

Proceeding Paper

Targeting Niche Tourism Using Niche Media: Expanding the Media in a Digital Era towards the Hashtag Generation [†]

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Abstract: Niche tourism is an umbrella term to show that certain activities serve a specialized segment of the tourism industry for their tourists. Facing new direction in tourism, a niche market also needs a niche marketing medium. This paper shows how certain media used to gather information for destination selection process can effectively create a better perceived image than other media. The data for this paper were collected using questionnaires aiming at the hashtag generation age groups. These age groups will be the potential marketing targets in near future. Approximately 250 questionnaires were collected with responses on where they obtained information about their dream destination and what reasons caused the medium they used to be the best source of information. In this modern era, where information moves fast and can be obtained via various media, different media can create different perceived images of tourist destinations. This paper is intended to show the opportunity for expanding the availability of segmentation that has potentials for niche marketing and for creating a new niche segmentation in the future, either through the medium used to promote the destination or expanding the destination itself.

Keywords: hashtag generation; niche tourism; destination perceived images; digital medium



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1. Introduction

As a one of the largest service industries, the collapse in tourism activities between 2019 and 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic provides an empirical fact that the tourism business has to shift. The rules of social distancing and limiting the number of visitors have provided a new direction in the world of tourism. Different from before, the tourism paradigm shifts towards niche tourism rather than mass tourism, which is no longer possible due to the application of several health protocols (CHSE).

During the current revival and recovery of the tourism industry, various new destination developments can also be seen. This is in line with what has been stated by the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Sandiaga Uno, that Indonesia is entering a period of transition to a new economic order after the pandemic. (<https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/2773229/sandiaga-pemerintah-sedang-siapkan-tatanan-ekonomi-baru-pasca-pandemi>, accessed on 8 September 2022).

As this happening, the traditional mass tourism is no longer applicable. Moreover, in this time of recovery, more new destinations create their own specialisation to suit their smaller niche markets. Ref. [1] described niche tourism solely based on different kinds of special interests, including traditional and cultural-based and activity-based tourism. The theoretical implication is that the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the trend of mass tourism to private tourism [2]. In this case, it refers to special interest or niche tourism. As the tourism industry develops, tourists will increasingly choose activities and ideas that are appropriate to their needs and preferences, while being eager to ensure that their needs are met [1].

Facing futures, the tourism industry also faces a new kind of tourists itself. In the near future, according to customer segmentations, the potential market will shift to a new generation. This so-called “Hashtag Generation” (<https://www.globaldata.com/store/report/generation-hashtag-thematic-research/>, accessed on 5 September 2022) (includes younger members of the millennial group, as well as older members of Generation Z) is the future market for tourism. Furthermore, GlobalData also shows how members of this Hashtag Generation have been instrumental in the rise of modern companies, such as Netflix, Uber, and Airbnb. These companies look directly at young, tech-savvy consumers and, thus, have established themselves as market leaders, which causes service companies, including tourism, to follow in their footsteps. This confirms how the potential market will shift from the millennials to the Hashtag Generation. Likewise, others have turned to these market segments because of their habits to provide information about destination based on user-generated content; the Hashtag Generation is more likely to trust this source of information than traditional reliable information sources, such as mass media advertising, travel agent information, and official websites [3].

2. Literature Review

The results of the research conducted by GlobalData in 2021 showed that 27% of Gen Z and 26% of Millennials stated that they “always choose products/services that are tailored to their needs” (<https://www.globaldata.com/store/report/niche-tourism-theme-analysis/>, accessed on 5 September 2022). By choosing a product/service that is tailored to their needs, we can see the importance of having a medium that suits the product/service images in their mind. It is undeniable that the Gen Z and Millennials are the future targets for marketing, especially during the recovery period. This generation is also able to produce new “niche” industries that are growing rapidly.

Some new media have been seen as a potential source of information in this generation than before. Rainoldi et al. [4] showed how a video game (Assassin’s Creed: Odyssey by Ubisoft) can build pre-visit images because their strong storytelling and actions and can be used as a type of video game-induced tourism. The growth and advancement of video game technologies over the past few decades, as well as the fact that they increasingly feature real places, offer marketers new possibilities for influencing destination imagery. Other than video games, TV is also a popular medium to induce tourism. TV can show representation of communities and landscapes in media, such as film and TV, and have an impact on destination image and travel behaviour [5]. Kim and Kim (2017) showed that film and TV are some of the fastest growing niche tourism areas. In particular, their dramatised characters in the KDrama series greatly affect the emotional involvement and referential reflection of the audience, while the shooting location, the background, and the context of the story are also able to provide perceived images in terms of cultural proximity.

