

# The Technology Used for Government's Communication Strategy During COVID-19 Pandemic; A Comparative Study Between Langkawi, Malaysia and Bali, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—This study aims to explore the uses of technology in the government's communication strategy to inform and socialize any regulation and support to the tourism sectors in Langkawi and Bali during the limitation of access due to the Covid19 pandemic. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from semi-structured interviews with representatives from four hotels in Langkawi and Bali including government agencies, and observation and literature review, with the case study as the method. By exploring the Media Richness Theory in the analysis, this study found that the government from each country has used different approaches in communicating with the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, both have done some adjustments in terms of communication media which one of the solutions is using the technology media. The adjustments are using the website, application, online meeting, video conference, and social media.

**Keywords**—*Technology Media, Government, Communication, COVID-19 pandemic, Tourism*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important industry for many countries, especially in supporting employment, infrastructure development, and as a significant contributor to the GDP. [1] The tourism industry is a significant income contributor to the Malaysian economy. Tourist receipts in 2019 reached MYR 86.1 billion compared to MYR83.1 billion for the same

period in 2018[2]. While in Indonesia, the tourism sector economy contributed to the national GDP of 5.5% and the number of workers in this sector is 13 million people in 2019. [3]. Although the tourism and hospitality industry has displayed an almost constant growth currently this has come with constant challenges at the same time. The recent public health crisis related to Covid-19 pandemic has had a big impact on tourism and of course the hotel industry. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the whole world. Starting from Wuhan, China in December 2019, the SARS Cov2 virus emerged and attacked its citizens [4] and then slowly spread throughout the world.

In Malaysia, the first to detect the first case of Covid-19 was on January 25, 2020, which was found in tourists from China. Since then, the addition of cases has continued until April 20, 2020, there were more than 5300 cases with 89 people dead. The Prime Minister of Malaysia on March 18, 2020, issued an MCO policy, namely the Movement Control Order [5]. Covid19 was first discovered in Indonesia in early March 2020, but there are many studies from various research institutions such as the University of Indonesia, Harvard University, Australian University that Covid19 entered Indonesia in early January 2020 [6]. On March 31, 2020, President Jokowi announced to the public about the Large-Scale Social Restriction (PSBB) which means a restriction on certain activities in certain areas/residents suspected [7]. With PSBB, all

community activities are stopped while having a strong influence on society particularly in the economy [8].

Both governments have announced a regulation to avoid the contagious effects of Covid19. This includes the limitation of community mobilization, nationally and internationally. As well as the private sector and companies as well as Universities that carry out quarantine and relocation to employees who have a history of traveling from exposed countries [9]. The Indonesian government has also decided to close for all international tourists from April 2020 until now, where this policy has been done by several countries. The Malaysian government has been limiting the mobility of its citizens out of Malaysia and restricting foreigners from entering Malaysia [5]. This policy is almost the same as the lockdown imposed in China and Italy. Under the lockdown policy in Malaysia, only essential places are allowed to open, such as supermarkets and medical clinics. Almost all schools were closed. Residents are only allowed to leave the house for important activities and not more than 10 KM. from home. Previously, travel between regions in Malaysia had been banned for months [10].

The Covid-19 pandemic hit Bali's economy and tourism industry hard. The local government states that Bali is in a very deep slump where all services are oversupply because there are no tourists. The impact of Covid-19, all of Bali's tourism activities were the most affected about 96%. The combined data of the Indonesian Tourism Industry (ITI) of Bali recorded the potential loss of the tourism sector in Bali from leisure and fare reaching USD 9 billion or around Rp 140 trillion [6]. While in Malaysia particularly Langkawi as the landmark of Malaysia tourist destination, the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) mentioned that as of March 16 (before the movement control order was imposed), a total of 170,085 hotel room bookings valued at MYR 68 million had been canceled, and the losses are expected to double by the end of the year. MAH also foresaw that 30% of 4,888 hotels registered under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) are expected to close [2].

Thus, the use of technology media has become the solution for the government to keep the communication access where face-to-face interaction is forbidden. At present, social media has become an important alternative for conveying disaster information during an epidemic crisis. Various public health offices and individuals choose to utilize social media platforms to communicate and share information [11]. Developments in communication technology show that billions of people are connected easily over long distances, the presence of social media devices is common in the social environment during face-to-face interactions [12] The function of technology is to expand human interaction in society. Technologies that are understood to be embedded to help appreciate community interactions and can be learned [13].

