



# Public Relations Communication Strategy of Disbudparekraf Sumut in Promoting Tourism through the DiSumutAja Application: Challenges, Opportunities, and Optimization in the Digital Era

Mhd Adrian Alfridho<sup>1</sup>, Erwan Efendi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Communication Studies Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

## Article Info

## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

Collaboration, Communication strategy, DiSumutAja, Tourism promotion.

This study examines the communication strategy of the Public Relations Division of the Department of Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy of North Sumatra (Disbudparekraf Sumut) in promoting tourism through the DiSumutAja application. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm, the study explores user experiences and digital-based promotional strategies. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Media Richness Theory serve as the theoretical frameworks to evaluate the adoption of the digital tool and its communication effectiveness. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation of the app, and document analysis. Findings show that the DiSumutAja app is effective in promoting tourist destinations and local events, but it faces challenges, including limited interactivity and minimal private sector collaboration. In conclusion, optimizing the app with user feedback features and expanding partnerships will enhance its effectiveness and sustainability, making it a more inclusive and responsive platform for tourism promotion in the digital age.

*This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.*



## Corresponding Author:

Name: Mhd Adrian Alfridho  
Department: Communication Studies Program, Faculty of Social Sciences  
University: State Islamic University of North Sumatra  
Email: [adrian0603213060@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:adrian0603213060@uinsu.ac.id)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2024, the number of international tourist visits to North Sumatra reached 19,322 through the three main entry points, reflecting a 4.78% decrease compared to the previous month's total of 20,292 visits, according to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) North Sumatra (2024). Despite this decline, the number of international tourist arrivals showed a 27.37% increase from January to November 2024, rising from 179,800 in 2023 to 229,013 in 2024. Conversely, the occupancy rate of star-rated hotels in the region decreased to 44.83% in November 2024, down by 1.40 percentage points from 46.23% in October 2024. The average length of stay in these hotels also decreased to 1.31 days, down from 1.34 days the previous month.

According to Kodhyat and Koen Meyers, tourism is a temporary travel activity, undertaken either individually or in groups, from one location to another. Kodhyat defines tourism as a pursuit of harmony and happiness through interaction with various social, cultural, natural, and scientific elements. Meanwhile, Meyers emphasizes that tourism is a travel activity aimed at recreation, exploration, or the fulfillment of curiosity, without

the intention of settling or seeking livelihood at the destination. These definitions broaden the understanding of tourism not only as a recreational activity but also as a medium for the exchange of values and intercultural experiences.

In the digital-driven era of globalization, tourism has undergone a significant transformation. Virtual interactions and the presence of digital platforms have facilitated easier access to information about travel destinations, making tourism not only a means of cultural exchange but also an important economic sector. This trend signifies a major shift in the way the global community experiences travel and leisure [1].

The Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has acknowledged the importance of adapting to this digital trend. Through various initiatives, the ministry aims to increase the visibility of local tourism and strengthen Indonesia's destination branding on the international stage. These efforts are undertaken to reinforce the local economy and enhance the welfare of communities around tourist areas [2].

The Department of Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy of North Sumatra (Disbudparekraf Sumut) plays a crucial role in driving tourism growth in the region. Through intensive and structured promotional campaigns, Disbudparekraf Sumut seeks to attract more tourists to explore the natural beauty and cultural uniqueness of North Sumatra.

One of the communication strategies implemented by Disbudparekraf Sumut is through the use of the DiSumutAja application. This app is designed as an information portal that provides data and interesting facts about tourist destinations, local events, as well as useful travel tips for both domestic and international tourists [3].

Digital marketing through the DiSumutAja application not only helps introduce lesser-known tourist destinations but also makes it easier for visitors to plan their trips more efficiently. This includes accommodation reservations, event ticket bookings, and access to local transportation services, thereby providing users with a seamless experience [4].

The DiSumutAja application plays a vital role not only as a promotional and informational tool but also as an interactive platform between tourists and local tourism service providers. Through review and rating features, the app allows users to provide feedback that contributes to the improvement of service quality. This facilitates the development of a dynamic tourism ecosystem, where continuous information exchange between tourists and business operators results in mutual benefits.

