The Agility of Micro Travel Influencer in Labuan Bajo Tourism Promotional Communication

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ABSTRACT

De-escalation occurred in the number of domestic and foreign tourist arrivals during this new normal. The pandemic that gave rise to social restriction policies had a negative impact on the country's tourism sector, including Labuan Bajo which is a super-priority tourist destination. A significant decrease of 82% occurred in the number of Labuan Bajo tourists, so in the face of this de-escalation, various parties are trying to revive Labuan Bajo tourism, from the government to influencers, especially travel influencers. Travel influencers are undeniably the main actors who can promote Labuan Bajo tourism during this pandemic, both travel influencers with millions of followers and micro travel influencers. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the agility of micro travel influencers in carrying out promotional communications for Labuan Bajo tourism. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method that is specifically carried out on the Instagram account of micro travel influencer Indra Septian Azhari, @indraseptianazhari. This study found that as a micro travel influencer, this account has the potential to influence its followers because the majority of followers of this account are 18-24 years old. Then this study also found that celebrity endorsers have a very important role in boosting the increase in three digital indicators: likes, comments, and engagement rates. However, it is possible that an Instagram account can get a lot of followers without using celebrity attributes in its material.

Keywords: micro travel influencer, promotion communication, tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The new normal that gave birth to social restriction policies resulted in stagnation and even decline in various industrial sectors in the country. It is not the social or political sector, but the tourism sector that is the worst affected [1]. If in 2019 there were 6.3 million foreign tourist visits, visits during the pandemic as of January-May 2020 decreased by 53.36% to 2.9 million [2]. De-escalation also occurred in the number of domestic tourists visits due to the reluctance of the Indonesian people to travel because they have to be on guard and protect themselves from exposure to the virus [3]. Labuan Bajo, which is now a super-priority tourist destination in Indonesia, has not been spared the impact of the pandemic. A significant decrease of 82% occurred in the number of tourists from Labuan Bajo [4].

Facing this de-escalation, various parties are trying to maintain and strengthen the tourist area of Labuan Bajo. One of them is the Tourism Authority of Labuan Bajo Flores (BOPLF), a special agency under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, which has carried out several strategic steps to restore the tourism sector of Labuan Bajo. These steps include training for local communities in various fields, developing the Batu Cermin tourist village in Liang Dara, and promoting through the media by holding familiarization trips for online, print, and television media players [5].

Apart from the top line or government, this tourism promotion communication is also indirectly carried out actively by social media influencers, especially those who are active in the travel sector, be it micro- or meso-influencers. In this case, micro-influencers are those who have less than 10,000 followers, while meso-influencers are those who have more than 10,000 to 1 million followers [6]. It is undeniable that travel influencers can be the main actors who can promote Labuan Bajo tourism during this pandemic, including micro travel influencers.

Anjali Bal, an Associate Professor from Babson College USA, said in Lipiner (2020) that the nature of influencer marketing is that consumers tend to trust information coming from influencers more than traditional marketing and advertisements. It can also be seen as a modern form of celebrity endorsement [7]. With the above background, this study aims to analyze the agility of micro travel influencers in carrying out promotional communications for Labuan Bajo tourism.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's digital era, promotional activities are one of the important activities for the survival of a product or brand. Therefore, many promotional channels are used so that the message conveyed can be received by a very specific target audience. One of the current prim donnas is marketing activities using Social Media Influencers (SMI).

According to Abidin (2016); Lou and Yuan (2019), what SMI means are people who have accumulated a large social media following, which is obtained through creative and commercially valuable social media material, where the content focuses on their experiences and interests only [8].

In addition, SMI is also considered as public figures or micro-celebrities because they use their online identity to communicate messages with their followers and achieve popularity. The communication and branding activities carried out by SMI are known to be aimed at supporting forms of Para social relationships between SMI and their followers.

The thing that emerges in SMI is none other than the ability to persuade and influence consumers and how they maintain customer trust in SMI. This is very understandable because the role of the number of followers plays an important role. So far, there are 4 categories of SMI usage based on the number of followers: (1) Mega or Super category Influencers with more than 1 million followers; (2) Macro Influencers with 100 thousand-1 million followers; (3) Micro-Influencers with 5 thousand-100 thousand followers; and (4) Nano Influencers with less than 5 thousand followers. In addition, there are also those who categorize followers based on the number of positive relationships that occur such as the number of "likes", the number of objective opinions, and account credibility [8].

