

Managing TikTok Content Strategies to Enhance Tourist Engagement: A Case Study of Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village

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Abstract

This study explores strategic approaches to managing TikTok content to enhance tourist attraction at the Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village in Banten. Using a qualitative case study method, the research examines how the local tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis) organises content planning, creative production, and distribution on TikTok. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital content analysis. Drawing on content marketing theory and narrative engagement theory, the study identifies three key stages in content strategy: crafting emotionally resonant themes, producing authentic short videos, and evaluating audience interaction using TikTok analytics. Visual aesthetics, emotional storytelling, and trend adaptation significantly influence audience engagement and visit intention. The findings contribute theoretically by contextualising community-based digital marketing within rural tourism promotion, and practically by offering actionable strategies for local tourism managers. This research highlights how authentic, experience-driven storytelling on social media can strengthen destination branding and foster sustainable tourism development in digitally emerging communities.

Keywords: Content Marketing, TikTok, Tourism Village, Narrative Engagement, Community-Based Tourism

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology and the widespread penetration of the internet have significantly transformed patterns of communication, interaction, and consumer behaviour. Social media has evolved beyond its original function as a communication tool into a key platform for global marketing strategies, enabling destinations to engage audiences across geographic boundaries (Ifadhila et al., 2024). Among various platforms, short-form video-based applications such as TikTok have emerged as powerful tools for promoting tourist destinations through immersive visuals, concise storytelling, and high algorithmic visibility (Belza et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, many mid-scale destinations, especially rural tourism villages, have yet to leverage TikTok in their content marketing strategies fully. While some destinations have started adopting the platform, their use remains largely intuitive and unstructured. Research by (Salsabila and Setiawan, 2025) reveals that TikTok content aesthetics—including visual quality, authenticity, and interactivity—play a critical role in shaping destination image and influencing tourists' intention to visit. This suggests that effective content management goes beyond simply uploading videos; it requires strategic planning aligned with the platform's algorithmic logic and the destination's unique identity.

At Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village in Banten, empirical observations indicate a notable increase in tourist visits following the virality of TikTok content. The village's Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) reported that visitor numbers

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surged after several videos reached TikTok's For You Page (FYP), demonstrating the platform's potential as a promotional tool for community-based tourism destinations. However, questions remain regarding how such content can be systematically planned, produced, and optimised without relying on influencers or external marketing agencies.

Previous studies have examined the role of social media marketing in shaping tourist behaviour (Fadhilah & Saputra, 2021; Gozali & Tunjungsari, 2024). Some have emphasised the power of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and digital storytelling in shaping tourists' purchase and travel decisions. However, few have specifically addressed how local tourism communities—such as Pokdarwis—strategically manage TikTok content to build destination image and engagement. Moreover, much of the existing research focuses on urban, commercial, or influencer-driven contexts, leaving a theoretical and practical gap in rural, community-led digital marketing initiatives. This study aims to address that gap by exploring the strategies employed by Bukit Sinyonya's Pokdarwis in managing TikTok content to enhance destination visibility and attract visitors. The research is grounded in content marketing theory and narrative engagement, which posit that emotionally resonant and authentic storytelling can generate deeper audience connection and behavioural response. By examining content planning, production, and evaluation practices, this study contributes to both theory and practice in the fields of digital tourism marketing and community-based destination management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Tourist Behaviour

In the digital era, social media has emerged as a dominant force in shaping tourist behaviour, particularly in decision-making and destination selection. Tourists are increasingly turning to online platforms not only to seek information but also to validate their travel choices through peer-generated content and recommendations. According to (Xu and Pratt, 2018), digital media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube significantly influence tourists' attitudes and preferences through visual storytelling and user interaction. One of the primary mechanisms by which social media affects tourist behavior is electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). e-WOM refers to the sharing of travel experiences, opinions, and suggestions by users across platforms, often in the form of comments, reviews, or personal content. As (Huertas et al., 2020) highlight, the credibility of peer-shared content often surpasses that of official advertising, making it a critical component in building trust and influencing travel intention.

