COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BUSINESS OF THE LODGE MARIBAYA BANDUNG

Benazir Bona Pratamawaty
Putri Limilia
Puji Prihandini
Roy Robert Rondonuwu
Faculty of Communication Sciences Universitas Padjadjaran
Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract

Tourism is one of the most escalating sectors in the world for the past few years, particularly in developing countries. In recent years, data shows large numbers of tourists going in and out of developing countries even more than the countries’ targeted tourist numbers in a year. The tourism industry, indeed, has been one of the significant contributors to the world’s GDP total amount.

The rapid escalation of the tourism industry not only affects positively, for instance, increase the region and country’s income but also affects negatively. The negative impacts that have been concerned prominently by most parties, especially UNWTO, including environmental impact, social impact, and cultural impact. Tourism destination that attracts thousands of tourists might damage the environment. Large numbers of visitors interact with the locals most likely might danger the local culture. On the other hand, tourism destination developments without involving the locals might affect regional economic development negatively.

Facing the problems above new concept of tourism development has been generated, which is known as sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism emphasizes three key points, which is planet, people, and profit. This tourism development concept underlines sustained environmental conservation, locals empowerment, and economic growth while addressing the needs of tourists, the industry, environment and also host communities.

Established in 2015, The Lodge Maribaya located in Bandung Barat Regency commenced its business with the environmental conservation and local people empowerment concept. Initially, the owner of The Lodge Maribaya merely intended to provide a small area which environmentally friendly for a family camping site. It turned out the business became well-known and growing over the past few years and required the owner to hire more staffs in which she recruited from the locals.

1 Financial support for this research is provided by Universitas Padjadjaran’s grant.

2 Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Benazir Bona Pratamawaty, Faculty of Communication Sciences Universitas Padjadjaran. Contact: benazir.bona@unpad.ac.id
Being well-known has attracted more tourists, year by year. This tourism business has grown larger each year indicated by the increasing amount of income. Aware of its potential and also the damage may occur because of the overwhelming number of visitors, the owner then focused on business development based on the sustainable tourism concept. In the development process, The Lodge Maribaya put more efforts on conservation, empowering as many local people in the business, preserving local culture through cultural performance in the tourism package, while increasing income by creating more creative tourism attraction. However, it could only embark the creative development in 2016, after settled varying social and cultural issues with the locals.

The Lodge Maribaya has been dealing with varied issues with the locals for approximately two years. The issues included the locals disliking traffic and huge crowd caused by the increasing numbers of tourists in their neighbourhood; the neighbourhood atmosphere changes drastically annoyed the locals; dispute amongst the locals initiated by those who refused to work for The Lodge and provoke the locals-employee to quit from their job; the locals-employee got provoked and demanded for raised salary; and other locals demanded to be involved in the development of the tourism destination area.

The major objective of this study was to investigate the communication strategy of sustainable tourism business of The Lodge Maribaya Bandung in facing the social and cultural issues with the locals. This study employed case study methods where the data collection was done by observing, interviewing, and studying some relevant literature. The interviews conducted with the General Manager and staffs of The Lodge Maribaya also with the locals in the neighbourhood.

The results reveal that the management of The Lodge Maribaya employed interpersonal communication approach step by step to deal with varying issues brought up by the locals in the area. Step one, the owner invited local people to her house to have a friendly and warm dinner while discussing daily issues and activities of the locals. Step two, the General Manager initiated interpersonal communication approach with the locals, built rapport and engaged interpersonal communication with the locals concerned. Step three, socialized and educated the locals regarding the issue at hand. Step four, established a memorandum of agreement with the locals both personally and in groups.

These findings suggest that interpersonal communication still plays the key role in diffusing innovation into the society, particularly the ones who refuse to change and develop. Employing the interpersonal communication approach to the locals and host communities have influenced their decision to accept the new idea or innovation proposed by The Lodge. In order to be able to maintain and develop a tourism business located around the locals’ neighbourhood, it is required to build a mutual understanding relationship which beneficial for both parties. Employing an interpersonal communication approach to build rapport and engagement with the locals need a strategy, stages, and great communication skills. Establishing communicator’s credibility also required in the process.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, communication strategy, interpersonal communication, diffusion of innovation
Introduction

Over the last fifty years tourism has become one of the largest economic sectors globally, accounting for some 9% of the world’s GDP and over 200 million jobs (UNWTO, 2013). Tourism is one of the most escalating sectors in the world for the past few years, particularly in developing countries. In recent years, data shows large numbers of tourists going in and out of developing countries even more than the countries’ targeted tourist numbers in a year. The tourism industry, indeed, has been one of the significant contributors to the world’s GDP total amount.