Information and communication technology (ICT) has shown progress and commercialization in encouraging hotels, offices, factories and companies to motivate ICT innovation. This expectation emerged when the hotel took the initiative to improve work efficiency using new ICT-based procedures to meet customer needs [14]. Based on the Media Richness Theory (MRT) there is an assumption that social and physical presence affects the increase in social media "wealth". On the other hand, the media plays a role in supporting important communication processes. thus, another dimension of social media that also deserves to be taken into account. MRT believes that the many characteristics of communication channels provide options in the process of carrying information. This theory explains the composition of wealth as a multi-perspective medium. In other words, MRT argues that the media have varying degrees of "wealth", or "ability" of information to transform knowledge over time [11]. With this fact, this research is aiming to find the government's communication strategy to ensure all regulation, information, and promotion in tourism sectors are well disseminated, including creating a two-way communication between the government and the community in Langkawi and Bali during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## II. METHODS

In doing this research, a qualitative approach was used. Researchers go into the field without being burdened or directed by theory and emphasis on using the researcher as an instrument where the researcher must be able to uncover social phenomena in the field by mobilizing all their sensory functions. [15]

A case study as a method was used to make this research can be used for other cases with the same situation. Moreover, the case study can be defined as an empirical research method used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon, focusing on the dynamics of the case, within its real-life context. [16]

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were applied including an observation and literature review. The unit of analysis in this study was hotels practitioners in Langkawi and Bali. In addition, the head of the Bali Tourism Agency had become the resource too. While for Langkawi, literature review became another resource. The interviews were conducted by following the content of resources' answers. This effort was aiming to explore more of the data and enrich the research.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The United Nations stated that during the government process during the COVID-19 outbreak, the whole world used digital platforms such as social media, mobile applications, and portals to advertise information related to COVID-19 to the public (United Nation). The delivery of this risk communication is considered strategic, effective, and the BOP is cheaper

during the COVID-19 outbreak period. The public's perception of having an active role to protect and ensure the safety of the community must be shown by the government [1].

The basic information provided is guidelines, procedures, prevention, handling and government responses. The development of e-governance during the pandemic understands the public to anticipate the effects associated with the virus [17]. E-government and social media were chosen as important platforms for educating children and adults about protective behavior against viruses. People need to be vigilant, maintain distance, physical interaction and get used to staying at home more. Therefore, they have more time to use the internet network at home. [1].

#### *A. Langkawi, Malaysia*

Most island destinations such as Bali, Bora Bora, Palawan, Phuket and Pulau Langkawi were heavily dependent on its nature as the main tourism product to attract visitors. These islands received increasing numbers of tourists throughout the years. However, the growth and intensity of tourism activities in these areas may raise some sustainability issues because of its ecological fragility [1]. Pulau Langkawi could be facing the same situation, because, as claimed by Ibrahim et al. (2019) In 1987, the Malaysian government through the Tourism Assets of Langkawi Island modified this island into a popular tourist destination after being awarded a duty-free zone [18].

However, when the covid-19 virus came to Malaysia, in March 2020, Many workers were furloughed and laid off by the hotel industry, in addition, some experienced wage cuts. This is the economic impact of a pandemic outbreak. The Malaysian Hotel Association (MAH) reported a loss estimated at RM560.72 million in revenue for the Movement Control Order (MCO) period. [19]. This is because human interaction is an essential attribute for hotels business sustainability. A remote working was not a feasible option as their employees need to travel to conduct businesses [20].

With this fact, of course government support is needed to protect workers from becoming unemployed and ensuring that tourism and hospitality businesses remain financially viable once the lockdown is lifted. The government quickly announced an allocation of MYR100 billion under the PRIHATIN Rakyat Economic Stimulus Package to support business.

The support and policy intervention however should be communicated well by the government so that the hotels' practitioners are aware including the community. Instead of the lockdown in all Malaysia areas for a few months, all policies still need to be disseminated without having a face-to-face interaction. A report was released by the National Audit Department which stated that a total of RM 455 million had been spent by the government in order to provide

infrastructure for an e-government project [21]. Even though the use of e-government applications is still at a low level.

E-government is the sample of technology used in a way the government tries to communicate with its people. Currently, the Malaysian government also has used the Big Data method in its hospitals to handle the Covid19 patients. In Malaysia, the advanced healthcare system in the country was extended beyond its capacity. Big data aims to mitigate the impact of an epidemic, reduce health services burdens, protect populations at risk of infectious diseases, and reduce deaths. Big data evolves into a knowledge ecosystem: a network of internally and externally shared information, automated decisions, outcomes, and new insights for business. Big data can provide continuous and frequent monitoring of health practitioners and Malaysian hospitals to address issues and identify root causes of problems [22]. Big data will reduce healthcare costs, reduce overhead waste and maximize resource usage. It can be used to recognize and respond better to epidemics, cure and manage illness, avoid premature deaths, and enhance citizens' overall quality of life and well-being [23].