Moreover, tourists do not engage with social media passively. They actively participate in content creation by posting photos, videos, and reviews, which, in turn, stimulate further interest and engagement from others. This participatory behaviour aligns with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework, in which tourists' exposure to digital stimuli (e.g., appealing content) elicits internal emotional responses that influence behavioural outcomes, such as visiting or recommending a destination (Lusianingrum & Pertiwi, 2023). With the rise of short-form video content and platform-specific algorithms, user engagement has become more dynamic. Unlike traditional advertising, social media enables two-way interaction, amplifying the reach and emotional resonance of promotional messages. As such, understanding how tourists consume and respond to social media content is essential for designing effective marketing strategies in tourism, particularly in rural or community-based contexts.

TikTok as a Short-Form Video Platform in Tourism Promotion

TikTok has rapidly emerged as a dominant player in the digital landscape of tourism promotion, thanks to its unique blend of short-form video content, algorithmic virality, and a highly engaged Gen Z and millennial user base. Unlike traditional platforms that prioritise follower-based reach, TikTok's "For You Page" (FYP) algorithm emphasises content discovery based on relevance, engagement, and emerging trends, allowing even small accounts to achieve viral success (Wengel et al., 2022). TikTok's entertainment-first design sets it apart from other platforms. Its short video format (typically under 60 seconds), vertical screen orientation, and integration of popular audio tracks encourage playful, emotionally driven content (Wang, 2020). These characteristics align with tourism marketing needs, which often rely on visual appeal and emotional resonance to inspire travel interest. According to (Marsiana et al., 2022), such formats demand creativity and narrative clarity, making them ideal for promoting experiences in an immersive yet concise manner.

Several studies have highlighted TikTok's growing role in shaping travel decisions. (Belanche et al., 2021a) found that TikTok content resembling peer-generated content can foster trust and increase influence, as users perceive it to be more authentic and relatable than traditional advertisements. This is particularly impactful for rural and emerging destinations, which often lack the resources for conventional mass media campaigns but can benefit from organic social media exposure.

Moreover, sound trends play a significant role in increasing content visibility. Videos that incorporate trending audio clips are more likely to be surfaced by the algorithm and shared widely, thus enhancing a destination's digital reach (Radovanović, 2022). The interactive features of TikTok, such as duets, comments, and shares, also foster a participatory culture, further amplifying the content's exposure and engagement. In the context of tourism, TikTok offers a unique platform for destinations to narrate their experiences, showcase cultural richness, and connect with travellers through relatable, emotional storytelling. This positions TikTok not only as a marketing tool but also as a storytelling medium, particularly suited for community-based tourism initiatives that rely on authenticity and emotional connection.

Content Marketing in Digital Tourism

Content marketing has become a foundational element in digital tourism promotion, enabling destinations to attract and engage potential visitors through valuable, relevant, and emotionally compelling content. According to (Holliman and Rowley, 2014), content marketing refers to the strategic creation, distribution, and exchange of digital content that delivers value to audiences and supports brand development. In the context of tourism, this approach emphasises storytelling, visual appeal, and user engagement as central to successful destination branding. On platforms like TikTok, content marketing is no longer limited to factual promotion but is increasingly driven by the aesthetics and emotional resonance of the content. Studies such as (Wei, 2025) show that factors like attractiveness, emotional appeal, trustworthiness, and e-WOM have a direct impact on consumers' intention to visit or purchase tourism-related services. Content that evokes curiosity, joy, or nostalgia is more likely to be remembered and shared, thus extending its influence.

The visual structure of short-form videos—including camera angles, colour grading, background music, and editing pace—contributes to audience immersion and message retention. (Huang and Zainol, 2025) emphasise that strong visual narratives, combined with clear, concise messaging, significantly improve viewer engagement, especially when tailored to mobile-native users with short attention spans. Furthermore, TikTok's algorithmic logic reinforces engagement by amplifying content that receives higher watch time, likes, and shares. This reinforces the need for tourism marketers to design content that not only informs but also entertains and emotionally connects with viewers. As a result, effective content marketing on TikTok often blends informative value with sensory stimulation, leveraging both visual aesthetics and cultural narratives to shape destination image. In tourism villages and community-based destinations, content marketing serves as an accessible and cost-effective strategy to showcase unique experiences—such as traditional cuisine, local customs, or hidden natural spots—without the need for professional production. This aligns with the broader trend of experience-based marketing, which centres the tourist's sensory and emotional experience as the core value proposition of the destination.