In 2012, international tourists spent US$ 386 billion in emerging market and developing countries, over five times the level of official development assistance which goes to these countries. It is one of their main sources of foreign exchange earnings (UNWTO, 2013). The rapid escalation of the tourism industry not only affects positively, for instance, increase the region and country’s income but also negatively. The negative impacts that have been concerned prominently by most parties, especially UNWTO, including environmental impact, social impact, and cultural impact. Tourism destination that attracts thousands of tourists might damage the environment. Large numbers of visitors interact with the locals most likely might danger the local culture. On the other hand, tourism destination developments without involving the locals might affect regional economic development negatively.

Tourism has been a promising industry for developing countries shown by high number of visitors, both domestic and international tourists, attracted by the tourism destinations. As a country with the vast geography, Indonesia has numerous beautiful and amazing tourism destinations spread all over the country from Sabang to Merauke, from the west to the east. Bali is one of the very well-known examples. West Java is followed behind as the second most popular tourism destination in Indonesia. Considering the vast geography of West Java itself, there are numerous magnificent tourism destinations within and West Bandung Regency is one of it. West Bandung Regency is a neighbor town of Bandung City where both have incredible nature sceneries and high numbers of creative people. The collaboration of magnificent nature sceneries and creative people have brought tourism into a huge and successful business. However, it is not easy to establish a tourism business around the locals. There are obstacles and problems required attention and solution in order to maintain the business.

Besides, the rapid growth of tourism business has emerged the concern towards the sustainability of both the tourism destination and the business. The Lodge Maribaya is one of the top tourism destinations of West Bandung Regency which developing sustainable tourism business by emphasizing on three key points of sustainable tourism concept which is planet, people, and profit. Sustainable tourism development concept underlines sustained environmental conservation, the locals’ empowerment, and economic growth while addressing the needs of the tourists, the industry, the environment and also the host communities.

A previous study of sustainable tourism in Bogor (Ardialisa, Hermawan, & Chozin,
2012) has concluded that sustainability perception in tourism business is perceived by stakeholders in Bogor as having consistent implementation of 3P (People, Planet, Profit) which consists of six indicators generated from stakeholder analysis, as followed: (1) involvement from local people; (2) preserving the natural resources and local culture; (3) availability of nature education program, (4) strong commitment from business owner/leader; (5) sufficient capital, and (6) availability of network. In other hand, the key element in implementing the 3P mentioned is communication. In order to achieve the sustainable tourism business goals in addressing the needs of the tourists, the industry, the environment and also the host communities, an effective communication is required.

An effective communication could be achieved by establishing an appropriate communication strategy based on the circumstances encountered. The key elements of communication strategy including the communicator, the message, the channel (media) and the audiences (H. H. Cangara & Cangara, 2005). Strategy of choosing the communicator refers to the communicator's background, credibility, and appeal; strategy of organizing and presenting message refers to message organization, message structure, message appeal, verbal and non-verbal, also message presentation form; strategy of media determining and planning refers to adjusting the media used to the audiences’ condition and situation also their socio psychological situation; and strategy of determining and identifying audiences refers to identify the audiences’ frame of references and field of experiences (H. Cangara, 2006). However, the lack of publication concerning communication strategy of sustainable tourism business required a qualitative study employed.

This study aimed to investigate the communication strategy employed by The Lodge Maribaya in establishing a sustainable tourism business concept. This article consists of two main parts where the first part will elaborate the communication concept and theory concerning an effective communication to achieve the sustainable tourism business goals, while the second part will elaborate on the communication strategy employed by The Lodge Maribaya in establishing its business to as successful as it is now.

**The Principles of Sustainable Tourism**

The UNWTO has defined sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities” (UNWTO, 2013). A further elaboration of sustainable tourism by UNWTO refers to the need for it to:

- Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
• Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation (UNWTO, 2013).

**Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

According to Everett M. Rogers (Hoffmann, 2011) diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of social system. While communication is a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding. Diffusion has a special character because of the newness of the idea in the message content (Hoffmann, 2011).

