



Exploring IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) strategies in an Islamic tourist destination: The case of Sharia Beach, Santen Island, Banyuwangi

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Abstract

This study was designed to explore the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies in a Muslim tourist destination with a focus on Sharia Beach Santen Island in Banyuwangi. The tourism sector is an industry that is currently enjoying growing popularity in Indonesia. Since 2017, Sharia Beach has officially been declared as a Shariah-compliant beach; the beach that is guided by Islamic Regulation (Sharia Law). In order to achieve the aims of the research, a qualitative approach (i.e. observations and interviews with visitors, government representatives and beach administrators) were employed. The result reveals that some IMC strategies have been applied at the beach such as advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations, and direct personal selling. These strategies, however, have not been favouring Sharia elements in particular.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communication, Islamic tourist destination, Sharia Beach, Indonesia.

Introduction

Indonesia's tourism has developed rapidly. According to the Indonesian Statistical Bureau, the number of international visitor arrivals to Indonesia in January-April 2019 is 5,122 million people (Statistics Indonesia, 2019). It has increased by 3.22 per cent in 2019 (Statistics Indonesia, 2019). Meanwhile, tourism has also developed significantly in the East Java Province of Indonesia as the province has 265 natural tourist destinations, 320 cultural tourist destinations, and 199 artificial destinations (Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Jawa Timur 2019). The East Java Statistical Bureau reported that 344.212 international visitors and 13.701.599 domestic visitors stayed in East Java in 2016 (Statistics East Java, 2019).

Banyuwangi has received awards from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) for excellence and innovation in tourism (Tempo.co, 2019). One amongst several beautiful destinations in Banyuwangi, is Sharia Beach in Santen Island. Since 2017, Sharia Beach has officially been declared that it is Sharia-compliant beach; the beach that is guided by Islamic Regulation (Sharia Law).

In order for the beach to be able to attract many tourists arrivals, special integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies are needed. Shimp (2003: 24) maintains that IMC is the process of developing and implementing various forms of persuasive communication programs to consumers and prospective consumers whose aim is to influence the behaviour of the target audience. Thus, the function of IMC in tourism is giving persuasive messages to the public about a destination (Yoeti, 2005).

The paper explores IMC strategies for Sharia Beach in Santen Island Banyuwangi. The uniqueness Islamic values underlying the beach development should lead to special the beach's marketing strategies. This paper will provide knowledge for marketers and policy makers who are concerned with Islamic issues in tourist destinations. It will benefit marketers and policy makers



to be able to learn any marketing strategies that are suitable for the consumers, especially for catering and attracting Muslim tourists.

Literature Review

Islamic Tourism

Currently, various terms for Islamic tourism concept are halal tourism, halal travel, or Muslim-friendly destination (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Battour and Ismail (2016) maintain that halal tourism and Islamic tourism are the most often-used terms for Islamic tourism. As sharia refers to an Islamic Law (Battour & Ismail, 2016), in Indonesia halal tourism or Islamic tourism concept is also called by sharia tourism (Tourism Ministry, 2015). Specifically, sharia tourism is considered as a way to develop Indonesia's tourism by upholding Indonesia's culture and Islamic values (Tourism Ministry, 2015).

Halal tourism is defined as "That which is permitted, with respect to which no restriction exists, and the doing of which the law giver, Allah is allowed" (Al-Qadrawi, 2013; p. XXV). Thus, from Islamic viewpoint, halal refers to any activities in tourism which is allowed by Islamic teaching (Battour & Ismail, 2016; p. 151). It includes the conformation of visitors' attitudes, clothing, manner and diet to Islamic teaching and practices (WTM, 2007). Islamic Law, therefore, is considered as the basis to deliver tourism products and service to the targeted customers (Jafari & Scott, 2014), in which all products and services should conform to Islamic teaching (Battour & Ismail, 2016). This idea has become foundation for the development of Sharia Beach at Santen Island.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

IMC is defined as the process of developing and implementing various forms of persuasive communication programs to customers (Schultz & Schultz, 2004). For this purpose, the IMC process determines any forms that need to be developed for a persuasive communication program (Shimp, 2003). For Sharia Beach, the IMC process may involve determination of what tourists or prospective tourists want in order to find the right form of marketing communication for the promotion and development of the beach.