Narrative Engagement and Emotional Storytelling

In tourism marketing, emotional storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool for shaping perceptions, inspiring desire, and influencing behaviour. Central to this approach is the Narrative Engagement Theory, which suggests that individuals become more receptive and emotionally involved when they are "transported" into a story world (Zhu et al., 2024). This state of narrative transportation allows audiences to cognitively and emotionally immerse themselves in the content, leading to stronger identification with the characters, experiences, and places depicted. This theory has direct implications for TikTok content strategies, particularly for experience-driven tourism promotion. Short-form videos that feature personal, emotive storytelling—such as moments of discovery, awe, or shared joy—are more likely to foster engagement and trigger travel intention. Unlike traditional marketing formats that often present destinations in a detached or brochure-like style, emotionally resonant TikTok content invites viewers to "feel" the atmosphere, not just observe it.

Moreover, the experiential marketing model emphasises five key dimensions—Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate—as critical to creating memorable, persuasive marketing experiences (Schmitt, 1999). TikTok videos that stimulate these dimensions, such as the visual "sense" of natural beauty, the "feel" of community warmth, or the "act" of participating in local culture, can significantly enhance user connection to the destination. Studies also show that content which integrates authentic emotions—such as excitement, nostalgia, peace, or joy—has a higher chance of being shared, saved, and reread. This is especially relevant on TikTok, where the algorithm promotes content with strong watch time and user interaction. (Zhu et al., 2022) argue that travel content that incorporates storytelling elements (e.g., setting, plot, emotion) has a greater impact on destination image formation and visit intention than purely informative content. In community-based tourism, emotional storytelling also serves a strategic purpose: it allows destinations to communicate local identity, culture, and values in a way that resonates across demographics. Rather than relying on scripted promotional

material, destinations like Bukit Sinyonya can leverage lived experiences—such as a peaceful sunset or a spontaneous culinary experience—to invite audiences into a more authentic narrative space.

Community-Based Digital Marketing

Community-based digital marketing is increasingly recognised as a sustainable and inclusive approach for promoting rural and emerging tourism destinations. Unlike top-down models that rely heavily on professional agencies or influencers, community-based marketing empowers local stakeholders—such as tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis)—to craft and manage their own digital narratives. This aligns with the principles of community-based tourism (CBT), which emphasise local participation, empowerment, and the preservation of cultural and natural assets. In digital contexts, user-generated content (UGC) plays a pivotal role in shaping destination image and expanding promotional reach. (Rathore, 2020) explains that UGC—such as photos, videos, and reviews shared by ordinary users—carries a high level of authenticity and trustworthiness. For tourism villages with limited marketing budgets, encouraging visitors to create and share their own experiences on platforms like TikTok creates a powerful multiplier effect, amplifying electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) without incurring additional costs.

Furthermore, the interactive nature of social media platforms allows for real-time engagement between destination managers and potential tourists. Community-based actors can respond directly to comments, questions, and feedback, thereby strengthening the destination's perceived accessibility and responsiveness (Cheng & Li, 2024). This two-way interaction is especially valuable in fostering emotional connection and building trust. However, implementing community-led digital marketing also poses challenges. Limited digital literacy, a lack of professional production tools, and insufficient understanding of platform algorithms often hinder content optimisation. (Park et al., 2021) highlight that digital competency is essential for navigating and leveraging digital platforms effectively. Therefore, capacity-building efforts are crucial to ensure that community stakeholders can manage content strategically rather than sporadically. Despite these challenges, evidence suggests that community-based marketing, when guided by strategic planning and narrative authenticity, can significantly boost visibility and visitor engagement. Destinations like Bukit Sinyonya demonstrate that even without celebrity influencers or paid advertising, strong local narratives and consistent engagement can drive viral success and increase tourist interest.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a case study approach, as proposed by Yin (2014). The case study method enables an in-depth understanding of the content management strategies used by local tourism actors in their real-world context—in this case, the Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia. This approach is particularly well-suited to exploring how community-based tourism managers (Pokdarwis) use TikTok to promote their destination through grassroots digital marketing.

