

Implementation of Public Relations Strategy to Increase Engagement Rate on Instagram at Lerep Tourism Village Indonesia

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Abstract

The lack of social media management in Lerep Tourism Village has resulted in weak branding and low marketing effectiveness, as reflected by an Instagram engagement rate of @desawisatalerep just 0.44% in March 2024. This study aims to design a public relations strategy to increase the Instagram engagement rate for Lerep Tourism Village. The target audience includes students ranging from kindergarten to university students. Using a four-stage methodology—fact-finding, planning, implementation, and evaluation—the study increased engagement by 1.20% over one month, based on 24 uploaded posts (from 9 May until 4 June 2024). Key factors include consistency in posting time (between 2-4 pm), content frequency (6 posts/week), and the use of informational content and Instagram Reels, which proved most effective in driving engagement. None of the content included a call to action (CTA), indicating further improvement potential in this area.

Keywords: Public Relations Strategy, Social Media, Lerep Tourism Village, Engagement Rate, Instagram

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Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology and widespread internet penetration have transformed the way organizations communicate and engage with their audiences, particularly within the tourism industry. Social media platforms have emerged as indispensable tools, enabling destinations to showcase their unique offerings, build brand visibility, and foster direct engagement with potential visitors. Indonesia, a nation with over 221 million internet users and 104.8 million active Instagram users, stands out as one of the most digitally connected countries globally. This massive social media adoption presents significant opportunities for tourism entities to connect with diverse audiences, ranging from local explorers to international travelers. Among these platforms, Instagram, with its focus on visual content and interactive features, offers unparalleled potential for destinations to share their aesthetic appeal and cultural heritage while cultivating an active online community. Despite this opportunity, many destinations fail to optimize their digital presence, as evidenced by Lerep Tourism Village's low engagement rate on Instagram.

Located in Semarang, Central Java, Lerep Tourism Village is a culturally rich and naturally beautiful destination known for its traditional dances, nature trails, and educational tourism activities. However, despite its inherent appeal, the village has struggled to translate its physical attractions into digital engagement. Established on Instagram in 2017, the village's official account (@desawisatalerep) has experienced moderate growth in follower count but continues to face challenges in audience interaction, as indicated by a low engagement rate of 0.44% as of March 2024. This disconnection between content and audience suggests a lack of strategic planning in content creation and posting schedules. The inconsistent use of Instagram's interactive features, coupled with limited alignment between audience interests and posted content, has hindered the account's ability to effectively promote Lerep's tourism offerings. Consequently, potential visitors remain disengaged, and the village's digital footprint remains underutilized as a promotional tool.

Recognizing these challenges, this study aims to explore the implementation of a structured public relations (PR) strategy to enhance the engagement rate of Lerep's Instagram account. By leveraging the principles of PR, this approach seeks to address the underlying issues of inconsistency, lack of audience alignment, and minimal interactivity. Specifically, the strategy emphasizes the development of a comprehensive content calendar organized around four thematic pillars: educational, promotional, entertaining, and informative content. Additionally, the study integrates the use of Instagram's unique features such as Reels, Stories, and carousel posts—to provide an immersive and engaging experience for followers. Through consistent posting schedules, targeted hashtag strategies, and community-focused captions, the PR strategy aims to create a more dynamic and interactive digital presence that aligns with Lerep's cultural identity and audience expectations.

This paper positions the case of Lerep Tourism Village as an example of how structured PR strategies can transform digital engagement in the tourism sector. By bridging the gap between Lerep's rich cultural assets and its digital outreach potential, the study provides insights into how other destinations facing similar challenges can leverage social media to strengthen their brand visibility and foster audience connection. As tourism becomes increasingly reliant on digital platforms, understanding and applying strategic PR frameworks is essential for destinations to remain competitive. The findings of this research not only demonstrate the impact of an organized approach to content management but also underscore

the role of adaptability and audience- centered strategies in achieving sustained engagement on social media platforms like Instagram.