Thus, the use of this application in the promotional strategy of Disbudparekraf Sumut not only assists in gathering valuable data and analytics but also in strategic decision-making and the adjustment of more effective tourism policies. The integration of the DiSumutAja application into the communication strategy of Disbudparekraf Sumut represents a step forward in the digitalization of tourism, expanding promotional reach to a broader audience, and enhancing operational efficiency, while modernizing the tourism sector and improving the competitiveness and sustainability of the local tourism industry.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to understand and optimize the promotional strategy used by the Public Relations Division of Disbudparekraf Sumut to advance regional tourism through the DiSumutAja application. This study is expected to provide deep insights into how digital technology, particularly mobile-based applications, can be integrated into communication and marketing strategies for effective tourism promotion. This research also aims to evaluate the impact of the application on increasing tourist visits and its influence on the local economy, providing a clear picture of the promotional model employed by Disbudparekraf Sumut's Public Relations in utilizing digital technology.

The tourism marketing communication strategy through the concept of Contextual Branding with the theme "Thoughtful Indonesia" during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this research is to analyze how this branding strategy was applied in an effort to build a tourism image that remains attractive despite the crisis situation. Using a qualitative method with content analysis, the study found that the "Thoughtful Indonesia" strategy focused on more emotional and empathetic communication with tourists, emphasizing values such as safety, comfort, and sustainability in the tourism sector [5].

The study published in Jurnal Mahardika Adiwidia examines the flow of communication within the bureaucracy following the structural simplification policy at the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy/Agency for Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf). The aim of this study is to

analyze how organizational structural changes impact internal communication within the ministry. Using a case study method, the research findings indicate that bureaucratic simplification affects the effectiveness of communication in the workplace, particularly in decision-making and the coordination of tourism and creative economy policies [6].

The study published in the *Journal of Communication Studies* evaluates a social media communication audit during the COVID-19 crisis. This research aims to analyze how social media was used as a communication tool in facing the crisis. Using a qualitative case study method on several social media platforms, the study found that social media communication during the pandemic was more informational, persuasive, and interactive, but still faced challenges in terms of message consistency and effective crisis management [7].

The study published in *Tourism and Hospitality Essentials Journal* examines the impact of the "Wonderful Indonesia" Nation Branding strategy on the decision of Australian tourists to visit Indonesia. The aim of this research is to determine the extent to which the branding strategy has been successful in attracting international tourists. Using a quantitative method through a survey of Australian tourists, the study found that the "Wonderful Indonesia" strategy has a positive impact on the appeal of Indonesia as a tourist destination, especially through digital promotions and campaigns highlighting Indonesia's natural beauty and culture [8].

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, acceptance, and realities presented by the DiSumutAja application as an innovative tourism promotion tool by the Public Relations Division of Disbudparekraf Sumut [9]. Through a constructivist paradigm, this research focuses on how stakeholders, including application developers, tourists, and relevant parties at Disbudparekraf, build their understanding of virtual reality as part of the tourism promotion strategy [10], [11]. This study explores their subjective experiences and perceptions related to the benefits and challenges of using DiSumutAja in supporting the development of tourism in North Sumatra.

This study employs a combination of primary and secondary data to understand the implementation of the DiSumutAja virtual reality application in tourism promotion. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives from Disbudparekraf, application developers, and purposively selected users. The sample was determined based on specific criteria, such as the relevance of the participant's role in tourism promotion and their direct interaction with the DiSumutAja application. In addition, direct observations of user interactions with the application were conducted. For secondary data, the research explored scholarly literature, books, journalistic articles, and policy documents from Disbudparekraf that discuss the use of digital technology in local tourism promotion.

The data analysis technique used follows the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions [12]. In the data reduction stage, the researcher sifted through the information from interviews and observations to focus on the findings most relevant to the phenomenon of virtual reality-based tourism promotion. The selected data were presented narratively to identify patterns and connections between the various findings. Conclusions were drawn progressively through reflection on the analyzed data.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied source triangulation, comparing information from interviews, observations, and secondary data sources to ensure that the conclusions are valid and credible [13]. Additionally, the study incorporated member checking by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. An audit trail was also maintained to track the data collection process, providing transparency regarding how decisions were made throughout the research.

The research was conducted in the context of North Sumatra's tourism development, with data collection taking place over a period of three months. The study acknowledges the limitations of the methodology, particularly the potential for selection bias in participant recruitment and the challenge of generalizing findings from a small, purposive sample. These factors may influence the scope of the conclusions, and future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size and exploring additional contexts.