Research Site and Informants

The study was conducted at Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village, a rural tourism site known for its scenic hilltop views and for actively using TikTok as a promotional medium. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: active involvement in TikTok content production, policy or promotional roles in tourism management, and knowledge of community-based promotional strategies. A total of eight informants participated in the study, including: 1 Chairperson of the Pokdarwis (local tourism awareness group); 2 Pokdarwis members responsible for social media; 1 Representative from the Pandeglang Tourism Office; 2 local content creators affiliated with the village; and two domestic tourists who discovered the village via TikTok.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three primary techniques: 1) In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions to explore the informants' experiences and perceptions of TikTok content planning, production, and engagement strategies. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was recorded with consent; 2) Participant Observation: The researcher conducted non-participant observations of content production sessions and community interactions related to digital promotions. Field notes were used to capture social dynamics and contextual nuances; and 3) Digital Content Documentation: Analysis included TikTok videos posted by @bukitsinyonya and @.bukitsinyonya accounts, focusing on

themes, visuals, engagement metrics, and narrative structures. Supplementary documents, such as internal promotional plans and visit data, were also reviewed.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model by (Miles et al, 2014), consisting of three main steps: 1) Data Reduction: Interview transcripts, observation notes, and digital artifacts were categorized into thematic clusters based on research objectives, including content planning, emotional storytelling, visual strategies, and engagement outcomes; 2) Data Display: Themes were organized into visual matrices and narrative descriptions to reveal patterns and relationships between content strategies and their perceived effects; and 3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Emerging findings were continuously verified through triangulation of sources (e.g., comparing interviews with observations) and methods. Theoretical memos were used to document the researcher's reflections and analytical insights throughout the process.

Trustworthiness and Validation

To enhance data validity, the study employed methodological triangulation by integrating interviews, observations, and document analysis (Patton, 2015). Additionally, member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary findings to selected informants for feedback and clarification, thus ensuring credibility and confirmability of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Bukit Sinyonya's TikTok Promotion

Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village, located in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, has increasingly embraced digital platforms for destination promotion, with TikTok serving as a primary medium due to its wide reach and popularity among younger audiences. The village's adoption of TikTok reflects a growing awareness of the platform's potential to amplify visibility and attract new visitors through short-form, emotionally engaging content. The village's digital journey began with the creation of its first official TikTok account, @bukitsinyonya, launched in December 2023. During its initial phase, this account posted nine videos, primarily showcasing scenic landscapes and general information about the site. Despite the initial efforts, the account gained limited traction, accumulating only 429 followers, 308 likes, and around 28,000 total views before activity ceased in February 2024.

Recognising the need for a more strategic approach, the village launched a second official account, @bukitsinyonya, in mid-2025. This account demonstrated significantly improved performance, reflecting enhanced content planning and audience targeting. As of the latest observation, the account has produced 15 videos, gained 3,703 followers, and accumulated over 19,700 likes, with several pieces of content reaching viral status. One notable video garnered 468,100 views, 8,461 likes, and 1,801 shares, indicating the account's success in leveraging TikTok's algorithm and audience preferences. This transition between the first and second accounts marks a clear evolution in the village's digital strategy. The content shifted from static scenic showcases to more immersive, emotionally resonant narratives, including sunset experiences, family outings, and culinary highlights. The rise in engagement metrics—followers, likes, shares, and comments—demonstrates not only a broader reach but also deeper interaction with potential visitors. Figure 1 compares the basic statistics for the two accounts, highlighting the significant improvement in performance after strategic content adjustments.

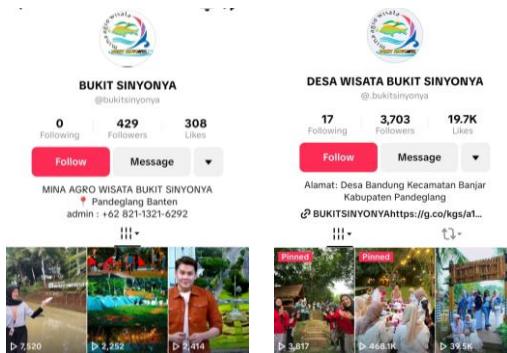


Figure 1. Comparative Growth of Bukit Sinyonya's TikTok Accounts

This overview sets the stage for analysing the core elements of content strategy in the subsequent sections, focusing on how planning, production, and engagement tactics were refined to align with TikTok users' behavioural patterns.