Of the many types of SMI, the Micro and Macro levels are considered the most effective in promoting products and brands. This is because the number of their followers is not too large so that all uploaded presentations can be accepted and understood by the audience such as videos, articles, and review results. There are two benefits obtained, namely first, the smaller the number of followers of a social media account, the more specific the character of the followers will be. On this basis, all uploads made by SMI will be accepted by the audience of followers of the account.

Second, the emergence of native advertising that describes sponsored material, so that the material uploaded to the SMI account has a context that makes it clearer to understand [9] [10].

In addition, despite the small number of followers, the use of Nano and Micro influencers has proven to be more effective in attracting and influencing consumers. The reasons are lower prices paid by companies, a higher level of trust than Macro influencers, relatability (considered as 'ordinary people' and not celebrities), having segmented targets, and higher interactions [9] [10].

The SMI phenomenon itself is not new because previously McCracken (1989) raised the theme of celebrity endorsers. What is meant by celebrity endorser is an individual who enjoys adoration from the public and uses this cult to display products as a promotion (advertising). Usually, these celebrities are used to endorse brands so that they are known to the public and get public attention and are able to influence attitudes and purchase intentions [11].

What's interesting about using this celebrity is to make the attributes they have such as expertise, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, nature, beauty, courage, and achievement as important points to attract (prospective) consumers [12]. These public figures are used to attract the attention of the audience in order to increase product awareness. They are chosen to give the impression that consumers are selective in choosing and increasing status, by owning what celebrities wear.

With this perception, marketers hope to form positive associations with the product in the minds of their customers. This is important because the positive association was considered capable of forming an image of a brand in the minds of consumers. A good image is an effective way to get the attention of consumers because consumers consciously or unconsciously will choose products that have a positive brand image. With a good perception in the eyes of consumers, it will affect consumer buying interest [12].

According to Sivesan (2013) and Sola (2012) in Mubarok (2016), the celebrity endorser dimensions used as indicators of assessing the success or failure of a product to achieve brand equity are attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness [12]. Meanwhile, according to Ahmed et al (2012) in Rahima (2018), it is stated that aspects of the credibility of a communicator commonly known as VISCAP consist of Visibility, Credibility, Attractiveness, and Power [13].

Visibility is how far the popularity is attached to the celebrity self, which can represent a product. When an endorser is considered to have a high element of visibility, it is hoped that this can be seen in promotions or uploads on social media so that the promoted brand is recognized by consumers [13].

Credibility is the extent to which the expertise and objectivity of a public figure. This expertise refers to the knowledge, experience, or skills possessed by a public figure related to the brand it supports Shimp [13]. An endorser who is considered an expert on a given topic will be more persuasive in changing the audience's opinion regarding his field of expertise than an endorser who is not considered an expert. An endorser becomes the focus of the audience's trust or motivation for support.

Attractiveness is a celebrity trait that is considered pleasing to the eye in terms of concept and attractiveness by certain groups. Two things are seen in the use of celebrities in terms of attractiveness, namely (1) the level of audience likes (likeability) and (2) the level of similarity with the personal characteristics desired by-product users (similarity). Generally, celebrities are desired to match the target audience of the brand they support, in terms of the demographic and psychographic characteristics concerned [13].

Power is the power of celebrities to persuade consumers to consider the product being promoted for consumption. Endorsers who have strong power can influence consumers'

minds to choose a brand and make the brand better and attached to consumers so that the promoted brand will have a good image on consumers.

According to Haenlein (2020), for an influencer on social media, three things become the main points of influencer marketing success, namely (1) Recognize the characteristics of the audience on each social media because each social media has a different character, including the public character; (2) Recognize the brand size of each social media, which can be seen from the ability to promote through social media from each platform, and (3) Social media content format [13].

The above aspects play an important role in various social media platforms. For Facebook, it is usually oriented towards a large section and online representation. While Twitter is more emphasized on the relevance of the material. On YouTube and Instagram, only entertainment to kill time because it plays a significant role.

This combination explains why Instagram and TikTok are so important to influencer marketing. Most of the users on Instagram and TikTok are ordinary individuals who use the platform to share content with their social circles or to enjoy content produced by others. However, a small group stands out in the sense that they are followed by significantly more users, which results in the fact that the content uploaded by them is spread to a much larger audience.