## 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### Public Relations Strategy of Disbudparekraf Sumut in Tourism Promotion through the DiSumutAja Application

The tourism promotion strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of the Department of Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy of North Sumatra (Disbudparekraf Sumut) through the DiSumutAja application reflects the innovative use of digital technology to enhance the appeal and accessibility of regional tourism. By integrating various interactive features that facilitate access to information about tourist destinations, culture, culinary experiences, accommodations, events, and state museums, the application serves as an efficient

communication medium between the government and tourists. This strategy not only changes how information is delivered but also how it is received and processed by users [14].

DiSumutAja is designed to provide an experience that is not only informative but also engaging, through content tailored to the needs and preferences of local tourists. Integration with social media platforms such as Instagram and the provision of data on location accessibility enhance the ease of trip planning, making this application a highly valuable promotional tool. It allows Disbudparekraf Sumut to address small aspects of the tourism experience that are often overlooked but crucial in shaping tourists' perceptions and satisfaction [15], [16], [17].

Through the communication strategy led by the Public Relations (PR) of Disbudparekraf Sumut, the DiSumutAja application has become a symbol of the serious effort to adopt digital technology to enhance the quality of tourism promotion. This approach represents how technology, when applied strategically, can improve user interaction and broaden the reach of promotional messages while ensuring that the messages remain relevant and engaging. Thus, the application functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a platform that enriches the tourist experience and fosters a closer relationship between tourists and the destinations they will visit.

**Table 1.** Communication Strategy of Disbudparekraf Sumut's Public Relations in Promoting Local Tourism Through the DiSumutAja Application

Aspect	Description	Weakness	Strategic Development Actions
Communication Medium	The DiSumutAja app serves as an efficient communication medium between the government and tourists through interactive features and integrated information.	Limited integration with the private sector in providing information and services, making the app focus only on government-promoted tourism.	Initiate collaborative partnerships between the government and private tourism businesses to expand the scope of promotion and service content within the app.
Interactive Features	Integration of features such as tourist destinations, culture, cuisine, accommodation, events, and state museums; as well as connectivity with social media like Instagram.	Lack of features such as reviews, ratings, and live communication with the Public Relations team, preventing real-time interaction for tourists seeking assistance or additional information.	Add features for reviews, ratings, and direct communication channels (text/audio-video) to enhance two-way interaction.
Promotion Strategy	Digital promotion strategy through the app to reach and attract local tourists with content tailored to their preferences.	Promotional activities have not actively involved the private sector, meaning the potential of local tourism has not been fully explored.	Increase the inclusion of private business actors and local communities in the creation of promotional content, and organize cross-sector joint campaigns.

User Experience	User-friendly app design and informative, engaging content that makes planning trips easier for users.	Lack of content diversification and tourism service providers, as well as limited interactive features, preventing users from providing feedback or communicating directly with administrators.	Optimize the user interface based on actual needs and add interactive channels for feedback and user involvement in feature development.
Impact on Tourism	The app is expected to increase tourist visits and strengthen the cultural identity and uniqueness of North Sumatra as a tourist destination.	The potential of Sumatra's tourism is not fully represented because of the lack of broad involvement from the private sector and limitations in addressing tourists' direct needs or aspirations.	Reassess regional tourism potential, including informal and private sectors, to be better accommodated in the app-based promotional system.

**Source:** Data Processed by the Researcher (2025)

The table above shows that the communication strategy implemented by Disbudparekraf Sumut's Public Relations through the DiSumutAja application reflects efforts to leverage digital technology as the main medium for delivering tourism information to the public. This application serves as an interactive communication channel that allows tourists to obtain integrated information about destinations, culture, cuisine, and local events. However, the effectiveness of this strategy still faces challenges, particularly in terms of limited collaboration with the private sector. This limitation results in the promotional content reaching only government-managed tourist attractions, while the significant potential from independent tourism operators remains underdeveloped.

In terms of interactive features, the DiSumutAja application has integrated several important and visually appealing contents, including connectivity with social media platforms like Instagram. However, the lack of features such as user reviews, rating systems, and live talk channels with Public Relations poses a significant barrier to building participatory two-way interactions. In the context of modern digital communication strategies, interactivity is a key element in fostering emotional closeness and public trust in the information presented. Therefore, strengthening these features is crucial so that tourists are not just passive recipients of information, but also active participants in the tourism communication process [18].

The promotion strategy of the Public Relations Department of Disbudparekraf Sumut so far seems to focus on a top-down digital approach, where content is developed and disseminated by the agency without broad involvement from the community and the private tourism sector. This certainly limits the potential for exploring more authentic and contextual local narratives. To optimize the communication strategy, the involvement of local communities and private tourism entrepreneurs is essential. By engaging these various actors, promotion can be conducted in a more holistic, inclusive, and adaptive manner to the local social and cultural dynamics, which are the main strengths of the region's tourism appeal [19].