Content Strategy Implementation

Content Planning

The planning phase for TikTok content at Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village evolved significantly as the local tourism managers (Pokdarwis) gained more familiarity with digital promotion dynamics. Initially, content uploads were irregular and lacked thematic coherence. However, over time, the management team began to implement a more structured planning process that considered both the character of the destination and platform-specific trends. Content was broadly categorized into three thematic clusters: 1) Natural Scenic Content: Videos that highlight the village's panoramic hilltop views, sunrises, and photogenic spots; 2) Tourist Activity Content: Clips showcasing real visitor experiences, such as camping, nature walks, and culinary exploration; 3) Cultural and Educational Content: Segments that present local traditions, artisanal products, and regional foods, often narrated with authentic local voiceovers or captions.

The planning process incorporated platform trend analysis, focusing on popular hashtags, soundtracks, and filters gaining momentum on TikTok. By aligning content themes with current viral trends, the Pokdarwis team aimed to increase the likelihood of being featured on the For You Page (FYP), TikTok's primary discovery channel. Additionally, timing was a deliberate part of the planning strategy. Uploads were scheduled during peak user activity hours—particularly Friday and Saturday afternoons, when audiences were more likely to search for weekend travel inspiration. This strategy aligns with (Singh et al., 2023), which emphasises the role of temporal rhythms in optimising social media engagement.

Rather than relying on professional content calendars, the team used informal planning meetings to coordinate ideas and assign responsibilities. Despite limitations in digital literacy and formal training, the Pokdarwis members demonstrated a growing awareness of audience behaviour, platform mechanics, and thematic consistency as key components of effective content planning. This planning stage laid the groundwork for subsequent content production and engagement, ensuring that every video reflected both Bukit Sinyonya's identity and the attention patterns of the platform's users.

Creative Content Production

The second stage of the content strategy at Bukit Sinyonya involved the creative production of short-form videos designed to resonate emotionally with TikTok users. Despite limited access to professional equipment, the Pokdarwis team relied on readily available tools, such as smartphones, ring lights, and basic editing apps. This minimalist setup did not hinder the quality of the content; rather, it highlighted the village's commitment to authenticity over technical perfection. Video production was carried out collaboratively, with Pokdarwis members taking turns capturing footage, narrating scenes, and editing clips. While some content was entirely produced in-house, others were co-created with local content creators or even spontaneously recorded by visiting tourists, contributing to a grassroots style of promotion. The majority of videos were 15 to 30 seconds in length—an optimal duration for TikTok's mobile-first audience—and adhered to a simple but effective cinematic style. Techniques included: 1) Handheld panoramic shots to emphasise natural landscapes; 2) Slow-motion sequences to dramatise scenic moments (e.g., sunrise, hilltop breeze); 3) Point-of-view (POV) perspectives to simulate visitor experiences; and 4) Subtle background music, often using trending audio clips to increase algorithmic relevance.

Narrative elements were also intentionally woven into the content. Rather than generic destination overviews, videos often focused on personalised micro-stories—a peaceful sunset with friends, a child's joy during a nature walk, or the sensory appeal of local cuisine. These narratives align with Salsabila and Setiawan's (2025) argument that authentic storytelling enhances emotional appeal and destination image. In this phase, the team prioritised emotional connection over direct information delivery. This approach reflected an intuitive understanding of TikTok's audience preferences, which favour spontaneity, relatability, and sensory-rich experiences. The visual content was deliberately crafted to evoke curiosity and emotional resonance—key factors influencing watch time and user interaction on the platform. Despite the absence of formal media production training, the Pokdarwis' iterative experimentation with content formats led to improved performance metrics over time. These creative decisions not only increased the village's digital visibility but also laid the foundation for community-driven storytelling as a core element of their promotional identity.