The IMC involves several strategies, as follows:

1. **Advertising.** According to Kasali (1995: 19), advertising is defined as a message offering a product through a media;
2. **Sales Promotion.** It can be defined as 'a form of direct persuasion through the use of various incentives, which can be arranged to stimulate immediate product purchases or increase the amount of goods purchased by consumers or traders' (Sulaksana 2003: 109);
3. **Public Relations and Publicity.** Publicity is 'the activity of placing news about a person, organization, or company in the mass media' (Muhammad, 2009: 60);
4. **Direct Marketing.** According to Kotler & Keller (2009), direct marketing is the usage of direct channels of consumers to deliver products and services to customers without using marketing mediators;
5. **Interactive Marketing.** It is an online activity that aims to engage customers or prospects and directly or indirectly ask for awareness, improve image, or create sales of products and services (Kotler & Keller, 2009);
6. **Word of Mouth Marketing.** It is oral, written, and electronic communication between individuals in relation to the excellence or experience of buying or using products or services (Kotler & Keller, 2009);
7. **Personal Selling.** According to Winardi (in Muhammad, 2009), personal selling is a process that customers are given information to buy products through personal communication in an exchange situation.



The various strategies of marketing communication above are complementary and should become an integrated element in the marketing activities of Sharia Beach at Santen Island. In relation to the IMC, the marketing of destination with Islamic teaching is difficult task because non-Muslim tourists may not want to visit the Islamic destination (Battour, ismail & Awais, 2014). Thus, the challenge for Islamic destination is satisfying non-Muslim tourists' needs without disrupting the Islamic teaching (Battrou & Ismail, 2016).

Moreover, Sharia-based IMC has been applied in tourism areas in Turkey, such as Adenya Hotel & Resort, Angel's Peninsula, Bera Alanya and Sahh Inn (Akyol & Kilic, 2014). In a research titled "Internet and Halal Tourism Marketing" (Akyol & Kilic, 2014), the places that promote Sharia values should include prayer rooms, halal food, and male and female separation in public facilities and activities. However, not all halal tourist attraction implements IMC according to Sharia values (Akyol & Kilic, 2014).

Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research method to capture the voices of visitors as well as local tourism officers in charge of tourism development in Sharia Beach. The data from these was also complimented by a review of documents such as existing marketing strategies and development documents, media sources, internet websites and other literature relevant to the topic area. To address the research aim, data collection was conducted using respondents such as 10 visitors, local tourism officers and beach management staff. Purposive sampling was conducted to select the local tourism officers and beach management officers. They were purposively selected based on their role as tourism board officers who have knowledge and is in charge of tourism planning and marketing in Sharia Beach. Thus, the informants in this research were listed as the following: 1) Commander of Baladhika Jaya 083, Military Command of The Indonesian Army as the official owner and manager of Sharia Beach at Santen Island, 2) The staff of Department of Tourism of Banyuwangi as the rightful Local Government Work Unit (Satuan Kerja Perangkat Daerah/SKPD) who manage and promote Sharia Beach as a sharia tourist attraction in Banyuwangi, and 3) Visitors.

Findings and Discussion

The concept of Sharia that is applied in Sharia Beach should ensure the availability of halal facilities at the beach. This is because, according to Battour and Ismail (2016), halal food, alcohol-free beverages, announcements for praying time (adzan), prayer rooms, and the division of male and female tourists have become amenities that Muslim tourists search as a part of halal tourism. Some of these halal facilities are available at the Sharia Beach, such as a separation area between men and women at the beach, halal food in food court, and mosque. Besides, guides and officers at the Santen Beach also wear hijab (for the female staff).