While the health service uses the Big Data method, then the e-government uses an interactive media. E-government plays a role in facilitating interaction between people and the government as well as improving the information flow and process within the government. The e-government initiatives in Malaysia were introduced under the 7th Malaysia Development Plan. Seven applications were identified as pioneering MSC projects. These included the e-government flagship with the e-government projects namely Generic Office Environment (GOE). GOE provides a paperless office environment using the multimedia information technology paradigm. This system provides public servants with a quick and easy method to access the latest information and ensures consistent and accurate information is given to the right person [21].

Messages related to the development of COVID-19 information can be accessed through the official portal of the Ministry of Health Malaysia. Malaysians can access the CPRC KKM Telegram channel, a special Facebook page called the Crisis Preparedness and Response Center (CRPC), and the Malaysian Ministry of Health (KKM). In April 2020, the government launched "MySejahtera", a mobile application to help deal with the outbreak in the country. The public can register their check-in locations, monitor their health progress and assist the authorities to provide an effective and rapid response to control the spread of COVID-19. Various studies report that e-government and social media have a fundamental role in stimulating protective attitudes and behaviors of Malaysians. Most people choose social media as the best alternative [1].

The Malaysian government proposes domestic travel promotion options in the tourism sector. Other

initiatives are marketing, financial incentives, and product development, partnerships, market intelligence, capacity building and training. In order to increase tourist confidence, a more holistic approach to assessing the potential of domestic tourism. One example is information on the behavior and preferences of domestic tourists and estimates of tourism's ability to revive the industry. [24]. One of the campaigns is *Cuti-Cuti* Malaysia to stimulate domestic tourists. The initiative needed is digital grants to tourism industry players to carry out their business activities towards industrial digitization. Government intervention provides benefits in promotional activities, marketing, information dissemination, bookings and cancellations due to uncertain situations..

The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) and the Tourism Promotion Board of Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia) need to provide essential insights and guidance for tourism policymakers and practitioners to maintain business continuity within the tourism ecosystem and ensure tourism resilience in any future crises. It would be useful for policymakers (MOTAC) to regulate and modify relevant tourism policies and stimulus packages or incentives to support and inspire local industry players such as transport providers, accommodation operators, licensed travel agents, tour guides, tourism product operators, food outlets, and handicraft/souvenirs suppliers to be more aggressive in promoting domestic tourism, especially in the COVID-19 recovery period. The rebrand of *Cuti-Cuti* Malaysia as the premier tourism driver necessarily needs adjustments considering the MCO and other measures to curtail the deadly coronavirus. By fine-tuning the *Cuti-Cuti* Malaysia marketing plan and communication strategy, the country may have a better chance of rejuvenating the tourism industry, a significant income generator [20].

#### *B. Bali, Indonesia*

The island of Bali is one of the main destinations for international tourists who have received the title "The Best Destination in The World" and "The Best Spa Destination of The World" from international magazines is one proof of how fascinated and amazed foreign nationals are of the beauty and the uniqueness of Bali as a world tourist destination. It's unique culture and beautiful natural scenery have always been the charm and appeal for tourists. Bali is renowned as one tourism destination globally; thus, the island became a place of interest for foreign tourists. With the unavailability of natural resources such as oil and gas, forest products, or large-scale manufacturing industries, tourism is the main sector to support economic development in Bali and the agricultural sector. The nature and Balinese culture are unique, and the spiritual activities make the nuances different from other tourist destinations in Indonesia [25]. Bali has had a growing tourism industry since the 1930s and has supported 68% of Bali's economy and employed more than 50% of the population [26]. In addition, Bali is one of the

provinces that have an important role in the Indonesian economy, contributing to the national GDP of 8.57 percent [27]. This contribution mainly comes from the tourism sector, as Bali is the flagship of national tourism.

When covid19 came to Indonesia, to suppress the positive number of Covid-19, the government issued a legal basis to accelerate the handling of the coronavirus. The Indonesian government has issued several regulations, one of which is Government Regulation No. 21 of 2020 namely Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB). In addition, The Ministry of Health has also issued Regulation No. 9 of 2020 namely Large-Scale Social Restrictions Guidance. Based on Ministry of Health Regulation No. 9 of 2020, the primary data that need to be managed for handling epidemics and pandemics are medical records and personal health records, travel history, disaster areas and list of areas in surveillance, the number of cases and local transmission events [28]. The PSBB includes restrictions on community activities including schools and offices being closed, restrictions on activities in crowded places or public facilities and other special restrictions related to aspects of community security. This policy included Bali. Based on Bali Governor Instruction number 8551-year 2020 regarding the strengthening and prevention of Covid-19, Bali Province follows social restrictions. Therefore, based on those regulations, data related to infrastructure (medical devices, medicines, health facilities, laboratories, pharmacies, funerals, etc.) and the availability of human resources for medical personnel, analysts, and information technology are also vital for evaluating and monitoring health services provided by the health service manager.

