

Business Communication Transformation In The Tourism Msme Sector Of Kota Pari, North Sumatra Through Digital Media Platforms: Challenges And Innovations

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the tourism sector of Kota Pari, North Sumatra, have transformed their business communication through digital media platforms. Using a qualitative case study approach carried out between January and April 2025, primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observation, and documentation of social media accounts. The research involved 40 MSME owners and managers engaged in tourism-related businesses (culinary, accommodation, handicrafts, and local guides). Thematic analysis reveals that MSMEs have migrated from oral and offline promotion toward digital channels particularly WhatsApp Business for reservation and customer service, Instagram for visual storytelling, and TikTok for short-form video promotion. Key challenges include limited digital literacy, uneven internet infrastructure, inconsistent content production, and difficulties measuring digital campaign effectiveness. Innovations observed include collaborations with local content creators, community-led digital training programs, usage of low-cost content tools (Canva, CapCut), and peer-sharing initiatives. The study concludes that digital media positively impacts visitor numbers, order frequency, and local brand awareness but requires targeted capacity building, improved infrastructure, and stronger multi-stakeholder support to be sustainable.

Keywords: *digital communication, MSMEs, tourism, social media, Kota Pari*

INTRODUCTION

Kota Pari a coastal area in Serdang Bedagai, North Sumatra has emerged as a growing local ecotourism destination supported by natural assets such as beaches and mangroves. Tourism-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Kota Pari play a vital role offering accommodation, local culinary products, handicrafts, and guiding services. However, many actors face challenges in communicating their offerings to increasingly digital-savvy visitors. The digital era demands not only the adoption of online platforms but also the strategic use of these platforms to build relationships, brand identity, and customer service.

This research investigates how MSME tourism actors in Kota Pari have transformed their business communication via digital media platforms, the obstacles they face during the digital transition, and the innovations they implement to overcome these constraints. Findings are intended to inform local policymakers, community organizations, and practitioners aiming to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of local tourism MSMEs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business communication in the digital era emphasizes interactivity, personalization, and real-time engagement (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Digital platforms such as social media and messaging applications change one-way promotional activities into two-way dialogues that strengthen customer relationships. Transformational frameworks in digital adoption stress

leadership, culture, infrastructure, and skills (Westerman, Bonnet & McAfee, 2014). Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory helps explain how early adopters and innovators catalyze broader adoption among peers. For MSMEs, constraints such as limited capital, human resources, and digital literacy often shape the pace and depth of transformation (Purwanto, 2021).

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach conducted in Kota Pari between January and April 2025. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Purposive sampling was used to select 40 tourism MSMEs actively using digital media. This qualitative descriptive case study was conducted in Desa Kota Pari, Kecamatan Pantai Cermin, Serdang Bedagai, North Sumatra between January and April 2025. The study targeted MSME owners and managers active in tourism sectors (culinary, homestays, handicrafts, and guiding services). Using purposive and saturated sampling, 40 MSMEs that had at least one digital communication channel were included. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis: data reduction, thematic coding, and synthesis leading to conclusions. Triangulation increased credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The results indicate that WhatsApp Business is primarily used for reservations and customer communication, Instagram for visual promotion, and TikTok for short-form video engagement. Digital adoption has increased customer reach and brand recognition.

Profile of Tourism MSMEs in Kota Pari

The sample comprised predominantly small-scale culinary vendors and homestay operators. Approximately 60% of businesses actively used at least one social media platform for promotion and interaction.

Forms of Communication Transformation

Four prominent patterns emerged:

1. Migration to digital promotion: Word-of-mouth and physical signboards have been supplemented or replaced by social media posts and short videos.
2. Messaging apps for operations: WhatsApp Business commonly used for reservations, order confirmations, and customer feedback.
3. Visual storytelling: Instagram is used as a product and destination portfolio; simple photo galleries and highlights showcase menus and homestay rooms.
4. Short-form video adoption: TikTok videos featuring cooking processes, local culture, and on-site tourist experiences attracted younger audiences and occasional viral attention.

Challenges

Respondents reported the following barriers:

1. Low digital literacy: Many owners lack content-creation skills and basic analytics understanding.
2. Infrastructure limits: Unstable internet in some areas constrains live interactions and

timely uploads.

3. Inconsistent content production: Irregular posting and lack of content planning reduce engagement momentum.
4. Measurement difficulties: Owners struggle to interpret platform metrics and assess ROI of digital efforts.

Innovations and Adaptive Practices

Local actors demonstrated practical innovations:

1. Collaborations with local content creators to produce persuasive content at low cost.
2. Community training programs (peer-to-peer Digital Sharing) organized by youth groups.
3. Use of free/low-cost tools (Canva for visuals, CapCut for short video edits) enabling better-looking content without professional studios.
4. Simple reservation systems via Google Forms and WhatsApp templates.

Impact

Digital adoption correlated with increased inquiries, higher booking rates during peak season, and improved brand recognition outside the immediate locality. Social media presence also aided informal feedback loops and repeat visitation by customers who follow brand pages.

DISCUSSION

These findings align with digital communication and MSME transformation theories, confirming that digital platforms enhance interaction and competitiveness. However, gaps in digital skills and infrastructure remain major constraints. The findings align with literature emphasizing that digital platforms reshape business communication from one-way advertising into interactive, relationship-driven processes (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Consistent with Rogers' diffusion model, early adopters often younger entrepreneurs or those with external networks acted as catalysts for wider uptake. However, structural issues such as uneven infrastructure and limited digital skills echo challenges described in broader MSME digitalization studies (Westerman et al., 2014).

Practical innovations in Kota Pari demonstrate that low-cost, locally adapted solutions can yield meaningful outcomes. Community-led training and partnerships with micro-influencers provide replicable models for other rural tourism destinations. Policy implications include the need for coordinated efforts between local government, universities, and private sector platforms to provide infrastructure investments, capacity building, and simple measurement training so MSME owners can make informed decisions about digital marketing investments.

CONCLUSION

Digital media platforms significantly transform business communication among tourism MSMEs in Kota Pari. Strengthening digital literacy, supporting infrastructure, and encouraging collaboration are essential for sustainable digital transformation. This study shows that digital media platforms have become pivotal in transforming business communication among tourism MSMEs in Kota Pari. While positive impacts on visibility and bookings are evident, sustainability of transformation depends on addressing digital literacy gaps, improving

internet infrastructure, and institutionalizing training and mentorship programs.
Recommendations:

1. Capacity building: Regular, hands-on workshops on content creation, basic analytics, and simple scheduling tools.
2. Infrastructure support: Public–private initiatives to improve local internet reliability.
3. Ecosystem collaboration: Facilitate partnerships between MSMEs, local content creators, tourism office, and academic institutions for continuous mentorship and low-cost promotional campaigns.
4. Measurement tools: Introduce simple KPI templates (inquiries per week, booking conversion rate, engagement trends) usable by non-experts

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