These users are referred to as influencers. Influencers can be individuals who have gained notoriety off the platform (e.g., athletes, actors, singers) or individuals who have become famous on the platform itself, usually because they produce great content. Companies are naturally interested in collaborating with these influencers to ensure their content is endorsed by users who are trusted by others and disseminated to a wide audience [14].

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Case studies are applied in various situations to gain knowledge about individuals, groups, organizations, social, political, and other related phenomena [15]. The case study research method is also the right strategy to be used in research that uses the main research questions "how" and "why" [16].

This method allows researchers to describe a phenomenon descriptively, namely the stretching of micro travel influencers in Labuan Bajo tourism promotion communications. The case study in this study was also specifically conducted on the Instagram account of micro travel influencer Indra Septian Azhari, @indraseptianazhari [17].

Data collection was carried out from June to July 2021 by conducting interviews and using social media analytic assistance, namely, analysis.io to collect data online. Analysis.io is an AI-powered social analytics tool that provides Instagram Analytics including campaign reporting, follower audience demographics, follower authenticity audits, influencer mapping, tagged

relationships, content analysis, posting schedules, geolocation mapping, date customization, and dedicated support with accounts managers. The data collected is data since the account was created, namely from January 2019 to the data collection period, namely June 2021.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

From data processing obtained through the social media analytic analysis.io application, it can be seen that @indraseptianazhari is a photographer account that offers the services of a travel agent @vincavoyages for cruises to Komodo Island. This account provides a lot of individual photos and videos with natural scenery settings for Labuan Bajo tourism objects. This account has 5,628 followers and 1,091 followings. Since the account was first created on January 3, 2019, until June 2021, the total post for this account was 127, with an engagement rate of 3.82%, a like rate of 3.69%, and a comment rate of 0.13%.

Figure 1 shows the demographics of the followers of this account. Of the 5,628 total followers, the highest number of followers are in the 18–24-year age group, which is 55.77% and most of them are women (75%). The followers of this account are spread in 5 countries, but the most are in Indonesia (46.2%). Although some hashtags use English, the text in this account is generally delivered in Indonesian.
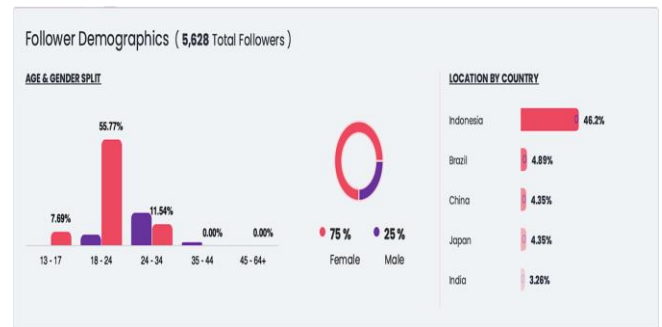

Figure 1. Follower Demographics
Source: Data Processing via analisa.io

As a micro travel influencer, it can be seen that the number of followers of this account is quite specific in terms of age, it appears that this account has the potential to influence its followers, given that consumers aged between 18-24 years have characteristics that tend to look for trusted influencers. The relationship between micro travel influencers and followers is very strong with trust, as revealed through research conducted on 1500 consumers of that age in America, England, and China, that consumers aged 18-24 years are more concerned with quality than quantity and are not very interested in influencers, who have many followers [18]. As revealed by Kay, Mulcahy, and Parkinson (2020), all uploads made by SMI will be accepted by the audience of followers of the account [9].

A limited number of followers aged 18-24 years also display native advertising in this case regarding the Labuan

Bajo tourist attraction, the material uploaded to this SMI account has a very clear context to understand, namely photos and videos of tourists visiting there [9]. In addition, micro-influencers can influence their followers more because they are considered more authentic and familiar, such as loading an invitation from a friend who is an ordinary person [10]. This is done through a friendly, warm, and supportive narrative that accompanies photo uploads in this account, such as "good morning who likes holidays", or "why do we love the sea? Because it has some potent power to make us think things we like to think" [17].