From a user experience perspective, the application's simple and informative design does provide adequate support for users in planning their trips. However, the lack of content diversity and the absence of a space for users to provide direct feedback pose challenges in creating an application that is truly adaptive to real needs on the ground. In an effective public communication strategy, the provision of dialogue spaces and reciprocal communication channels is essential to ensure that the messages conveyed truly address the aspirations and expectations of the public. Therefore, it is important to add feedback channels whether text, audio, or video-based that can be accessed directly through the application [20].

#### **Public Relations Communication Model of the Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy Office of North Sumatra in Tourism Promotion through the DiSumutAja Application**

The Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) model implemented by Humas Disbudparekraf Sumut through the DiSumutAja application demonstrates a structured effort to integrate various promotional elements into a comprehensive digital platform. Findings from observations show that the application has combined several communication channels, such as visual content, thematic narratives of destinations, accommodation information, and connectivity with social media, all aimed at strengthening the positioning of North Sumatra as a tourist destination. This approach reflects the application of IMC principles, which involve unifying promotional messages through consistent and mutually supportive media. However, the effectiveness of this strategy has not yet been fully optimized due to the weak elaboration of two-way communication, which should be a vital part of the digital tourism ecosystem today [22].

Field observations show that the lack of interactive features such as reviews, a rating system, and direct communication channels with Humas causes the DiSumutAja application to remain one-sided. In the context of integrated marketing communication, the strength of a strategy lies not only in the delivery of structured messages but also in the ability to receive and respond to feedback from the audience. The absence of these interactive features impacts the weakness of the feedback loop, which could provide strategic input for content development, service improvements, and real-time adjustments to promotional strategies. This also indicates that the role of Humas as a facilitator of public communication has not been fully optimized in the dialogical dimension, even though this aspect is crucial in participatory digital-based communication.

Furthermore, the limited collaboration with the private sector also serves as a barrier in strengthening message integration within the IMC strategy. Most of the content in the application only features government-managed tourist attractions, without involving independent tourism entrepreneurs who could make significant contributions to enriching narratives and expanding the promotional reach. As a result, the promotion built through this application becomes less representative of the diversity within the local tourism industry in North Sumatra. In the IMC framework, cross-sector collaboration should be an inherent part of the promotional strategy to create message harmony, enhance the credibility of campaigns, and strengthen the connection between promoters and the target audience. Therefore, the communication strategy implemented by the Humas Disbudparekraf Sumut needs to be directed towards enhancing participation, dialogue, and synergy among stakeholders in order to position the DiSumutAja application as an inclusive and sustainable tourism communication hub.

**Table 2.** Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Model of the Public Relations Department of the Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy Office of North Sumatra through the DiSumutAja Application

Aspect	Description	Weaknesses	Strategic Development Actions
IMC Component	Implementation in DiSumutAja App	Critical Findings	Strategic Implications
<b>Message Integration</b>	Tourist promotion content is delivered through destination narratives, visuals, cultural, culinary information, and social media, centralized in the app.	Promotional messages are fairly consistent but only cover government-managed tourist attractions.	Expand narratives by incorporating content from the private sector to enrich the variety of messages and strengthen destination positioning inclusively.
<b>Two-Way Interaction</b>	Basic features only provide one-way information with no space for direct interaction between users and Public Relations (no reviews, ratings, or live chat).	Lack of interactive features weakens the feedback loop between tourists and the promoters.	Develop direct communication features (live chat, Q&A forum, review system) to strengthen the dialogic dimension between users and the government agency.

<b>Consistency of Promotion Media</b>	The digital platform is used as the main channel, connected to Instagram, presenting thematic information visually and descriptively.	Promotional media have not been maximized across channels, and collaboration with external private sector channels is lacking.	Expand promotional channels through private media, tourism communities, and local influencers to increase the reach and diversity of promotions.
<b>Cross-Sector Collaboration</b>	Content and app management are still dominated by the local government, with minimal involvement of independent tourism industry players.	The app does not represent the entire tourism ecosystem of North Sumatra due to limited involvement of non-government stakeholders.	Strengthen collaborative networks between the government and the private sector in content production, information dissemination, and digital platform-based tourism promotion.