The main elements of diffusion of innovation theory are innovation, communication channels, time, and social system. The innovation in this case refers to the sustainable tourism business concept while the communication channels play key role in diffusing the new idea into the social system from time to time. Rogers (Hoffmann, 2011) claimed that a communication channel is the means by which messages get from one individual to another. Mass media channels are more effective in creating knowledge of innovations, whereas interpersonal channels are more effective in forming and changing attitudes toward a new idea, and thus in influencing the decision to adopt or reject a new idea.

The development of tourism destination most likely affects the surrounding or so-called the social system by Rogers. An innovation or new idea might be perceived and received differently by individuals or units in the social system. Rogers (Hoffmann, 2011) distinguishes among three main types of innovation-decisions: (1) optional innovation-decisions, choices to adopt or reject an innovation that are made by an individual independent of the decisions of other members of the system; (2) collective innovation-decisions, choices to adopt or reject an innovation are made by consensus among the members of a system; and (3) authority innovation-decisions, choices to adopt or reject an innovation that are made by relatively few individuals in a system who possess power, status, or technical expertise.

**Interpersonal Communication**

Interpersonal communication mentioned to be more effective in forming and changing attitudes toward a new idea and thus it is highly contributed in the decision making of accept or reject a new idea. There are four principles of interpersonal communication which are interpersonal communication is inescapable, interpersonal communication is irreversible, interpersonal communication is complicated, and interpersonal communication is contextual. In the case of sustainable tourism business and the relation of implementing sustainable tourism concept then we are mostly talking about interpersonal communication is contextual.

Every communication occurs in a context and there are five contexts needed our attention which are psychological, relational, situational, environmental, and cultural.
Psychological context refers to who you are and what you bring to the interaction affect how you will interpret the messages of others. Relational context refers to the level of thrust, the degree of self-disclosure, levels of power and control, and the history you share. Situational context refers to the event of reason that you are communicating. The environmental context refers to the furniture, other people, the location, the temperature, time of day, and day of week you are communicating. While the cultural context refers to all the elements of the culture (learned behaviors and rules) that affect the interaction (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2014).

**Method and Data**

This study employed case study methods to explore the communication strategy applied by The Lodge Maribaya in developing its sustainable tourism business. Case study research investigates predefined phenomena but does not involve explicit control or manipulation of variables: the focus is on in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and its context (Cavaye, 1996). Case study research allows researcher to collect details and rich information including dimensions of a certain case (Daymon & Holloway, 2008). There are varied dimensions need to be explored in order to elaborate the communication strategy of The Lodge Maribaya. Thus, this method considered to be appropriate for the study. Data collection incorporates observation and interviews with several parties in order to explore different dimensions of the case. Interviews conducted with the staffs of The Lodge Maribaya from its top management level to its technical staffs in the field. Also, interviews conducted with other elements of the community related to the business development of The Lodge Maribaya, that is the host community, the locals-employee, and also the merchants around. Observation conducted during our visit to the tourism destination.

**Results and Discussion**

First established in 2015, The Lodge Maribaya was before known as The Lodge Earthbound & Adventure Park, located in Cibodas, West Bandung Regency. The Lodge Maribaya commenced its business with the environmental conservation and local people empowerment concept. Initially, the owner of The Lodge Maribaya merely intended to provide a small area which environmentally friendly for a family camping site. It turned out the business become well-known and growing over the past few years and required the owner to hire more staffs in which she recruited from the locals.

Being well-known has attracted more tourists, year by year. This tourism business has grown larger each year indicated by the increasing amount of income. Aware of its potential and also the damage may occur because of the overwhelming number of visitors, the owner then focused on business development based on the sustainable tourism concept. In the development process, The Lodge Maribaya put more efforts on conservation, empowering as many local people in the business, preserving local culture through cultural performance in the tourism package, while increasing income by creating more attractive tourism attraction. However, it
could only embark the creative development in 2016 after settled varying social and cultural issues with the locals.

The Lodge Maribaya has been dealing with varied issues with the locals for approximately two years. The issues included the locals disliking traffic and huge crowd caused by the increasing numbers of visitors in the neighborhood; drastic changes of the neighborhood atmosphere annoyed the locals; dispute amongst the locals initiated by those who refused to work for The Lodge and provoke the locals-employee to dislike their job agreements; the locals-employee got provoked and demanded for salary raised; and other locals demanded to be involved in the development of the tourism destination area.