4.1. Posts and Hashtags: Enticing Messages in Digital Marketing Communication

This account's posts are in the form of photos, videos, and text. Of the 127 uploads, 15 of them are videos. The 127 uploads also contain various hashtags, 3 of which are the most frequently used, namely #labuanbajo, #jalan-jalan, and #pesonaindonesia, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Hashtags
Source: Data Processing via analisa.io

Furthermore, Figure 3 shows that of the 127 posts, the most viewed since this account was created in early 2019 until June 2021 were posts on October 10, 2019. This post was viewed 6,141 times, received 573 likes, and 35 comments. This post also uses the 3 most used hashtags, namely #labuanbajo, #jalanjalan, and #pesonaindonesia. Hashtags are an important factor for engagement, and for understanding engagement [19]. Data from Analysis.io shows that the engagement rate of this account is 3.82%.

The object of the photo in the post that is most viewed is a singer who is also a celebrity endorser wearing traditional weaving from the Nusa Tenggara region. Photo setting is one of the attractions in Labuan Bajo. The text in the post contains thank you words as if addressed to the celebrity endorser who has given the account owner the opportunity to record videos when he is in Labuan Bajo.

Figure 3. Most Viewed Post
Source: Data Processing via analisa.io

4.2. Likes, Comments, and Engagement: Interactivity to Influence Followers

Figure 4 shows that posting is mostly done on Wednesday, Sunday, and Monday. On average, posts get 321.7 likes and comments, as can be seen in Figure 5. In addition, Figure 5 also shows that the most likes and comments appear on Friday, Sunday, and Wednesday. This shows that there is a similarity between the trend of posting time with likes and comments for posts on Mondays and Wednesdays. But what is quite interesting is that the average number of likes and comments is done on Fridays, while the posts are the least on that day.
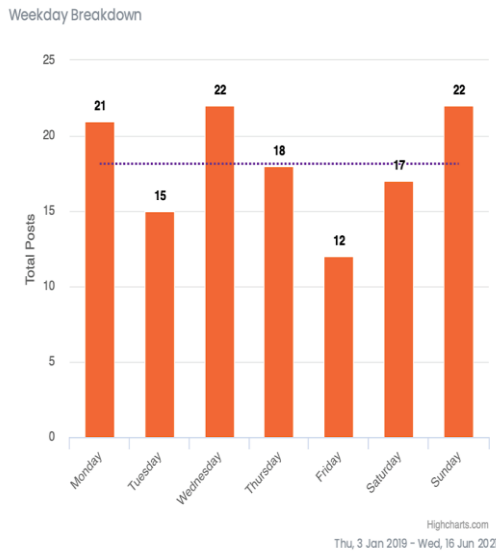
Weekday Breakdown

Figure 4. Total Posts
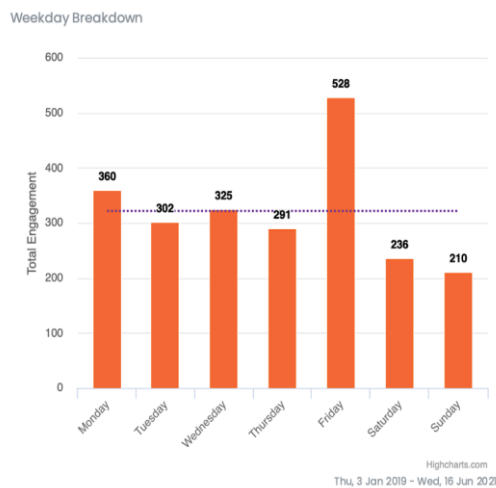Source: Data Processing via analisa.io

Weekday Breakdown

Figure 5. Average Likes and Comments per Post
Source: Data Processing via analisa.io

Figure 6 shows the upload with the highest achievement on the @indraseptianazhari account during the period January 2019 to June 2021. The post was uploaded on September 17, 2019, depicts a public figure image of a popular dangdut singer posing against a backdrop of natural scenery in Labuan Bajo. This upload reached 2,484 likes, garnered 56 followers' comments, and resulted in an engagement rate of 45.13%.
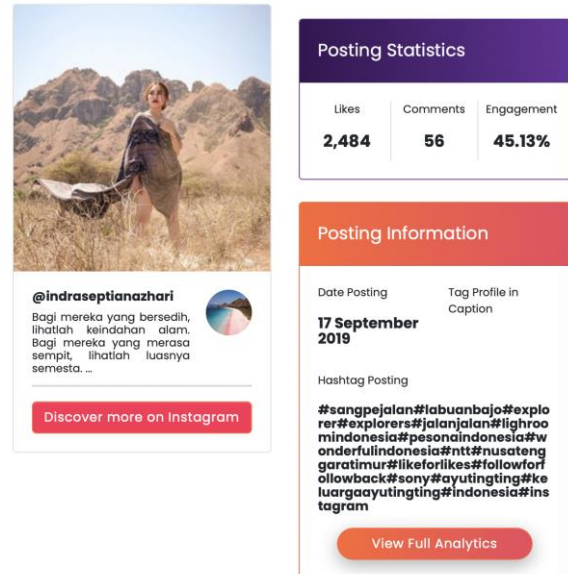