**Source:** Researcher Observation Results (2025)

Table 2 above illustrates that the communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations (Humas) of the Sumatera Utara (Sumut) Cultural, Tourism, and Creative Economy Agency (Disbudparekraf Sumut) through the DiSumutAja app has adopted an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) model. However, several structural weaknesses remain that need strengthening [23]. One observed strength lies in the message integration component, where promotional content such as destination information, culture, culinary offerings, and accommodation is consistently delivered through a single digital platform integrated with social media. However, this content is still limited to government-managed tourist sites, failing to fully represent the diversity of actors and broader tourism potential, particularly from the private sector or local communities.

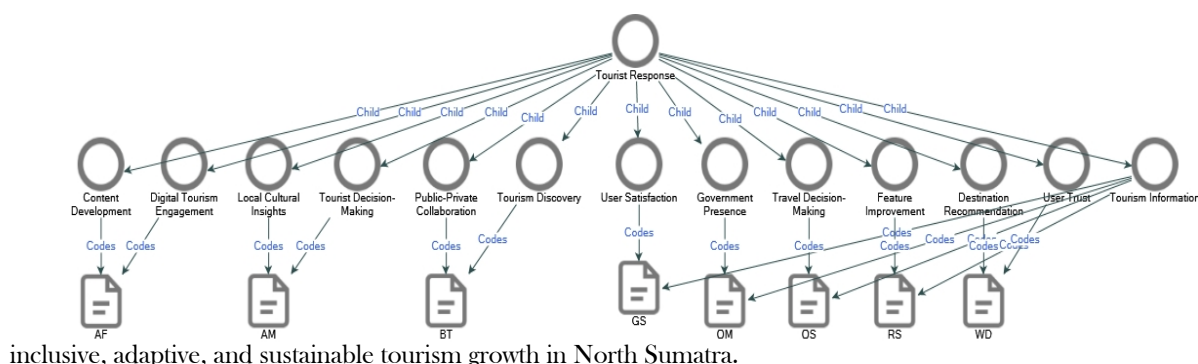
The two-way interaction component in the DiSumutAja app is another identified weakness. Although the app serves as a digital communication tool, features enabling reciprocal interaction between users and the Public Relations team, such as review systems, ratings, or live chat services, are still unavailable [24], [25]. The lack of these features disrupts the feedback loop, which should be an essential part of participatory digital communication. This limitation hinders the role of Public Relations as a facilitator of public communication, which should be responsive to tourists' needs and experiences directly.

The consistency of media promotion shows an effort to maintain a coherent narrative through primary digital channels like Instagram. However, the media strategy remains centralized and has not yet leveraged promotional networks from external channels such as community media, independent tourism platforms, or local influencers [26]. In the IMC context, message consistency should not only be maintained within a single channel but also enhanced through cross-media coherence and the expansion of message distribution networks. This will ensure that the promotional message reaches a broader and more varied audience.

Furthermore, cross-sector collaboration remains a crucial strategic issue. Currently, the DiSumutAja application is entirely managed by government agencies with minimal involvement from private tourism industry players, creative economy actors, or local communities [27]. The lack of content from non-governmental sectors causes the application to be elitist and not representative of the entire tourism ecosystem. From an IMC perspective, multi-stakeholder involvement is essential for a communication strategy that is not only informative but also collaborative and inclusive of all actors in the tourism industry.

Low audience participation is a logical consequence of the lack of open communication channels within the application. Users are not given space to provide feedback, share experiences, or contribute to content development. As a result, innovation in content and services becomes stagnant due to the absence of input from users. In modern IMC, audience participation is key to creating communication that not only targets the audience passively but also encourages them to engage actively as message producers [28].

Based on these five components, it can be concluded that the DiSumutAja application has a solid foundation as a digital communication tool for tourism promotion but has not fully optimized the principles of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). To enhance its effectiveness, strategic improvements are needed, including strengthening two-way communication, involving the private sector and local communities, expanding message distribution channels, and providing participatory space for the audience. This approach will transform the application into not only an information hub but also a collaborative communication ecosystem that fosters



**Figure 1.** Tourist Responses to Various Factors Within the Digital Tourism Ecosystem

This study focuses on tourist responses to various factors within the digital tourism ecosystem. The interview map developed illustrates a thematic structure centered on the main category of "Tourist Response," which branches into eleven key subthemes. Each subtheme represents a crucial aspect that influences tourists' experiences, perceptions, and decision-making in the context of digital tourism information consumption. This approach enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the interrelationships among factors and to identify key patterns emerging from the interview data.