Promotional strategies can also reflect the pre-visit perceived image as the main thing in seeing a destination [6]. In the digital era, pre-visit perceived images are easy for potential tourists to find because they can search for information through online search engines and they can also go on social media and search for them using hashtags (hashtag [#]) according to the tourist destination they are planning to visit. This shows that destination consumption can be carried out more broadly with digital media. This is seen as an external factor in the promotion of a tourist destination. This external factor then creates a pre-visit perceived image.

3. Research Methods

This research was performed with the so-called “Hashtag Generation” (includes younger members of the millennial group, as well as older members of Generation Z) as the future marketing targets for tourism. The data were collected from 2020–2022 to examine if there were any differences during and after the pandemic. The informants were mostly in the same age groups and had similar activities that optimized the use of digital media in their daily life, such as online classes and interaction activities. A total of 254 informants

stated their information source for destinations that would become their dream destinations and how these media could build a pre-visit perceived image in their mind. The data show that all media have their own advantages to increase pre-visit perceived images based on niche destinations.

4. Results

This age group (Hashtag Generation) will be main customer segmentation in the future, including tourism market (presented by Seubelan, 2022 in Digitalks Webinar. See Figure 1). As explained before, this niche market has their own ideas on how to choose products and services, mainly to tailor these to their needs. According to [3], this market group attaches great importance to being connected to the internet and, by doing so, the relationships they build with their peers have two distinct aspects. They seek and need peer approval through the number of “likes” their posts generate. The second aspect is their willingness to volunteer in tourism contexts and their search for authentic experiences. This search for authentic experiences shows how their niche interest can be sought by using certain media. Story, images, and interplay are important factors that can be utilized to build better pre-visit images in this generation. Ref. [7] stated that (pre-visit) image formation is mainly shaped by two main forces, namely personal factors (organic image) and stimulus/objective factors (induced image).

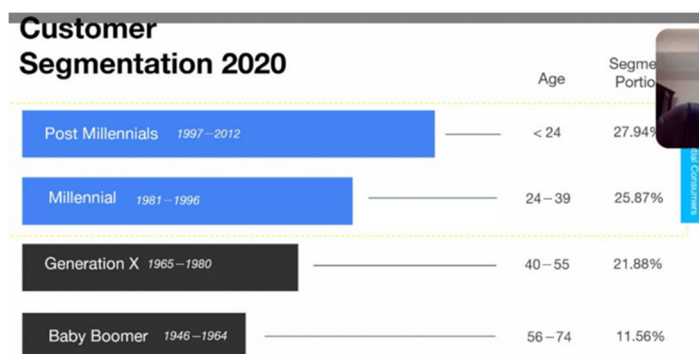


Figure 1. Customer segmentation in 2020 and in the future. Source: Seubelan, 2022 (presented in Digitalks webinar, 21 May 2022).

While the data (Table 1) show members of this Hashtag Generation mostly use social media as their information source, film/tv (series) also have their own potential niche markets. Contextually, during the pandemic era, they were forced to stay at home and most of them consumed subscription streaming service; thus, it is inevitable that this source has become more popular. Ref. [5] showed how this medium can always present a representation of communities and landscapes. The interesting thing is the source of information from family/friends (direct experience) which is also high because this medium is considered to be able to provide more emotional images than other sources of information.

Table 1. Source of information.

Source	Qty
Social media	122
Direct experience (word of mouth from family and friends)	48
Film/TV (series)	46
Internet	33
Printed (books, magazines, novels, comics, etc.)	5
Total	254

Source: the author (2020–2022).

By showing two of the considered keys that affect pre-visit destination images, both cognitively and affectively [7], each medium has their potential to unlock these images. The growing demand for unique and differentiated experiences can also be provided through the immersion in residents’ daily life, with the purpose of living as if the tourists are also the residents of that place [3]. This kind of information can be provided through film or TV series. Information about nature can be obtained from social media, such as Instagram, which provides a cognitive picture for going on city tours, sightseeing cruises, and performing various activity-based tours. Direct experiences can primarily deliver more emotional and affective images of the destinations.

Direct media mainly create organic images, and other media can create induced image formation. These media (social media, film/TV series, and the internet) also build better organic images on locals and scenery because their features support this possibility. Research on induced images has shown how they positively influence destination images through various types of information sources of a commercial nature, both directly and subliminally. On the other hand, organic images may have a far-reaching impact on the process of forming a goal image because they are more emotionally touching and can bond with the viewer. While the formation of organic images may involve country stereotyping [8], it can also be used for showing cultures and local life.

These research findings show how direct information can build positive pre-visit images, when people hear story about pilgrimage and dark tourism (sad stories), while others can provide detailed picture about scenery and cultural (TV/film). Social media can show activity-based tourism by showing what they can do during the visit. These different images (pre-visit) provided by each medium can be extracted by using a new medium, such as using storytelling for emotional images (using video or podcast). Others can maintain their advantages for other niche markets.