Distribution and Evaluation

After planning and producing the content, the final stage of Bukit Sinyonya's TikTok strategy involved distributing the videos and ongoing evaluation of their performance. The distribution process was handled manually by Pokdarwis members, who uploaded content directly to the village's official TikTok account, `@.bukitsinyonya`. The uploads were strategically timed to coincide with periods of high user activity—typically late afternoons on Fridays and weekends—when potential tourists were more likely to browse for travel inspiration. To maximise reach and visibility, the team used trending hashtags and audio clips, selecting those currently featured on TikTok's discovery page. Captions were crafted to be emotionally engaging and often included call-to-action phrases, such as "Let us go to Bukit Sinyonya this weekend!" or "Discover peace and beauty in Pandeglang's hidden gem." These tactics aim to align with TikTok's algorithm, which favours high engagement and relevance to trending topics.

Post-distribution, the team conducted informal weekly evaluations using TikTok's built-in analytics dashboard. Key performance indicators (KPIs) included: 1) View counts; 2) Like and share metrics; 3) Average watch duration; and 4) Comment engagement. The evaluation process focused on identifying patterns in content virality. Videos that performed well—such as those showing dramatic natural scenery or emotionally driven moments—were used as benchmarks for future content. For instance, a 15-second video of a couple enjoying a sunset picnic, set to trending music, garnered over 468,000 views and became a template for subsequent uploads. In addition to metrics, qualitative feedback in the comments section was also reviewed. Common questions included inquiries about location, entry fees, transportation routes, and available facilities. The Pokdarwis team responded to these comments promptly and politely, reinforcing the village's image as welcoming and attentive. This two-way engagement was instrumental not only in increasing algorithmic exposure but also in building trust and relatability among potential visitors.

Despite their limited digital literacy, the team demonstrated growing proficiency in understanding what content resonates, when to post, and how to interact with the audience. While no formal A/B testing or algorithmic tracking was employed, the iterative feedback loop between content release and user response formed a practical basis for content optimisation. Overall, this stage highlights the importance of adaptive content management, in which continuous observation and platform-native feedback guide the real-time refinement of promotional strategies.

Discussion

Factors Influencing TikTok Content Success

The success of Bukit Sinyonya's TikTok content in driving engagement and increasing visitor interest is shaped by several interrelated factors. These factors align with theoretical constructs from the literature on digital marketing, narrative engagement, and community-based tourism. By analysing content characteristics, user responses, and strategic choices made by the local tourism managers, five dominant success drivers were identified: emotional storytelling, visual quality, trend adaptation, user interaction, and content authenticity. Among the most critical factors is the strategic use of emotional storytelling. Videos that depict real visitor experiences—such as enjoying the sunset, tasting local cuisine, or bonding with family—generate emotional resonance, significantly increasing audience engagement. These narratives embody the principles of Narrative Transportation Theory, which posits that when users are absorbed in a story, they are more likely to experience attitude and behaviour changes (Zhu et al., 2024). In this case, content that frames the destination as a place of peace, joy, and shared experience evokes curiosity and a desire to visit, particularly among younger viewers seeking emotional fulfilment in their travel experiences.

Visual appeal was found to play a vital role in boosting content virality. Videos with warm tones, cinematic framing, and high natural lighting drew significantly more attention and engagement. Even with minimal equipment, the Pokdarwis team created compelling visuals that mimic professional aesthetics. This finding supports the argument by (Huang & Zainol, 2025) that visual quality enhances viewer retention and encourages social sharing, both key metrics in TikTok's algorithmic promotion model. The incorporation of trending music and sound effects was another essential tactic. Viral videos often featured audio tracks actively promoted on TikTok's trending page, thereby increasing the likelihood of algorithmic exposure. Furthermore, videos posted during high-traffic periods—especially Fridays and Saturdays—consistently received higher view counts. This supports the conclusions of (Singh et al., 2023), who emphasise that synchronisation with the platform rhythm (i.e., trending sounds and optimal timing) is crucial for maximising content visibility.