The first subtheme explored is Content Development and Digital Tourism Engagement. In this context, interviews revealed that the quality of digital content plays a critical role in capturing tourists' initial interest. Informative, engaging, and authentic content enhances user engagement, shapes positive perceptions of destinations, and fosters interest in visiting. These findings underscore the importance of user experience-based content development strategies to improve the effectiveness of digital tourism promotion.

Local Cultural Insights and Tourist Decision-Making also emerged as central points in the analysis. Tourists tend to consider local cultural values in their decision-making process. Cultural insights gained through digital platforms enrich tourists' knowledge and increase their desire to explore specific destinations. This factor highlights the need for the presentation of well-curated and authentic cultural information in tourism promotion materials.

Public-Private Collaboration and Tourism Discovery play a significant role in shaping tourist experiences. Collaboration between public and private sectors has proven effective in expanding access to more diverse and reliable tourism information. Through such partnerships, tourists can discover new and lesser-known destinations, thereby broadening travel choices and enhancing the distribution of tourist visits across various regions.

In the interview mapping, User Satisfaction and Government Presence emerged as moderating factors that influence the relationship between tourists' expectations and their actual experiences. Active government participation in providing information and managing destinations significantly contributes to user satisfaction. Government intervention is considered vital to ensuring the quality of information and promoting tourism sustainability, particularly in digital contexts where oversight can be challenging.

Other highly influential aspects include Travel Decision-Making, Feature Improvement, and Destination Recommendation. Continuously updated features on tourism platforms, based on user feedback, improve convenience in travel planning. Personalized destination recommendations based on users' previous preferences enhance tourists' trust in the platform and increase the likelihood of actual travel. This highlights the importance of continuous innovation in the development of digital tourism services.



Finally, User Trust and Tourism Information serve as critical nodes within the overall ecosystem. Users' trust in the information provided greatly determines the effectiveness of digital tourism communication. Accuracy, relevance, and timeliness of information are key factors considered by tourists. Therefore, digital tourism service providers must ensure transparency and consistency in all forms of communication to maintain



and strengthen user trust.

**Figure 2.** The most dominant words

The findings from the interview analysis are visualized through a word cloud that highlights the most frequently mentioned keywords during conversations with respondents. The most dominant words "app", "information", and "DiSumutAja" indicate that discussions primarily revolved around a digital tourism application as a medium for delivering information to travelers.

The words "government" and "Sumatra" appear prominently, suggesting that the role of the government and the geographical focus of the study, North Sumatra, are significant concerns among respondents. The government is perceived as a key actor in providing, managing, and validating tourism-related information. This reflects tourists' expectations of public authorities to ensure the accuracy and credibility of digital tourism information platforms.

Additionally, terms like "tourism", "destinations", and "travel" also stand out, implying that tourists seek information not only about major attractions but also about a broader range of destinations, including lesser-known places. Expanding destination options and enriching travel experiences appear to be priorities in users' expectations from the application.

The word cloud also includes terms such as "accurate", "useful", "helpful", and "content", emphasizing that tourists value information that is precise, beneficial, and relevant. The accuracy of data is critical in building user trust in the application. Incorrect or outdated information may damage the platform's reputation and erode public confidence.

Terms like "platform", "sources", and "features" further suggest that beyond content, technical aspects such as usability, feature design, and diversity of information sources are also key considerations. Tourists expect an application that is not only rich in content but also user-friendly, with features that support practical and timely travel decisions.

Interestingly, words like "feel", "personally", and "experiences" also appear prominently, indicating that personal experiences and user emotions while interacting with the app are taken into account. This underscores the importance of a human-centered approach in digital tourism app design, where user experience (UX) plays a central role in determining overall satisfaction.

In summary, the interview map demonstrates that the success of a tourism information application depends on a combination of well-managed, government-backed informative content, user-friendly platform features, and the delivery of accurate, personalized user experiences. These insights form a crucial foundation for developing strategies to enhance digital tourism applications in North Sumatra and beyond.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of the Department of Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy of North Sumatra through the utilization of the DiSumutAja application demonstrates significant progress in the digitalization of regional tourism promotion. The application serves as an effective communication medium for conveying information about tourist destinations, local culture, and tourism activities through integrated and easily accessible content. However, the effectiveness of communication remains limited due to the lack of interactive features, low two-way communication, and minimal involvement of non-governmental actors, particularly the private sector and local communities. These limitations hinder the creation of a participatory and representative tourism communication ecosystem that truly reflects the region's diverse tourism potential.