Literature Review

Prior Research on Social Media in Tourism Marketing

The influence of social media in tourism branding and audience engagement has been the subject of extensive research (Smith et al, 2023), with findings indicating that strategic management of social media accounts can profoundly enhance a destination's brand image and audience reach. A study on Bukit Indah Simarjarunjung and Batu City Tourism's Instagram marketing efforts demonstrated that PR-based engagement strategies significantly increase user interaction (Soleha et al, 2023). Key elements such as frequent posting, user-centric engagement strategies, and varied multimedia content all play a role in amplifying audience reach and creating a sustainable impact (Lie et al, 2023). Similarly, studies on the use of Instagram as a marketing tool in tourism highlight that structured content management, targeted use of interactive features, and regular posting schedules are vital components for engaging users and achieving substantial engagement metrics.

Visual-centric platforms like Instagram have proven particularly effective in enabling destinations to convey brand identity and interact with audiences (Kaplan et al, 2010), particularly through the use of multimedia elements that resonate with user interests. Instagram, a platform focused on visual content, is especially effective for tourism destinations seeking to showcase their aesthetic appeal. In Indonesia, where Instagram usage is among the highest globally, tourism entities have a vast potential audience. Studies have shown that features like Instagram Reels, Stories, and direct follower engagement (likes, comments, messages) strengthen brand-audience relationships, increasing the likelihood of actual visits. Consequently, a structured PR strategy on Instagram has the potential to elevate Lerep's digital reach and engagement, turning digital interaction into increased tourism.

Public Relations (PR) Strategy in Social Media Engagement

The theoretical framework guiding PR strategies in social media is rooted in the systematic approach developed by Cutlip & Center (Cutlip et al, 2006), which includes fact-finding, planning, action, communication, and evaluation. This model allows for an organized approach to content management that aligns with organizational objectives while maintaining audience engagement. Organizations must develop comprehensive social media strategies that align with their overall PR goals (Agarwal & Puppala, 2024). For tourism brands like Lerep Tourism Village, adopting a PR framework that includes consistent content posting, audience-targeted messaging, and frequent engagement allows for the development of a structured communication channel that fosters a deeper connection with followers. Social media allows for real-time interaction, enabling organizations to build trust and visibility with the public (Tasente, 2023). Through this model, tourism destinations can transform their social media presence into a dynamic promotional tool that continuously engages and informs audiences, ultimately driving brand visibility and visitor interest (Elfandri and Nuraryo, 2023).

Social Media Strategy and Instagram's Unique Role in Visual Engagement

Instagram, with its emphasis on visual storytelling, provides an ideal platform for tourism brands to capture and communicate the allure of destinations. Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) model of social media strategy underscores the importance of tailoring content to the specific attributes of each platform to maximize engagement (Kaplan et al, 2010). For Lerep Tourism Village, Instagram's variety of features such as Reels, Stories, and carousels provides opportunities to create engaging and interactive content that resonates with the platform's large and diverse user base. Instagram marketing significantly influences brand awareness and purchasing decisions, accounting for a substantial portion of variance in consumer behavior (Setiawati & Sirait, 2024). Through these features, tourism entities can share stories, announce events, and build brand affinity, ultimately fostering an interactive community and stronger engagement.

Engagement Rate (ER) as a Metric of Social Media Success

In social media marketing, engagement rate (ER) serves as a vital metric for assessing the effectiveness of content in capturing and maintaining audience interest. Defined as the ratio of total interactions (e.g., likes, comments, shares) to the number of followers, ER offers insight into how well a brand's content resonates with its audience (Smith and Gallicano, 2015). Low engagement rates, typically under 1%, suggest a disconnect between content and audience interests, while higher engagement rates indicate a strong, resonant social media presence (De Vries et al, 2012). Therefore, effective PR strategies target improvements in this metric by incorporating engaging content, consistent posting, and interactive features that invite active participation from followers. For Lerep Tourism Village, elevating the ER from its initial 0.44% requires a strategy that both appeals to follower interests and encourages more frequent interaction.