The team's consistent engagement with viewer comments helped build a two-way relationship, reinforcing audience trust and encouraging further interaction. Responsive comment management aligns with customer engagement theory, which emphasises that dialogue and responsiveness in digital communication foster

loyalty and positive destination perception (Cheng & Li, 2024). Users frequently asked about practical visit details, and the team's helpful replies created an impression of authenticity and accessibility. Lastly, content authenticity was a distinguishing success factor. Unlike scripted or influencer-driven promotions, Bukit Sinyonya's TikTok content showcased real visitors, spontaneous interactions, and unfiltered experiences. This authenticity resonates with user-generated content (UGC) literature, which suggests that content perceived as genuine is more likely to influence consumer behaviour (Gozali & Tunjungsari, 2024). The collaborative involvement of local creators and visitors—through reposts and spontaneous recordings—also demonstrates the effectiveness of community-based content production in strengthening promotional outcomes without incurring commercial costs.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical development of digital tourism marketing by integrating concepts from content marketing, narrative engagement, and community-based tourism promotion within the context of short-form video platforms—specifically TikTok. While prior research has examined the effectiveness of social media in shaping destination image and influencing travel behaviour (Xu & Pratt, 2018; Huertas et al., 2020), this study deepens the theoretical discourse in several key ways: First, it bridges content Marketing with Narrative Engagement Theory in Rural Tourism. By empirically analysing how emotionally rich, short-form content influences tourist intention, the study connects content marketing theory (Holliman & Rowley, 2014) with Narrative Transportation Theory (Zhu et al., 2024). It demonstrates that tourist engagement is not merely a function of information delivery, but also of emotional immersion and personal relevance. This integration offers a nuanced understanding of how storytelling functions as a persuasive device within destination promotion, especially when implemented by non-professionals in rural settings.

Second, Expanding the Scope of Community-Based Digital Promotion. The study offers a theoretical expansion of community-based tourism (CBT) frameworks by showing how local actors can independently manage digital content without relying on influencers or external media agencies. This addresses a gap in the literature, where most digital tourism studies focus on commercial, urban, or professionally managed campaigns. The case of Bukit Sinyonya illustrates how grassroots digital strategies, when aligned with platform trends and authentic narratives, can yield viral outcomes and influence visitor behaviour—thereby reasserting the role of local agency in destination branding. Third, Reframing TikTok as a Narrative Infrastructure, Not Just a Platform. TikTok is typically discussed in terms of virality and algorithmic reach. This study reframes the platform as a narrative infrastructure, wherein users participate in micro-storytelling that stimulates emotional identification and virtual presence. Such a view aligns with and extends recent work on experiential marketing and digital emotion (Zhu et al., 2022), arguing that emotions embedded in short-form content serve as cognitive anchors that shape memory and influence travel intention. This theoretical lens enriches our understanding of how platforms like TikTok mediate the emotional dimension of destination image construction, fourth, highlighting the Role of Adaptive Strategy in Content Lifecycle. By observing the shift from Bukit Sinyonya's first to second TikTok account, this study introduces the concept of an adaptive content strategy in the tourism context, in which local managers adjust their thematic focus, production style, and upload timing based on iterative feedback from audience metrics. This contributes to the literature by embedding real-time learning and data-informed responsiveness into the theoretical understanding of digital marketing practices.

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for tourism practitioners, particularly those operating in community-based tourism (CBT) environments, who seek to leverage TikTok as a low-cost, high-impact marketing tool. The case of Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village demonstrates that strategic, emotionally resonant content—despite being produced with limited resources—can achieve significant reach and engagement when grounded in platform logic and local authenticity. First, Strategic Content Planning is Crucial for Engagement. Tourism village managers must go beyond ad hoc content posting and adopt a structured content calendar that reflects both the destination's character and current digital trends. Thematic consistency, alignment with viral hashtags or sounds, and timing uploads to coincide with peak browsing hours (e.g., Fridays and weekends) can significantly improve content visibility. Managerial training on trend analysis and platform timing could enhance strategic capacity in this area.

Second, Focus on Authentic Storytelling Over Promotion. Rather than prioritising traditional promotional messages, local tourism promoters should focus on creating authentic, emotionally driven micro-stories. These narratives—featuring real people, daily experiences, and local nuances—are more likely to build emotional

resonance and engagement. Managers should encourage a “story-first” rather than an “info-first” approach, training community members to recognise emotionally compelling moments and capture them effectively. Third, Build Local Content Production Capacity. The success of Bukit Sinyonya’s content was not dependent on expensive equipment, but on narrative and visual creativity. Tourism authorities and regional policymakers should provide basic digital literacy workshops for Pokdarwis teams, teaching smartphone-based video editing, caption writing, sound syncing, and analytics tracking. Empowering local stakeholders in this way ensures sustainability and ownership of the digital strategy.