A research conducted in 2020 about the impact of Covid-19 and the PSBB policy, for the employment in Bali showed that out of 748 companies that reported as of April 16, 2020, there were 52,387 employees who were sent home, 84 companies reported 1,204 employees who were laid off [29]. This possibly happened since the Indonesia government has decided to close for all international tourists until 2021. Though the government has opened for domestic tourists since the end of July 2020, it still does not help the economy and operation of the tourism field.

The government needs to help the community in Bali to survive, otherwise the people will die not because of covid but because they cannot afford to buy some food. The help and support should be done comprehensively since the main economic resources of the Bali people is tourism. While during the pandemic, the tourism field is the most impacted by the restriction for international and national mobilisation. Communication needs to be developed not only for health issues to prevent the spread of covid19 but also for surviving the tourism sectors. Hotels and other tourism practitioners need to have access to

communicate their obstacles, their effort to survive or their input re- government policy. At least to help them standstill until the pandemic is over or safe enough to open the restriction for the tourism sector nationally and internationally.

The Government of Indonesia has issued Presidential Regulation No. 39 of 2019 concerning One Data Indonesia to establish accurate, up-to-date, integrated, accountable, easily accessed, and shared data, and is managed carefully, integrated, and sustainably. The Indonesian Ministry of Health has developed several e-health applications such as public health center information systems, hospital management information systems, health referral information systems, emergency information systems and telemedicine that can be used by the public health care facilities. These applications can be used to assist the government in performing public health functions according to the States of America Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Currently, there are 17 implementing regulations on e-health. Regulations covering the aspect of Information Systems/Information Technology are regulated under 3 regulations with a focus on electronic transactions and disclosure of public information. m. The arrangement of data communication implementation in integrated Health Information System aims to guarantee the availability, quality, and access of priority Health Data and other Data Loads; optimize the flow of health data from districts/cities and/or provinces to the Ministry of Health or vice versa, and realize the implementation of an integrated Health Information System [30].

For tourism, under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MOTCE), the Indonesian government is officially in charge of some social media accounts to help and support tourism particularly for Bali. First, Kemenparekraf (abbreviation of Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif - MOTCE) is the official corporate accounts of the Ministry to inform the public about the tourism and creative economy policy. Second, Pesona Indonesia Travel social media accounts to promote Indonesian tourism to Indonesian citizens, so that the accounts use Indonesian language. Third, Indonesia Travel social media accounts to promote Indonesian tourism to global markets. The social media accounts under MOTCE are mostly using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube, which can be classified as the virtual communities, content communities, and social network sites [31]. The platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, and Twitter. Indonesia Travel's Twitter accounts has the biggest number of followers along with other Indonesia Travel social media accounts (1.3 million followers). While Kemenparekraf serves the general public as the corporate accounts, Pesona Indonesia Travel and Indonesia Travel fulfil the functions as the social media marketing channels for Indonesian tourism.

Since the pandemic, an online approach is used by the Indonesian government including for promotion, campaign and regulation socialization. The MOTCE has built digital marketing for tourism purposes. The government also has started a new campaign to rebrand the Indonesian tourism campaign. The government changed the tagline of Wonderful Indonesia into Thoughtful Indonesia on April 23rd, 2020, to show empathy on the current pandemic situation. Few hashtags to increase the people awareness such as *#StayAtHome* and *#InDOnesiaCARE* also being announced.

In the context of Bali government, the Bali Tourism Agency, has also built a communication with the tourism practitioners using the technology media during the pandemic. Long time ago before the pandemic, the agency has had a good relationship with those Bali tourism personels. Therefore, the agency does not have any difficulties in communicating with them. They have developed a mutual relationship between government and local associations for tourism sectors. The biggest association in Bali is PHRI (The Republic of Indonesia Hotel Association). PHRI also plays the role as the representative for input to the government. PHRI act as an organization that oversees its members in the field of hospitality, restaurants, owner services and educational institutions tourism, including developing potential members, guidance, consulting, cooperation & solidarity, providing protection, promotion, as well as research, business development planning. Hence, the agency just needs to contact the PHRI representative to develop the communication. The PHRI has had a WhatsApp group with the members from all over Bali. Once the PHRI has the information, then the whole Bali will know it. The Bali tourism practitioners have no choice but to join PHRI because the government has given an exclusive authority for PHRI in terms of license extension. PHRI recommendation is needed to extend tourism business license. But in the other hand, PHRI needs to help the government to have a good communication media to all Bali tourism practitioners. As a result, once the government wants to communicate or socialize or promote or disseminate any information, the PHRI will conduct a virtual meeting and share the virtual invitation. The communication between the government and the tourism practitioners are well maintained even in this covid19 pandemic.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