Methods

The methodology employed in this study was designed to address the engagement challenges faced by Lerep Tourism Village on Instagram by implementing a comprehensive public relations (PR) strategy. The approach was structured into four distinct phases—fact-finding, planning, implementation, and evaluation—each contributing to a systematic progression towards improved engagement. This phased methodology ensured that every aspect of the strategy was carefully aligned with the goals of increasing interaction, optimizing content delivery, and leveraging Instagram's platform-specific features. By breaking the process into clear stages, the study was able to tackle the root causes of low engagement and build a sustainable framework for future improvements.

Phase 1: Fact-Finding and Problem Identification

The first phase focused on identifying the fundamental challenges impeding Lerep Tourism Village's Instagram engagement. A thorough analysis of the account's Instagram insights was conducted, examining metrics such as post frequency, follower demographics, and existing interaction levels. The findings revealed several critical issues, including inconsistent posting schedules, minimal use of interactive features like Reels and Stories, and a lack of content that resonated with the audience's interests. For instance, while Lerep's cultural and natural attractions have strong potential, these strengths were underrepresented in the account's content. Audience analysis also indicated a preference for visually engaging and informative

posts, emphasizing the need for a targeted approach that aligns content with user expectations. This phase laid the foundation for the subsequent strategy by clearly defining the scope of the problem and identifying areas requiring immediate attention.

Phase 2: Planning and Program Development

Building on the insights from the fact-finding phase, the second phase involved developing a structured content strategy to address the identified challenges. A detailed content calendar was created, categorizing posts into four core themes: educational, promotional, entertainment, and informative. The content strategy to be implemented is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Content Strategy

Strategy	Description
Key elements of strategy	Consistent Posting Schedule: Upload time: 2 PM - 4 PM. Posting frequency: 6 times per week (Monday to Saturday, except Wednesday and Sunday; two contents on Monday).
Content types	Informational Content: Information about daily activities and attractions Entertaining Content: Behind-the-scenes (BTS), reels showcasing student activities like outdoor learning. Educational Content: History of the village, eco-tourism activities, and traditional performances. Promotional Content: Information about special event also discount
Content guidelines	Publish engaging content like reels, photos, and carousels. Use a consistent posting schedule (e.g., twice on Mondays, once on other days). Relevant hashtags (#Wisatasemarang, #Exploresemarang) to reach wider audiences.

Each theme was designed to cater to different audience preferences and maintain a balanced flow of content. For example, educational posts focused on the cultural history and unique aspects of Lerep, while promotional content highlighted events and tourism packages. Entertainment posts were crafted to provide visually appealing and engaging content, such as scenic photos or short videos, while informative posts updated followers on activities and improvements within the village. Additionally, specific posting schedules were planned to align with peak engagement hours (2–4 PM), ensuring that content reached the largest possible audience. The planning phase also included the development of a hashtag strategy and guidelines for writing engaging captions to encourage audience interaction.

Phase 3: Implementation – Content Creation and Communication

The implementation phase focused on executing the planned strategy with precision, emphasizing consistency, quality, and engagement. Content creation was prioritized to ensure that each post met the visual and thematic standards established during the planning phase. Posts were scheduled and published consistently at the pre-determined peak hours, with six posts per week ensuring regular visibility and interaction. Instagram Reels and Stories played a central role in this phase, as these features were identified as highly effective in driving

audience engagement. For instance, Reels showcasing Lerep's traditional dances or natural landscapes provided an immersive experience for followers, while Stories allowed for real-time interaction and updates. Captions accompanying each post were crafted to invite comments, questions, and shares, fostering a sense of community among followers. A targeted hashtag strategy further expanded the account's reach, attracting new followers who shared an interest in cultural and natural tourism.