Figure 6. Highest Engagement, Likes and Comments
Source: Data Processing via analisa.io

From the indicators discussed (likes, comments, and engagement rate), it is clear that the content of the @indraseptianazhari Instagram account is dominated by uploads with the object of singer Ayu Ting Ting, with the hashtag #labuanbajo. This is an interesting finding because it can illustrate the collaboration between micro-influencers, namely the Instagram account @indraseptianazhari itself by mentioning the name of the Instagram account @ayutingting92 which has 48 million followers or can be classified as a macro influencer. How the collaboration will take, is not explained in this article.

Judging from the celebrity endorser concept, the presence of a famous singer as well as a macro influencer in this micro-influencer account brings positive things to the micro-influencer account.

The reason is, these micro accounts indirectly support the popularity of accounts that have larger categories. Not surprisingly, four aspects of VISCAP consisting of Visibility, Credibility, Attractiveness, and Power, which are contained in the celebrity endorser concept, can be found in this phenomenon [13].

First, Visibility can be interpreted as the level of ease of being found. @indraseptianazhari's account may be hard to find. But the @ayutingting92 account is very easy to find, especially by fans. Therefore, in this case, the @indraseptianazhari account has the potential to be easy to find so that the public will recognize and understand the message the account owner wants to convey.

The second, the Credibility of the account owner. When talking about the @indraseptianazhari account, maybe not many people know this person, so they don't understand his credibility. However, the information provided in the biography or profile description will greatly help the public to recognize and understand who the owner of the account is. Especially if he uploads material that explains the photo of the popular dangdut singer made by him professionally.

Of course, this information will soon reach all followers of the singer's account.

Third, attractiveness is defined as the level of attractiveness of the public figure. In this case, the figure of a famous singer is present in one of the uploads of the @indraseptianazhari account which has a smaller scale of influence on social media. Because this account displays interesting photos of his work with public figures, this upload has the highest level of exposure witnessed by his followers.

Fourth, Power, which means the artist's ability to persuade consumers. In the phenomenon of the Instagram account @indraseptianazhari, this aspect is very clearly found through what values this account is trying to display by including pictures of famous singers. At the beginning of the analysis section, it was explained that the owner of this account is a seller of photography services and has a travel agency. By displaying the figure of a famous singer with an attractive image display, the account owner is also promoting his service business to the public.

From the explanation above, it can be said that the figure of a celebrity endorser, which is included in several uploads of micro-influencer accounts, has proven to be able to attract the attention of the general public. This is evident from the level of likes, comments, and engagement rates of the account. When compared to uploads that do not include celebrities, the results of the analytical statistics are much different.

5. CONCLUSION

This study which aims to analyze the agility of micro travel influencer in carrying out tourism promotional communications in Labuan Bajo found that as a micro travel influencer, this account has great potential to influence their followers, given that consumers aged between 18-24 years have characteristics that tend to seek trusted influencers. Focusing on quality over quantity, this age group tends to be more attracted to micro-influencers. They also brought up native advertising for the Labuan Bajo tourist attraction uploaded by this micro travel influencer, such as photos and videos of visiting tourists.

In line with previous research, micro travel influencers were also found to be able to influence their followers more because they were considered more authentic and familiar, such as loading an invitation from a friend who was an ordinary person. This Instagram account @indraseptianazhari often writes sentences that are like talking to friends in their photo uploads.

Finally, this study finds that the role of celebrity endorsers is very important in boosting the increase in three digital indicators: likes, comments, and engagement rates. This is because celebrities have their own virtual community in the digital world. But the presence of celebrities is not the main thing in gaining followers. There are many things that can make an Instagram account close in the eyes of the public and get a lot of followers. One of them is the creator of interesting and useful content for the community.

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