The IMC focuses on corporate activities that integrate and coordinate various communication channels to communicate a clear message about the company and its products (Kotler & Armstrong, 2005). The IMC in tourism is applicable when there is a desire for destination to achieve an optimal satisfaction for visitors and a satisfying profit level (Yoeti, 2005). The result indicates that the Sharia Beach management has applied several strategies of IMC such as advertising, sales promotions, events and experience, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, direct marketing and personal selling. These strategies will be explained below.

Advertising

There are 4 types of advertising applied for the Sharia Beach such as advertising in social media, websites, billboard, and advertising in the annual tourism bulletin magazine of Banyuwangi. A collaboration of these advertising methods should create an impression that encourages people



to visit the beach. While the advertising should contain uniqueness of the products/services to attract customers (Lee & Carla, 2004), the advertising for Sharia Beach only shows general information about the beach such as direction and access to the beach. The main uniqueness of the beach, that is, the beach as halal destination, is not shown at the advertising. Only the writing of 'Sharia Beach' that appears on the advertisements. Confirming the content of advertisement, the staff management said that "the advertising is complete enough already to show about the beach" (Ema). Similarly, another staff of the beach management also mentioned that "there is no such special advertising regarding Sharia Beach as an 'Islamic destination' to the public, except the writing. That's it" (Dino). These comments reveal that the management of the beach does not regard Sharia as something unique that can actually become the main selling point that can be offered to public.

Different to Sharia Beach, the advertisement of Shariah Beach in Turkey emphasises its Sharia and Halal items on its advertisement (Mevlüt & Özgür, 2014). The beach website indicates the separation of coastal locations between men and women, as well as emphasising that Adenya has a hotel that provides women-only beaches and male-only beaches. The picture in its advertisement also shows that the women's beach is covered with buildings while the male-only beach directly faces the sea. The ads also emphasise that Adenya is a hotel that does not sell alcohol.

Sales Promotion

Many offers have been applied in Sharia Beach, such as a free drink and shuttle for some visitors, a free entrance ticket at the pre-opening event and so on. In addition, travel agents, in cooperation with the government, also play an essential role in sales promotion activity of the beach. They offer a discount for city tour with the beach as one of its destination. This will promote the beach widely, as expressed in the following interview:

I first knew about Sharia Beach from the Department of Tourism's website that organizes the Banyuwangi city tours. They gave me a discount on the city tour and covered my transportation expenses (Indah).

While the beach management has developed many sales programmes to introduce the beach, the label 'sharia' for the beach does not become 'the main idea' to offer for the sales promotion programme. All sales promotion programmes introduce the beauty of the beach and do not strongly accentuate the sharia values as the programme's content. Different to this, a destination called Angel's Peninsula emphasises the availability of a prayer room, halal food and beverages, and promote everything related to Sharia values instead of giving discounts to visitors (Mochsin & Alkhulayfi, 2016).

Events and Experiences

For events and experiences to promote Santen Beach, the Government of Banyuwangi has organised morning exercises every Friday for all Banyuwangi SKPD staff (local government staff) and local residents. Besides, the beach was also used for scouting activities, cooking competitions and jazz concerts. However, the events held at the beach did not always adhere to contain Sharia values, as stated by one of Santen Beach management staff member:

I was appointed as the party responsible for Santen management. I am here only to administer to the beach's finances and facilities. The promotion sector is the duty of the Department of Tourism and cleaning officers are provided by the Department of Sanitation. On New Year's eve, I organised a jazz concert on the beach but without attaching Sharia value to it (Yulian).



Events are also supported by the Head of Karangrejo sub-district. The sub-district previously also organised several events to promote tourism attractions. This was stated by the Head of Karangrejo sub-district:

We have organised many events. Every Friday, we arrange morning exercises with the Head of Banyuwangi Regency. We have also had a fish grill competition. The local fishermen could promote their products, and they could also sell grilled fish in the event. Scout and beach cleaning programs have been organised as well. We have pictures (Fredy).