Phase 4: Evaluation

The final phase involved a rigorous evaluation of the strategy's effectiveness through continuous monitoring of engagement metrics. Weekly tracking was conducted to measure interaction rates, follower growth, and the performance of specific content types. These metrics provided valuable insights into audience preferences, allowing for real-time adjustments to the content calendar and posting strategy. For instance, if educational posts on cultural traditions garnered higher engagement than promotional content, the focus would shift towards increasing the frequency of educational posts. Similarly, hashtags and captions were refined based on their performance in driving interaction. The evaluation phase also emphasized the importance of learning from both successes and challenges, enabling the team to make informed decisions about future strategies. By continuously refining the approach based on data-driven insights, the study ensured sustained improvements in engagement and laid the groundwork for long-term digital success.

Analysis and Discussion

Initially, Lerep's Instagram content strategy was characterized by sporadic posting and limited alignment with user interests, contributing to the low engagement rate of 0.44%. A detailed SWOT analysis highlighted that, while Lerep has strong cultural assets, its digital engagement strategies were not optimized, resulting in missed opportunities for audience interaction. The newly implemented PR strategy addressed these gaps by focusing on four core content pillars: educational, promotional, entertaining, and informative. Each content type was carefully designed to appeal to the specific preferences of the audience segments, ultimately creating a more dynamic and engaging presence on Instagram. This structure provided followers with a balanced mix of content, keeping them interested and encouraging them to engage with posts regularly.

Moreover, the PR strategy incorporated a systematic approach to content scheduling, ensuring that posts were shared during peak hours (2-4 PM), maximizing visibility and reach. The scheduling component of the strategy proved vital, as consistency in posting not only keeps the audience engaged but also signals reliability and active management of the account. For instance, Instagram Reels, Stories, and carousel posts were strategically utilized to increase interaction rates, given that these formats offer a more immersive experience and cater to Instagram's visual-centric audience. Reels and Stories, in particular, emerged as effective tools for driving engagement, as they allowed Lerep to share authentic moments, event highlights, and scenic shots that captivated followers. By focusing on these interactive elements, the strategy capitalized on the unique strengths of Instagram, ultimately aligning Lerep's online presence with best practices in digital PR.

A targeted hashtag strategy was also developed and integrated as part of the PR approach to broaden Lerep's audience reach and foster a sense of community among followers. Hashtags, when used effectively, not only categorize content but also make it discoverable to users

outside the immediate follower base. The selected hashtags were carefully curated to appeal to tourism enthusiasts, locals, and travelers interested in exploring cultural and natural attractions. This approach enhanced the account's visibility on the platform and increased the chances of reaching users who share a genuine interest in tourism-related content. Engaging captions accompanied each post, encouraging followers to leave comments, ask questions, or share their own experiences, thereby fostering a community-oriented atmosphere. This interactive component allowed followers to feel more connected to Lerep Tourism Village, leading to stronger engagement levels across posts.

Weekly evaluation and adjustments formed a critical part of the strategy, allowing for real-time optimization based on performance metrics. By continuously monitoring engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and overall interaction rates, the PR team could identify which types of content were most resonant with the audience. For instance, if certain hashtags or types of content, such as educational posts on Lerep's cultural heritage, performed particularly well, adjustments could be made to incorporate more of these elements into the content calendar. This data-driven approach proved essential in refining the strategy and allowed the team to respond to engagement trends, effectively keeping the audience's interest over time. These insights enabled a proactive response to the audience's preferences and enhanced the overall impact of the PR strategy on Instagram. The results of the strategy implementation on the Lerep Tourism Village Instagram account are shown in Figure 1, which illustrates the increase in ER every week (from May 9 to June 4, 2024).