The Lodge Maribaya has expanded its business core into three main tourism objects attraction that is The Lodge Maribaya, Fairy Garden, and The Dutch House. Each tourism object distanced from one another for about 300 to 500 meters. The Lodge also has a special parking lot located 300 meters from the main gate of The Lodge. The Lodge provides operational vehicles which they called _wara wiri_ to take the visitors from the parking lot – which is the main point – to each of the tourism object. This method is a solution for the high traffic caused by the high volume of visitors’ vehicles in the neighborhood. Since the access to The Lodge passing by a narrow alley of the neighborhood, The Lodge then provides a special parking lot located outside the main gate and the neighborhood gate area. It is more convenient for both the visitors and the host communities. It is one of the efforts employed by The Lodge in order to maintain its business sustainability.

Sustainable tourism business required specific treatment and approach in order to keep the business sustainability. As mentioned above, a previous study of sustainable tourism in Bogor has concluded the tourism stakeholders in Bogor perceived sustainability in tourism business is by consistently implementing People, Planet, Profit (Ardialisa et al., 2012). The findings indicated The Lodge has implemented the three key elements of sustainable tourism business consistently.

1. **People**

   The Lodge has been recruiting the locals as its employee since the beginning of the business. Within its capacity, The Lodge provides as many job vacancies as possible for the locals in order to empower them and also train them at the same time. The Lodge not only employs the locals but also provide informal training and education for the potential ones as one of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, for instance, giving the youths coffee brewing training with a proper coffee machine and ingredients. The Lodge also attempts to serve the host community needs. For example, most of the people around the tourism destination is a merchant with a small stall. The Lodge aware that some of them might be potential merchant for its visitors thus it provides a special and strategic area for the merchants to organize their merchandises. Moreover, the merchant stalls located along the narrow alley to The Lodge initially were unorganized and unappealing. The Lodge then made an agreement with the owners to organize and maximize its stall appearance in order to attract visitors. The technical procedures and the process itself is under the neighborhood youth community surveillance and responsibility. It is another way in empowering the host community through its youth.
Locals empowerment is not merely about economic but also improving the locals’ quality of life, education, and preserving its culture. The Lodge has inserted dance play Sangkuriang as one of its tourism package programs in which case the dancers are the locals’ children themselves. The Lodge proposed for a collaboration with the locals’ dance studio to provide a cultural performance in its tourism package program. The Lodge hires a professional dance trainer to teach the children, also provides the costumes, accessories, and make up for the performances. This is one of The Lodge efforts in preserving locals’ culture while empowering the locals.

2. Planet

Since the beginning, The Lodge has been putting more efforts in environmental conservation, waste management, and preserving the area. Environmental conservation mainly inside The Lodge where more trees breed and grows each year. There are several movements made and organized by The Lodge in the context of waste management, and waste bank is one of it. In cooperation with the locals, The Lodge initiated garbage bank where people of Cibodas village could bring their plastics waste and later will be converted into an amount of money depends on the weight. Furthermore, The Lodge actively participates in conserving the rainforest surrounding the area. As The Lodge area is directly adjoined with the forest park conservation area Tahura, The Lodge collaborates with Bandung’s Department of Forestry to manage the conservation site particularly in managing the overwhelmed waste surrounding it.

To show its commitment to the environment, The Lodge has its own village waste management staffs responsible to keep Cibodas village free of plastic waste. They are in charge of taking and putting away plastic waste in radius of 5 kilometers from the gate of The Lodge to the gate of Cibodas village on daily basis. It is one of The Lodge commitments to guarantee the village cleanliness despite visitors’ high activities in the area.

3. Profit

The Lodge has been actively developing its core business in the past two years while maintaining a good relationship with the host communities and the locals. Its business principle is to always prioritize the convenience of locals and host communities while earning money. The General Manager of The Lodge himself claimed that The Lodge may not be in its best performance now if it weren’t because of the locals full support and great cooperation. Since the business embarking professionally in 2016, The Lodge has developed its business into three core business in three different sites, that is The Lodge Maribaya, Fairy Garden and The Dutch House. Each core business promotes different kind of tourism attraction. While The Lodge focuses on the nature tourism program, Fairy Garden provides children friendly attraction for kids and The Dutch House provides photographic tourism package including costumes and photo sets. On weekends The Lodge attracts thousands of visitors, both domestic and international which consists of family, small, and large groups of people. The ticket package for each tourism site costed IDR 35,000 (around US$ 3) while the 3 in 1 ticket package including all of the tourism sites costed only IDR 45,000 (around US$ 4). There is also different ticket price...
for the visitors’ vehicles depends on the type of the vehicles.