A visitor added:

This is my second time visiting this place because my house is nearby. Kids love the beach. If I am not mistaken, Dangdut shows are often held in this place. This place is never lacking for tourists. But it is complicated now because as a Sharia Beach, it is impossible to hold Dangdut performances here (Cahya).

I know that they had a fish-grilling competition back then. The fishermen directly grilled their fish after catching them from the sea (Yahya).

It was clear that the Government of Banyuwangi conducts various events to promote the beach, however, none of the events is attaching the Sharia theme to it. For example, the events show that men and women are closed to each other during the event, while Islam does not allow any closeness to men and women (Mochsin & Alkhulayfi, 2016).

Public Relations and Publicity

Sharia Beach has close relationships with several key stakeholders, including the media, investors, the Indonesian Army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia/TNI), the Indonesian Army Wife Association (Persatuan Istri Tentara/Persit), visitors and fishermen. The media plays a substantial part in introducing Santen Island to the community while investors support construction around the coast, including hotels. TNI is the party that owns the coastal area, which gives them the authority to give permission for all activities on the beach. Persit, as a community group, carries out activities to attract visitors. The visitors become consumers whose presence influences and maintains the sustainability of Santen Island.

In addition, the government has also built its cooperation with mass media regarding marketing. The Banyuwangi Regency Government also cooperates with the press to generate exposure for the activities and events held at Sharia Beach through media coverage in newsletters and TV shows.

Sharia Beach is expected to easily gain popularity because the inauguration coincides with the arrival of King Salman to Indonesia. This is in accordance with the stories revealed by the following informants:

Sharia Beach was initiated by the Regent. The process was quite short, and it only took one day. Sharia Beach's inauguration was purposely decided to adjust to the occasion when King Salman visited Indonesia. Initially, Bidadari Beach was prepared, but then the Bupati made Santen beach an attraction (Ryan)

An officer from the Information Communication Development Agency at the Department of Tourism and Culture of Banyuwangi, Ainur, added that:



Sharia beach of Santen island's inauguration was almost at the same time as King Salman's visit to Indonesia. At that time, the media was flooded with news coverage of King Salman, who went to Bali. The report would not only become one of the main issues in the Arabic world, but also in the Islamic world as a whole (Ainur).

According to Mevlüt and Özgür (2014), Sharia tourism in Turkey has a certificate stating that it is a halal tourist destination. The certificate issued by the government strengthens the identity of a location as a tourist destination that prioritises Sharia values, which shows the level of cooperation between the tourist attraction management and outside parties.

Direct Marketing

The Government of Banyuwangi and other stakeholders does not utilise personal selling as the main marketing method of Sharia Beach. This method is performed more frequently by tour guides as part of travel services or by third parties who have the opportunity to directly communicate and persuade tourists, for example guests from out of town, community service program students and tourists who happen to stop by.

The situation is in accordance with the Head of Karangrejo sub-district's statement:

I never implement a direct marketing method. I am more inclined to do interactive marketing and face to face promotions (Fendy)

There was also no particular form of promotion conducted by the Department of Tourism.

The development of tourism in Banyuwangi in general is perceived through the contour and stakeholders of the region, because not all of the destination areas in Banyuwangi are under the authority of the local government. So their treatment is different. For the promotions, we almost equate everything. We are responsible for introducing each destination to tourists with promotions, and one of the areas is Sharia Island. We also collaborate with travel tours and drivers to invite their guests to new tourism destinations in Banyuwangi (Ainur)

On the other hand, only a limited number of visitors experienced direct marketing:

Yes, I do not directly do the marketing. But posting on social media can have big influence on my friends that Sharia Beach is a good place for travelling to (Cahya).

I used to come here often, but lately I have not visited the place that much anymore. I planned to take pictures here. I want to make a video clip. Yes, it can be an asset for promoting it to my friends too, right?(Indah).