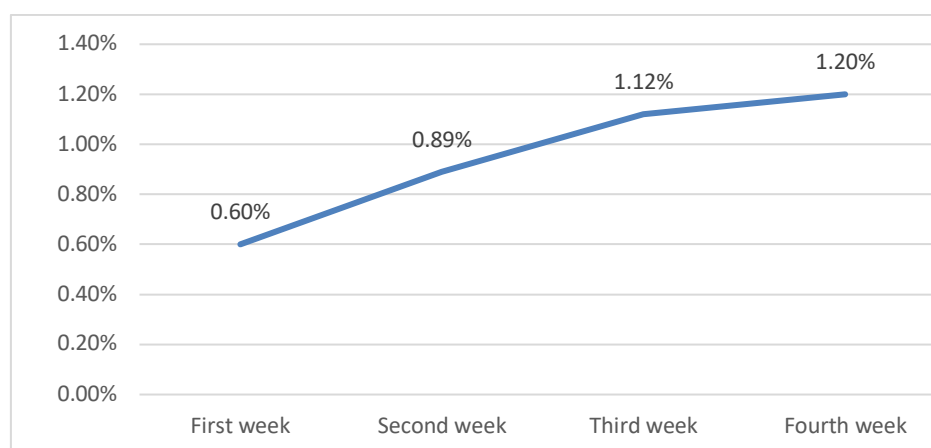


Figure 1: Instagram Engagement Rate of @desawisatalerep From 9 May to 4 June 2024

Overall, within just one month of implementation, the structured PR strategy achieved a notable increase in engagement rate, from 0.44% to 1.20%, demonstrating the effectiveness of a well-organized content strategy and consistent community engagement. The combination of diverse content themes, interactive Instagram features, and optimized posting schedules contributed significantly to this growth. The increased engagement reflects the power of aligning content with user preferences and utilizing platform-specific tools to create a more immersive and meaningful experience for followers. This transformation illustrates how Lerep Tourism Village successfully leveraged PR strategies to connect more deeply with its audience and establish a more visible digital presence in the competitive tourism industry.

Conclusion

By transitioning from an unstructured approach to a data-driven PR model, Lerep was able to achieve a measurable increase in engagement, validating the importance of targeted,

audience- centric social media strategies. The PR strategy focused on three main pillars of engagement: thematic content variety, interactive engagement tactics, and real-time strategy refinement. Each of these pillars was essential in transforming Lerep's Instagram presence from a passive page into an interactive, community-oriented platform that invites followers to participate actively. Key success factors included the use of high-quality visuals, engaging captions, targeted hashtags, and regular posting, all of which contributed to maintaining audience interest and fostering a strong connection with followers.

Thematic content variety proved essential in catering to the diverse interests of the audience. By balancing educational, promotional, and entertainment content, the strategy was able to sustain followers' attention and keep them engaged with both Lerep's cultural and natural attractions. This approach ensured that the content was not only informative but also visually and emotionally appealing, enhancing Lerep's brand identity and encouraging user interaction. Interactive engagement tactics, including the strategic use of Instagram Reels, Stories, and carousels, further strengthened audience connection by allowing followers to experience Lerep's attractions in a more immersive way. These features effectively engaged followers, increasing their likelihood of sharing content or engaging directly with posts.

Real-time strategy refinement was another critical factor that contributed to the success of the PR strategy. Through weekly evaluations, the PR team was able to make timely adjustments to content types, posting schedules, and engagement strategies, optimizing each element based on observed engagement trends. This adaptive approach allowed the strategy to remain responsive to the changing preferences and behaviors of the audience, ensuring sustained engagement and relevance. By incorporating feedback from engagement metrics, the team was able to make data- informed decisions that directly improved the effectiveness of the strategy, showcasing the value of continuous evaluation in social media management.

In conclusion, the success of the PR strategy on Lerep Tourism Village's Instagram account highlights the significant impact that structured social media management can have on brand visibility and audience engagement (Jaakonmaki et al, 2017). The results of this case study provide a replicable model for other tourism destinations seeking to improve their digital presence through strategic PR efforts. By focusing on audience needs, utilizing platform-specific features, and maintaining flexibility through ongoing evaluation, tourism entities can achieve higher engagement rates and foster stronger relationships with their followers. Future strategies should consider incorporating emerging social media trends, such as augmented reality (AR) and live streaming, to further enhance engagement and continue adapting to evolving audience preferences. Through these efforts, Lerep Tourism Village has established a robust foundation for long-term digital engagement, setting a benchmark for social media excellence in the tourism industry.

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Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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