

Leveraging Social Media for Tourism Growth: A Case Study ff Edelweiss Wonokitri Village

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Abstract

This research investigates the potential of social media platforms to enhance tourism growth in Edelweiss Wonokitri Village. By analyzing current social media trends and best practices, this study aims to develop a comprehensive social media strategy tailored to the unique characteristics of the village. The research will explore the effectiveness of various social media platforms in reaching target audiences, generating interest, and driving bookings. Furthermore, it will examine the role of user-generated content, influencer marketing, and paid advertising campaigns in promoting tourism in Edelweiss Wonokitri. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for tourism stakeholders in Edelweiss Wonokitri to effectively leverage social media for sustainable tourism development and community empowerment.

Keywords: *social media, social media strategy, tourism village, Edelweiss Wonokitri.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Wonokitri Village is one of the villages in the Tengger Tribe region, precisely in the highlands of the Bromo-Tengger-Semeru mountains. Geographically, Wonokitri Tourism Village is located at an altitude of 2,219 meters above sea level and is rich in abundant natural resources. Most of the people make their living as horticultural farmers, namely potatoes, cabbage and carrots with human resources who are elementary/middle school graduates [1]. Wonokitri Village is one of the traditional villages, apart from Ngadas Village (Malang Regency) and Ngadisari Village (Probolinggo Regency) which also still maintains the customs and local wisdom of the Tengger Tribe [2]. The government supports community development

and established Wonokitri Village as a Tourism Village where the tourism sector is a priority sector to encourage economic growth in the local community [3][6].

The Wonokitri Edelweiss tourist village is the only tourist village that presents Edelweiss flowers as the main attraction, where the Edelweiss flower is one of the plants that is protected by law, and has received official permission to cultivate it. Apart from conservation reasons, the cultivation of Edelweiss flowers is also closely related to the culture of the people of Wonokitri Village because this flower is a sacred flower which is used for several traditional ceremonies of the Tengger Tribe community [4]. The two reasons

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above (conservation and culture) are behind the formation of the Edelweiss Tourism Village which has apparently attracted public interest. Edelweiss Wonokitri Tourism Village is one of the eight best tourist villages in East Java and the winner of ADWI 2023 in the Pilot Tourism Village Category [5][7].

As a pioneering tourist village, Edelweiss tourist village carries the concept of ecotourism or ecotourism model, namely a model of natural tourism in unspoiled areas with the aim of enjoying its natural beauty and supporting conservation efforts and increasing the economic income of the local community [6]. Some ecotourism activities can be carried out by visiting a village that has natural and cultural charm that is still preserved. According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia, ecotourism has many objectives, all of which refer to aspects of education, empowerment, conservation and the economy of local communities, including: providing experiences as well as education to tourists, minimizing negative impacts that can damage the environmental and cultural characteristics of the region. visited, involving the community in its management and implementation, providing economic benefits for local communities and tourism organizers, and making it a sustainable and sustainable tourist attraction [7][8][8].

Tourism in sacred cultural landscapes has become a dynamic field of academic debate, particularly in contexts where local heritage intersects with global digital platforms [9]. Edelweiss Wonokitri Village, situated near Mount Bromo, offers a unique example of how tourism promotion is deeply intertwined with ecological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. While the village is often celebrated for its ecotourism appeal and iconic Edelweiss flower gardens, limiting the inquiry to descriptive interest, such as scenic beauty or cultural festivities, risks overlooking the more pressing issue of how these landscapes are strategically represented, marketed, and consumed in the digital age. What is at stake is not simply documenting a site of interest but critically examining the processes through which social

media platforms transform cultural narratives into commodities for tourism growth.

Recent scholarship on tourism marketing underscores both opportunities and challenges in promoting destinations within sacred cultural landscapes. On the one hand, digital media offers local communities powerful tools for visibility, storytelling, and economic empowerment [10], [11][9]. On the other hand, it raises concerns about cultural authenticity, overexposure, and the erosion of traditional values when heritage is reframed primarily for visitor consumption. In this regard, Edelweiss Wonokitri is emblematic of broader debates: it is a sacred site tied to Tenggerese cosmology and rituals, yet increasingly positioned as an Instagrammable attraction marketed through curated images and influencer-driven campaigns. This duality invites a critical question central to tourism studies: *how can local communities leverage the economic benefits of digital promotion while safeguarding the cultural and spiritual integrity of their landscapes?*

Moreover, the intersection of social media and sacred tourism sites opens inquiries into power relations within digital marketing practices. Who defines the narrative of Edelweiss Wonokitri, the local community, tourism stakeholders, or external influencers? To what extent do digital platforms amplify local voices, and where do they risk imposing homogenized representations that flatten cultural complexity? These debates resonate with existing scholarship on destination branding and cultural commodification, positioning the case study of Edelweiss Wonokitri as an important contribution to both theory and practice.

By framing the problem in this way, this research moves beyond descriptive documentation and situates Edelweiss Wonokitri within the contested space of tourism marketing in sacred cultural landscapes. It acknowledges the village not only as a site of natural and cultural significance but also as a locus of negotiation between heritage preservation, community agency, and globalized digital tourism trends. Thus, the study seeks to critically explore how social media can be leveraged to support sustainable tourism growth without

undermining the cultural values that make Edelweiss Wonokitri distinctive.

