedang Village was facilitated by a training program conducted by Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang underscores the importance of capacity-building initiatives. This finding resonates with research emphasizing the role of education and training in equipping rural communities with the skills and knowledge required to harness digital tools effectively (Ramsden et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). It underscores the idea that education acts as an empowerment tool, enabling rural entrepreneurs to overcome the initial barriers associated with digital adoption.

The study's identification of challenges faced by agrotourism businesses in embracing digital marketing resonates with existing literature. The lack of digital marketing expertise, technical issues, and resource constraints are common challenges reported in rural digitalization efforts (de Clercq et al., 2023; Price et al., 2021). Recognizing these challenges is essential for tailoring support programs and interventions that address the specific needs of rural businesses and facilitate their digital transition.

The study's finding that digital marketing played a pivotal role in fostering community engagement and sustainability aligns with the broader concept of destination marketing and community development. Research in the field of destination marketing has emphasized the importance of community engagement and cultural representation in attracting tourists (Lu et al., 2020). Digital marketing, as demonstrated in Sumbergedang Village, not only promotes individual businesses but also contributes to the broader identity and pride of the local community, ultimately strengthening its sustainability.

In light of the findings, several recommendations emerge as crucial for furthering the potential of digital marketing in Sumbergedang Village and similar rural settings. Firstly, there is a clear and pressing need for comprehensive capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing digital marketing skills among agrotourism business owners. Training programs, workshops, and ongoing education could empower these entrepreneurs to make more effective and innovative use of online tools. Secondly, local authorities and relevant stakeholders should give due consideration to strategic investments in digital infrastructure and resources that can support businesses in their digital

marketing endeavors. This could encompass provisions such as improved internet connectivity and access, digital literacy programs, and the creation of digital marketing support networks. Lastly, future research endeavors could delve deeper into the long-term effects of digital marketing on agrotourism self-sustainability, exploring innovative strategies to overcome the challenges identified in this study. This would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of rural development in a digital era.

In conclusion, this research underscores the vital and transformative role of digital marketing in shaping the self-sustainability of agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village. It celebrates the myriad benefits, including heightened visibility, enhanced customer engagement, and substantial revenue growth. Simultaneously, it acknowledges the challenges and obstacles encountered on the digital frontier, highlighting the immense potential for digital marketing to contribute to community sustainability. These findings extend beyond the confines of Sumbergedang Village and offer valuable insights and lessons for agrotourism businesses, local authorities, and researchers interested in the intricate interplay between rural development and digital marketing practices in the modern age. The study serves as a testament to the potential of digital initiatives in fostering community cohesion and driving sustainable economic growth.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study delved into the transformative impact of digital marketing on the self-sustainability of agrotourism in Sumbergedang Village. Through comprehensive qualitative analysis, insights from agrotourism business owners and local authorities illuminated the multifaceted nature of digital marketing strategies employed in the region. The findings highlighted the pivotal role of digital marketing in enhancing visibility, broadening the audience, and ultimately contributing to the economic viability of agrotourism businesses.

A remarkable facet of this transformation was the catalytic influence of a digital business training program conducted by Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. This educational initiative empowered the villagers, who previously had limited exposure to digital technologies, to harness tools such as WhatsApp Business and social media platforms effectively. Consequently, the agrotourism businesses experienced a profound shift in their marketing and sales capabilities, reaching a broader audience and engaging with potential customers in innovative ways.

The positive impact of digital marketing on various aspects of agrotourism business performance was consistently emphasized by participants. Increased

online visibility translated into heightened social media engagement and a notable upswing in customer acquisition. Furthermore, digital marketing facilitated enhanced customer engagement and communication, leading to increased revenue for businesses.

However, the study also unveiled significant challenges. The lack of digital marketing expertise among business owners, technical hurdles, and resource constraints posed formidable barriers. Additionally, the rapid evolution of the digital landscape necessitated continuous learning and adaptation.

An intriguing finding was the role of digital marketing in community building and sustainability. Agrotourism businesses, acting as ambassadors for Sumbergedang Village, not only promoted their offerings but also showcased the community's culture, heritage, and products. This digital representation fostered a sense of pride and identity among residents, contributing to the broader sustainability of the village.

To maximize the potential of digital marketing in rural agrotourism, several recommendations emerge. Firstly, comprehensive capacity-building initiatives are imperative to enhance digital marketing skills among business owners. Education, training programs, and ongoing support can empower entrepreneurs to leverage digital tools effectively. Secondly, strategic investments in digital infrastructure, including improved internet connectivity and digital literacy programs, should be considered to support businesses in their digital marketing endeavors. Lastly, future research should delve deeper into the long-term effects of digital marketing on agrotourism self-sustainability and explore innovative strategies to overcome identified challenges.

In essence, this study underscores the transformative role of digital marketing in rural agrotourism. It not only enriches the economic landscape but also fosters community cohesion and pride. Beyond Sumbergedang Village, these findings offer valuable insights for rural development stakeholders, emphasizing the intricate interplay between digital marketing practices and the sustainability of rural communities in the modern age. This research serves as a testament to the potential of digital initiatives in propelling rural areas towards self-sufficiency and growth in an increasingly connected world.

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