A challenge regarding how to attract or target niche markets is the definition and classification of niche tourism itself. Niche tourism is still very widely interpreted. Experts and organizations (such as UNWTO) have their own classification of niche tourism (see Figure 2). In Indonesia, based on the decision of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, there is a submenu called “5 Wonders” which consists of a number of special interest/niche tourism categories. These categories include nature and wildlife, culinary and wellness, art, culture and heritage, recreation and leisure, and adventure. (<https://traveling.bisnis.com/read/20220701/361/1550403/sektor-pariwisata-pulih-secara-bertahap-kemenparekraf-promosikan-wisata-minat-khusus>, accessed on 8 September 2022).

Operational definitions on tourism types:

- Cultural tourism
- Business tourism (related to the meetings industry)
- Ecotourism
- Gastronomy tourism
- Rural tourism
- Coastal, maritime and inland water tourism
- Adventure tourism
- Urban/city tourism
- Health tourism
- Mountain tourism
- Wellness tourism
- Education tourism
- Medical tourism
- Sports tourism

UNWTO

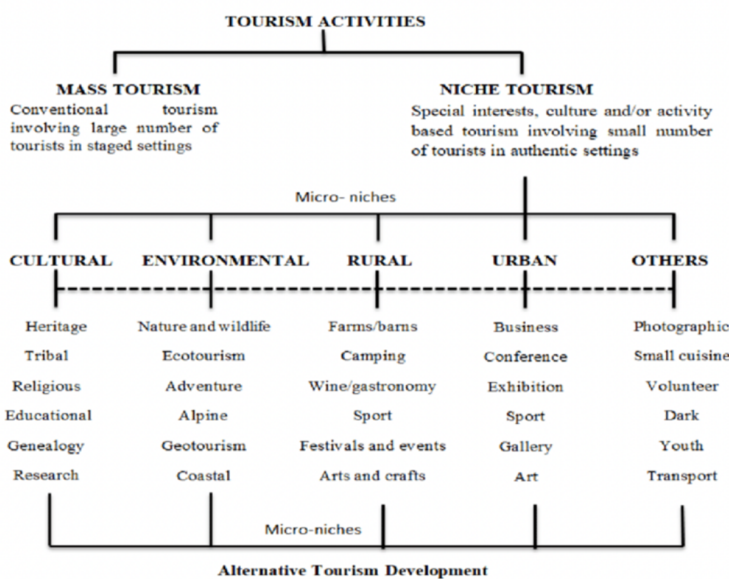


Figure 2. Niche tourism classification. Source: UNWTO, 2018 and Novelli 2005 [1].

5. Conclusions

The data show how different destinations obtain their “product placement” recently by using various media to target and create niche markets for the Hashtag Generation. Some may look like subliminal advertising, but the ideas are to attract their potential niche market’s attention as the niche market with this “tailored to their needs” spirit wants to experience something engaging and gain unique experiences that match their interests. The “one size fits all” traditional package tourism model no longer suits this market. In the future, as shown by [4,5], new digital media targeting the Hashtag Generation can also be used to induce tourism. These include the possibilities of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) worlds (metaverse possibly), other subscription-based services (such as podcast), and many others to come. This niche medium can be used to build destination images that can be produced based on their features as either cognitive or affective images, as shown in this research. Niche tourism can be effectively promoted by using digital media towards these future market segments. During the pandemic, virtual tours have already been used, and it is possible to make this an opportunity to build pre-visit destination images.

It is key to improving tourists’ perception of the destinations. The characteristics of the Hashtag Generation as the largest potential market require the tourism sector to transform tourism, especially in the formation of pre-visit images. These group are looking for a different type of vacation experience from that of their parents and grandparents, they are more concerned with touring and activities undertaken as a characteristic of special interest tourism [9]. This is because it is defined as the feelings a person harbours towards a destination [8]. Marketers have been attempting to engage potential tourists in pre-trip stages by designing experiential marketing stimuli [10]. This group tends to seek travel experiences in which they can be physically and mentally involved, becoming co-producers or prosumers of their tourism experiences.

Building pre-visit images using new media can be broadened by expanding to other media, such VR and video games, as users and producers are increasing in Indonesia. Through this new direction of creating pre-visit perceived images for destinations by optimizing different types of media, we can continue to develop the opportunity for expanding the availability of segmentation with potentials for niche markets. Since there is no restriction in classifying niche tourism (we can also create a micro-niche based on [2]), it is an opportunity for creating a new niche segmentation in the future and expanding the destination itself. This new segmentation can also provide the effectiveness of the media used to promote the destinations based on the features of those media.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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