From the perspective of the Diffusion of Innovation and Media Richness theories, the DiSumutAja application aligns with the characteristics of rich media in delivering information. However, it has yet to fully capitalize on interactivity, which is a crucial component of modern digital communication. Strengthening a more inclusive and dialogic communication strategy is essential. This can be achieved by developing features such as reviews, real-time feedback systems, and fostering collaborative partnerships between the government and independent tourism industry stakeholders.

In practical terms, the study highlights the need for more interactive and inclusive features within the application, recommending that policymakers and app developers prioritize engagement from both the private sector and local communities. This approach will enable DiSumutAja to evolve from merely an informational tool into a responsive, adaptive, and sustainable platform that supports the growth of North Sumatra's tourism sector in the digital age.

Although this research provides valuable insights into the current state of digital tourism promotion, it also has limitations, including a lack of quantitative data to measure the app's objective effectiveness. Future research could focus on conducting more comprehensive evaluations, including user engagement metrics and broader stakeholder participation, to refine the communication strategies employed.

In conclusion, the DiSumutAja application has the potential to become a transformative tool for regional tourism promotion, but its success depends on adopting a more interactive, collaborative, and inclusive communication strategy that integrates the diverse voices of all tourism stakeholders. By addressing these challenges, the app can play a pivotal role in enhancing North Sumatra's tourism sector while fostering greater engagement and sustainability.

## 5. REFERENCES

- [1] Y. Pshenichnykh and I. Novi, "The Role of Information Technology in Promoting a Tourist Destination," *Int. J. Media Inf. Lit.*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2023, doi: 10.13187/IJMIL.2023.2.350.
- [2] W. Wider et al., "Unveiling trends in digital tourism research: A bibliometric analysis of co-citation and co-word analysis," *Environ. Sustain. Indic.*, vol. 20, 2023, doi: 10.1016/j.indic.2023.100308.
- [3] E. D. Amperawati, "Review of Using Instagram Social Media as a Promotional Media on Online Shop Trustworth.id," *Enrich. J. Manag.*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2022.
- [4] S. K. Deb, S. M. Nafi, and M. Valeri, "Promoting tourism business through digital marketing in the new normal era: A sustainable approach," *Eur. J. Innov. Manag.*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2024, doi: 10.1108/EJIM-04-2022-0218.
- [5] A. M. Afrilia, "Contextual Branding 'Thoughtful Indonesia' Strategi Komunikasi Pemasaran Pariwisata di Masa Pandemi COVID-19," *Medialog J. Ilmu Komun.*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2022, doi: 10.35326/medialog.v5i1.1195.
- [6] C. R. Pasaribu and E. H. Saksono, "Analisis Aliran Komunikasi Paska Penyederhanaan Birokrasi Studi Kasus pada Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif/ Badan Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif (Kemenparekraf/ Baparekraf)," *J. Mahardika Adiwidia*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2022, doi: 10.36441/mahardikaadiwidi.v2i1.764.
- [7] C. D. Saputri, P. Lestari, and E. A. Sosiawan, "Audit Komunikasi Media Sosial di Masa Krisis COVID-19," *J. Ilmu Komun.*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2021, doi: 10.31315/jik.v19i1.4720.
- [8] S. Utami and V. Gaffar, "Pengaruh Strategi Nation Branding 'Wonderful Indonesia' Terhadap Proses Keputusan Berkunjung Wisatawan Australia Ke Indonesia," *J. Tour. Hosp. Essentials J.*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 693, 2016, doi: 10.17509/thej.v4i1.1978.
- [9] E. Weyant, "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 5th Edition," *J. Electron. Resour. Med. Libr.*, vol. 19, no. 1-2, 2022, doi: 10.1080/15424065.2022.2046231.
- [10] W. A. Edmonds and T. D. Kennedy, *An Applied Guide to Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. 2020. doi: 10.4135/9781071802779.
- [11] J. Pilarska, "The Constructivist Paradigm and Phenomenological Qualitative Research Design," in *Research Paradigm Considerations for Emerging Scholars*, 2021. doi: 10.21832/9781845418281-008.
- [12] M. B. Miles, A. M. Huberman, J. S. University, and *Data, Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 2021.
- [13] U. Flick, *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Methods*. 2020. doi: 10.4135/9781529716634.
- [14] I. G. A. A. N. Leonita, A. A. S. I. Pramesti, A. A. I. C. V. Ibrayanti, E. A. F. Laure, and N. L. Y. Dewi, "Strategi Branding Budaya Pariwisata 4.0 Melalui Digital Tourism di Kabupaten Gianyar," *Habitus J. Pendidikan, Sosiologi, Antropol.*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2022, doi: 10.20961/habitus.v6i1.61079.
- [15] C. Biswas, H. Omar, and J. Z. R. R. Rashid-Radha, "The Impact of Tourist Attractions and Accessibility on Tourists' Satisfaction: The Moderating Role of Tourists' Age," *Geoj. Tour. Geosites*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2020, doi: 10.30892/GTG.32402-558.
- [16] N. Zulvianti, H. Aimon, and A. Abror, "The Influence of Environmental and Non-Environmental Factors on Tourist Satisfaction in Halal Tourism Destinations in West Sumatra, Indonesia," *Sustain.*, vol. 14, no. 15, 2022, doi: 10.3390/su14159185.
- [17] C. S. Lu et al., "How Port Aesthetics Affect Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction and Tourist Loyalty," *Marit. Bus. Rev.*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, doi: 10.1108/MABR-12-2019-0056.
- [18] I. K. Pokulyta and M. O. Kolotylo, "Media Technologies and Virtual Practices in Creative Approaches to Educational Training of a Social Worker," in *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 2021. doi: 10.1088/1742-6596/1840/1/012055.
- [19] G. T. Di Sant'Agata and F. Voce, "Cybersecurity and the New European and International Balances," *Not. Polit.*, vol. 34, no. 132, 2018.
- [20] D. Buhalis, D. Leung, and M. Lin, "Metaverse as a Disruptive Technology Revolutionising Tourism Management and Marketing," *Tourism Management*, vol. 97, 2023, doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2023.104724.