Fourth, Leverage User Engagement for Two-Way Communication. Managers must treat social media not just as a broadcasting tool, but as a dialogue platform. Responding promptly and informatively to comments (e.g., location inquiries, pricing questions) enhances trust and fosters a perception of responsiveness. This user engagement loop not only boosts TikTok’s algorithmic ranking but also builds positive pre-visit experiences, reducing information barriers for potential visitors. Fifth, Promote Collaborative and Organic Content Creation. The study shows that viral success is often supported by user-generated content (UGC) and spontaneous visitor participation. Managers should encourage visitors to tag the destination account, use designated hashtags, or participate in local TikTok challenges. These grassroots efforts can amplify visibility and support a decentralised, community-driven branding process. Sixth, Align with Policy for Broader Impact. Finally, these insights can support national tourism development strategies, particularly those initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) to digitise rural tourism villages. Policymakers should consider integrating TikTok-based storytelling frameworks into official training programs and tourism village empowerment initiatives.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides meaningful insights into community-based TikTok content management in a rural tourism context, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may affect the generalizability and scope of the findings. First, Single-Case Context: The research is limited to a single tourism village—Bukit Sinyonya—which, although rich in local dynamics, may not fully represent other tourism destinations with differing digital capacities, visitor demographics, or socio-cultural characteristics. Future research should conduct comparative studies across multiple tourism villages or regions to examine whether similar strategies yield consistent outcomes in different contexts. Second, Qualitative Scope and Lack of Behavioural Measurement: This study primarily uses qualitative methods—interviews, observations, and content analysis—which provide depth of understanding but do not quantify the behavioural impact of TikTok content on actual visitation numbers. Future research could incorporate mixed-methods approaches, combining qualitative insights with visitor-tracking data, TikTok engagement analytics, or experimental designs to assess causal relationships between content features and visit intention.

Third, Absence of Longitudinal Analysis: The study offers a snapshot of content strategy within a specific period but does not capture the long-term evolution of digital engagement or sustained tourist behaviour. A longitudinal study could explore how storytelling techniques, content types, and engagement patterns shift over time and how these changes affect destination loyalty or return visitation. Fourth, Platform-Specific Focus: By focusing exclusively on TikTok, the study does not address how cross-platform strategies (e.g., Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts) may complement or reinforce digital tourism promotion. Future work should explore multi-platform storytelling strategies to assess whether integrated campaigns produce synergistic effects on engagement and awareness. Fifth, Technical Limitations and Algorithmic Uncertainty. Finally, the study does not account for TikTok’s opaque algorithm, which may influence content performance in unpredictable ways. Algorithmic changes, regional moderation policies, and content moderation practices may affect the visibility of tourism content. Researchers are encouraged to engage with platform studies and data science methodologies to better understand these hidden variables.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how community-based tourism actors at Bukit Sinyonya Tourism Village in Banten, Indonesia, strategically manage TikTok content to increase tourist attraction. Through a qualitative case study approach involving interviews, observations, and digital content analysis, the research revealed a three-stage content management strategy—planning, creative production, and distribution with evaluation—that significantly improved audience engagement and destination visibility. The findings show that emotionally driven storytelling, authentic visuals, and adaptive content planning are central to successful TikTok promotions. Factors such as visual quality, emotional narratives, use of trending sounds, upload timing, and interactive responses to audiences were identified as key contributors to content virality and increased visit

intention. This suggests that short-form video platforms can serve as powerful narrative infrastructures, especially when leveraged by local communities who understand their own cultural and environmental assets.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature by integrating content marketing, narrative engagement theory, and community-based digital tourism into a unified framework. It expands the scope of tourism marketing studies by highlighting the potential of grassroots digital strategies to achieve impact without reliance on influencers or professional agencies. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for local tourism managers, policymakers, and content creators in similar rural contexts. Emphasising authentic storytelling, digital literacy development, and data-driven strategy can enable community-managed destinations to enhance their competitiveness in the digital tourism landscape. However, the study is not without limitations. Its single-case focus and qualitative scope limit generalizability, and future research should explore comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method approaches to assess broader patterns and causal effects—moreover, platform-specific dynamics and algorithmic unpredictability warrant further investigation.

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