One aspect that has been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic is the tourism sector. Decisions by the government to close or restrict the movement of people both domestically and internationally, have dealt a hard blow for them. MCO or PSBB are examples of policies from both governments in both countries to prevent the spread of the virus. Both governments have tried to provide various assistance and support such as tax breaks, grants, subsidize employee salaries, or relax

regulations restrictions on the movement of community activities, namely by re-opening the door of tourism for domestic tourists. The government has also issued various tourism campaign programs so that the wider community remains informed about tourism holiday promotions. In Malaysia there is a Cuti-Cuti campaign, namely taking time off to vacation to tourist attractions. In Indonesia, the government changed the name of its campaign program to be Thoughtful Indonesia. But the government's action is not enough by injecting funds or issuing various policies. Government too obliged to establish two-way communication with the community, including tourists and business actors. Various policies to help tourism actors to survive must be socialized. In addition, it is time for the government to innovate in the tourism sector related to preventing the transmission of the Covid-19 virus and living with a new normal.

The Malaysian government has used technology as the tool of governing under the 7th Malaysia Development Plan. One of the tools is the E-government where it plays a role in facilitating interaction between people and the government as well as improving the information flow and process within the government. Using the Big Data method, the government also established a healthcare system in facing the pandemic. Big data aims to mitigate the impact of an epidemic, reduce health services burdens, protect populations at risk of infectious diseases, and reduce deaths. Big data evolves into a knowledge ecosystem: a network of internally and externally shared information, automated decisions, outcomes, and new insights for business. Big data can provide continuous and frequent monitoring of health practitioners and Malaysian hospitals to address issues and identify root causes of problems. Malaysia residents can get information and updates on COVID-19 through the Official Portal of the Ministry of Health Malaysia, special Facebook pages called the Crisis Preparedness and Response Center (CRPC) and Ministry of Health Malaysia (KKM), and also the Telegram channel of CPRC KKM. In April 2020, a mobile application called MySejahtera was launched by the government to help in managing the outbreak in the country. E-government and social media played significant roles. During the pandemic, the Malaysian government suggested several initiatives targeted at promoting domestic travel and restoring confidence in the tourism sector. Government intervention is crucial for providing digital grants to tourism industry players for transforming their core business activities towards further digitalization of the industry. Not only for promotion, marketing, information socialization, but also to book and cancel due to the uncertain situation.

Meanwhile, for the Indonesian government, the use of technology in dealing with pandemics and building communication with the community is stated in government regulations and implemented by each ministry. The Indonesian Ministry of Health has developed several e-health applications such as public

health center information systems, hospital management information systems, health referral information systems, emergency information systems and telemedicine that can be used by the public health care facilities. The government also cooperates with the States of America Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). There are 17 implementing regulations on e-health. Regulations covering the aspect of Information System/Information Technology are regulated under 3 regulations with a focus on electronic transactions and disclosure of public information. For tourism, under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MOTCE), the Indonesian government, is officially in charge of some social media accounts to help and support tourism particularly for Bali. The social media accounts under MOTCE are mostly using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube, which can be classified as the virtual communities, content communities, and social network sites. The platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, and Twitter. Indonesia Travel's Twitter accounts has the biggest number of followers along with other Indonesia Travel social media accounts (1.3 million followers). While Kemenparekraf serves the general public as the corporate accounts, Pesona Indonesia Travel and Indonesia Travel fulfil the functions as the social media marketing channels for Indonesian tourism. In the context of local government, a good relationship between the government and the tourism industry has made the communication is well maintained. WhatsApp groups, zoom meetings and virtual workshops have become the technology media used by both sides to face the pandemic and win the battle with the virus.

It can be concluded that, government has to take the initiative to be more open with the advancement of technology. Not only because of the pandemic but also now it's the era of technology. Even the pandemic can give more ideas of a new concept of tourism to be explored. More research will be very useful to dig deeply into the social media impact or the social media use in the tourism industry. Or more research looking at some ideas or innovations from many countries in utilizing the technology in their tourism industry in the future.

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