- [21] Y. R. Sari, D. W. Handayani, A. Marta, V. Desiana, and I. J. Wiranata, "Penta Helix Collaboration on Village Tourism Development Program in Indonesia Post COVID-19 Pandemic," in *Proceedings of the Universitas Lampung International Conference on Social Sciences (ULICoSS 2021)*, 2022, doi: 10.2991/assehr.k.220102.004.
- [22] Latifah, "Imaji Borobudur Sebagai Destinasi Pusat Religi Dunia Melalui Media Digital," *Bandung Conf. Ser. Journal.*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2023, doi: 10.29313/bcsj. v3i3.9640.
- [23] C. Foà, "Crowdfunding Cultural Projects and Networking the Value Creation," *Arts Mark.*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2019, doi: 10.1108/aam-05-2019-0017.
- [24] J. Zetterblad et al., "Genomics-Based Analysis of Interactions Between Developing B-Lymphocytes and Stromal Cells Reveal Complex Interactions and Two-Way Communication," *BMC Genomics*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2010, doi: 10.1186/1471-2164-11-108.
- [25] K. Lueg and R. Lueg, "Detecting Green-Washing or Substantial Organizational Communication: A Model for Testing Two-Way Interaction Between Risk and Sustainability Reporting," *Sustain.*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2020, doi: 10.3390/su12062520.
- [26] R. Dwivan, V. Octaviani, and S. Sari, "Surfing Tourism Marketing Communication Through the 'Bengkulu Surf Instagram' Account as a Promotional Media," *J. ISO J. Ilmu Sos. Polit. dan Hum.*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2023, doi: 10.53697/iso. v3i1.1226.
- [27] A. Rao and S. Saksena, "Wildlife Tourism and Local Communities: Evidence from India," *Ann. Tour. Res. Empir. Insights*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.annale.2021.100016.
- [28] W. Shu, "Research on Viral Communication of New Media Based on Online Social Network," *Front. Business, Econ. Manag.*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2022, doi: 10.54097/fbem. v6i3.3640.
- [29] L. Muliawanti and D. Susanti, "Digitalisasi Destinasi Sebagai Strategi Pengembangan Promosi Pariwisata di Kabupaten Magelang," *War. ISKI*, vol. 3, no. 02, 2020, doi: 10.25008/wartaiski. v3i02.53.
- [30] A. Amalia and E. Sudiwijaya, "Yogyakarta Tourism Promotion Using User-Generated Content Feature," *Komunikator*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2020, doi: 10.18196/jkm.122042.
- [31] F. F. Rozi, "Komunikasi Pembangunan Desa Kemiren Kabupaten Banyuwangi Sebagai Desa Wisata Budaya," *Commercium*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2022.