The remarks show that the Banyuwangi District Government and managers do not conduct direct marketing which specifically promotes Sharia Beach. Likewise, visitors also do not conduct direct marketing specifically to attract tourists. In the digital era, broadcasting is mostly done through the social media.

Interactive Marketing

Banyuwangi Regency Government, through the Banyuwangi Tourism and Culture Office, conducts interactive marketing on their website <https://www.banyuwangikab.go.id/> and through <https://banyuwangitourism.com/>. Marketing is also carried out by several parties sharing tourist information on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and



private visitors' blogs. Interactive marketing and the use of social media make it easier for potential travellers to find information.

Prospective visitors can also access review posts from the visitor blogs of who have visited Sharia Beach first-hand. Bloggers who find the place comfortable or who have a good impression of Sharia tourism will not hesitate to share their experiences after their visit. With the development of the internet and through e-commerce, websites have become the most important tourism promotion media that can evoke positive perceptions about tourist attractions. In the current digital era, interactive marketing is expected to provide significant changes to the development of tourist destinations.

I promote tourism destination using a WhatsApp Group. I share information about Sharia Beach with friends in my WA group, like to my high school friends' group (Fendy).

I use my personal social media. Kids here also post to their social media (Yulian).

Well, usually a member of the Indonesian Army Association Wife actively shares information on social media. I'm not really active in online media. For the promotion, I put people from the Department of Tourism in charge (Bambang, Military Division Commander of Banyuwangi)

We have a tourist catalogue on the website. We also facilitate those who want to do a city tour. We pick the latter and take them to the different tourist attractions. People charge for online promotions. This Pokdarwis has a group for information exchange. Similar to Jebingtole, they have a community that usually promotes tourism in Banyuwangi (Ainur, Head of Information and Information Services at the Banyuwangi Information Office).

Visitors felt that interactive marketing was more accessible and that it had more of an impact on the tourist destination's reputation.

Yes, I know this beach from Instagram and the website of the Department of Tourism. There are also a lot of online news channels that broadcast about the Sharia coast (Indah).

The ease of prospective tourists concerning obtaining information about Sharia Beach in Santen Island is inseparable from the role of millennial visitors. Visitors who are identified as the millennial generation post their photos on social media. They include hash tags on the picture to allow other Instagram users to access information about Sharia beach.

Word of Mouth Marketing

The Government of Banyuwangi, community groups and the local people have conducted marketing promotions by word of mouth, as mentioned by the interviewees below:

I always promote Santen Beach. I used to invite my friends to come to Banyuwangi and to stop at the Beach. But now I am embarrassed to promote the beach because the Beach is not well managed and it is dirty (Fendy).

Promotion by word of mouth is usually done by all staff (Bambang, Kodim Banyuwangi).

Apart from the bureaucrats who do the marketing, visitors also promote the beach through this conventional method:



I recommend it to my friends from outside the city when they come here (Yahya)

I know this beach from my friend who said 'if you want to experience halal tourism, you don't need to go far to Lombok. There is also one in Banyuwangi, right?' So I searched for information about this beach. I searched on Google for the location. It turns out that it is close, because the beach is usually located on the edge of the city (Cahya).

The recollections of some visitors above exemplify their activity in conducting word of mouth marketing. As people are happy to share information when they are satisfied, the above remarks show that some visitors are happy with the beach. The label 'Sharia tourism' has become a magnet for them to visit and introduce the beach to others.

Conclusion

Advertising, sales promotions, events and experience, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word of mouth marketing and personal selling are several strategies of IMC that are applied in Sharia Beach. Even though Sharia Beach has been declared as Sharia-compliant Beach, the IMC strategies do not specifically refer to Sharia or halal tourism marketing strategies as its main selling point. The values of Islam indeed reflect in some facilities at the beach; however they do not certainly clear appear in the IMC strategies. Also, while the visitors are attracted with halal tourism and label sharia that is attached to the beach, the beach itself unfortunately does not pay attention to the attributes in its IMC strategies.

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