To be able to consistently implementing those three aspects, The Lodge has spent months dealing with varied problems both internal and external. Since almost 80% of The Lodge employees are the locals themselves, the internal problem aroused also by the locals. The findings indicate The Lodge has always been depend on the interpersonal communication approach in handling problems, both internal and external. The General Manager (GM) of The Lodge claimed they have always been trying to respond to the locals and host communities’ critiques and complaint as fast as they can. It is to ensure the problem does not grow bigger and out of hand. Besides, The Lodge believes the predominant factor of a tourism business sustainability is the locals. By getting the locals and host communities’ trust, support and cooperation, tourism business might be sustained in the future. Thus, The Lodge GM stressed the importance of quick respond and real action in handling critiques and complaints.

One of The Lodge Sales Executives confirmed the quick respond strategy always worked all the time. She proclaimed how The Lodge GM always be the first one to respond complaints from the locals and host communities by visiting their houses personally and talking to them. This strategy always succeeds to control the issue from getting out of hand. One of the staffs – who is also a local – praised The Lodge approach in handling crisis and problems with the locals. He then further elaborated on how The Lodge Management has routine meeting and discussion with the village head, host communities representative and other locals’ elements. The Lodge GM himself emphasizes interpersonal communication to encounter the issues or problem at hand. He claimed every problem raised because of different perception and perspective and interpersonal communication is the only means to solve it. The study also found how the locals so far satisfy and grateful of The Lodge treatments and relationship with them. They admitted to approve mostly problem solutions offered by The Lodge because they consider the GM as someone who truthful and reliable. They also claimed to be familiar with The Lodge owner who known to be kind-hearted and has a warm personality.

The findings indicate The Lodge has been implementing an interpersonal communication strategy to encounter issues with the locals and host communities. This strategy includes four primary stages, as followed: (1) the owner invited the locals to her house for a warm and intimate meeting to build rapport with the locals, especially the host communities in the neighborhood; (2) when an issue raised, The Lodge GM initiated interpersonal communication approach with the locals in which he built rapport and engaged in interpersonal communication with the locals concerned; (3) socialized and educated the locals regarding the issue at hand; (4) established a memorandum of agreement with the locals both personally and in groups as a document evidence for further purpose. These stages employed to ensure the satisfaction and convenience of both parties.

Since the tourism business is something new for the locals, pros and cons cannot be avoided. Developing a tourism business is an innovation, a new idea for the social system surrounds it. The interpersonal communication approach employed by The Lodge so far could be identified as diffusing innovation into a social system using interpersonal channels. As declared by Rogers (Hoffmann, 2011), interpersonal channels are more effective in forming and
changing attitudes toward a new idea, and thus in influencing the decision to adopt or reject a new idea. The findings indicate the host communities and the locals surround The Lodge mostly approve the solutions offered by The Lodge to the problems they have. This implies the communication strategy employed by The Lodge is effective in diffusing innovation to the social system through interpersonal channels. Also, the findings indicate the innovation brought by The Lodge has been approved collectively by the host communities and the locals in which could be identified as collective innovation-decisions type in diffusion of innovation theory. Collective innovation-decisions means choices to adopt or reject an innovation are made by consensus among the members of a system. Issues faced by The Lodge were mostly brought up by groups of people, it has always been collective issues. Thus, the problem solving also involved collective decisions.

**Conclusion**

The study suggests interpersonal communication still plays the key role in diffusing innovation into the society, particularly the ones who refuse to change and develop. Employing the interpersonal communication approach to the locals and host communities have influenced their decision to accept the new idea or innovation proposed by The Lodge. In order to be able to maintain and develop a tourism business located around the locals’ neighbourhood, it is required to build a mutual understanding relationship which beneficial for both parties. Employing an interpersonal communication approach to build rapport and engagement with the locals need a strategy, stages, and great communication skills. Establishing communicator’s credibility also required in the process.

**References**