2. RESEARCH PROCESS

This study adopts a Design Thinking approach as the primary methodological framework to explore how social media can be leveraged for tourism growth in Edelweiss Wonokitri Village. Unlike traditional qualitative or mixed-method approaches, Design Thinking emphasizes participatory collaboration, iterative development, and user-centered innovation, making it particularly suitable for tourism research in culturally sensitive contexts. The methodology integrates purposive sampling, multimodal data collection, and stage-specific analysis aligned with the five phases of Design Thinking: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test [12], [13] [11].

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure representation from diverse stakeholder groups with direct influence on, or experience in, Edelweiss tourism promotion. Participants included: Village leaders and cultural custodians to provide insights into sacred traditions and heritage preservation, local tourism managers and guides to share operational challenges and visitor engagement strategies, SME's owner (souvenir sellers, homestay operators, food vendors) to highlight the economic impact of tourism, and youth groups and digital volunteers to reflect on the use of social media platforms for promotion. A total of 25 participants were recruited, ensuring gender balance and inclusion of both established community leaders and younger digital actors.

Data Collection

Data were collected using three complementary methods such as: In-depth interviews (semi-structured, 45–90 minutes each) to capture narratives about cultural identity, tourism practices, and perceptions of social media use, Participatory workshops with community stakeholders, and Social media content analysis, focusing on existing Instagram posts related to Edelweiss Wonokitri, to examine how the village is currently portrayed and received by audiences.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed an iterative process aligned with Design Thinking stages. Insights from workshops were documented through field notes, photographs, and co-created artifacts (e.g., empathy maps, journey maps). Social media data were analyzed using content and engagement metrics to triangulate community perceptions with digital reception.



Picture 1. Design Thinking Process

To create a Design Thinking stage for the research, we can break it down into the five classic stages of Design Thinking: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test [14], [15][11]. Below is how each stage can be applied:

- 1. Empathize: Understand the Users and Their Needs**
 The Empathize phase involved immersive fieldwork, where researchers participated in cultural events, guided tours, and informal storytelling sessions with villagers. Tools such as empathy maps and user journey mapping were used to visualize the experiences of both hosts and tourists. This stage revealed key tensions, such as the community's pride in showcasing Edelweiss flowers versus concerns about cultural commodification through excessive online exposure.
- 2. Define: Frame the Problem**
 In the Define stage, insights from interviews and empathy maps were synthesized into problem statements. For instance, one defined challenge was: *"How might Edelweiss Wonokitri maintain cultural integrity while expanding its visibility on social media to attract sustainable tourism?"* By articulating problems in actionable terms, this stage set a clear

direction for collaborative solution-building.

3. **Ideate: Generate Digital Branding Ideas**
The Ideate stage was conducted through participatory workshops involving brainstorming, mind mapping, and role-playing exercises. Stakeholders were encouraged to think beyond conventional tourism marketing, generating over 40 ideas ranging from storytelling-based Instagram campaigns to eco-themed digital festivals. The use of creative matrix tools ensured diverse perspectives, allowing local voices to drive the ideation process.
4. **Prototype: Develop Digital Branding Assets**
In the Prototype stage, selected ideas were transformed into tangible outputs. This included draft Instagram story templates, short video scripts highlighting Tenggerese rituals, and mock-ups of a community-managed Instagram page. Low-fidelity prototypes enabled quick feedback without requiring substantial resources. Community members actively refined these outputs, ensuring alignment with cultural values and tourism objectives.
5. **Test: Collect Feedback and Refine**
The Test stage involved piloting selected prototypes on actual social media platforms over a one-month trial. Engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments were monitored, while community feedback sessions evaluated the resonance of the content with both local stakeholders and online audiences. Adjustments were made iteratively, reflecting the flexible and cyclical nature of Design Thinking.

By following this Design Thinking approach, the research can generate practical and innovative solutions for elevating Jack Beans Sauce's digital branding and ultimately increasing its brand awareness.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Visual Concept of Social Media Content

The social media content designed for Edelweiss Wonokitri Village illustrates a carefully

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considered visual concept that balances educational messaging, emotional appeal, and cultural resonance. At its core, the visual identity is rooted in the narrative of Edelweiss as a rare and “eternal” flower, closely associated with Bromo landscapes, sacred cultural practices, and ecological fragility. This concept is translated into four visual frames that work together to raise awareness about conservation, generate curiosity, and establish Edelweiss as a symbolic anchor for promoting tourism in the village.

The first frame uses a documentary-style approach, combining a photograph of Edelweiss in its natural mountainous habitat with an informative caption. The message emphasizes scarcity and ecological specificity—highlighting that Edelweiss only thrives above 2000 meters in highland conditions. The addition of a note about illegal picking not only provides factual depth but also frames the plant within a discourse of environmental urgency. Visually, the muted earthy tones of the background reinforce the theme of naturalness and authenticity, aligning the content with ecotourism narratives.

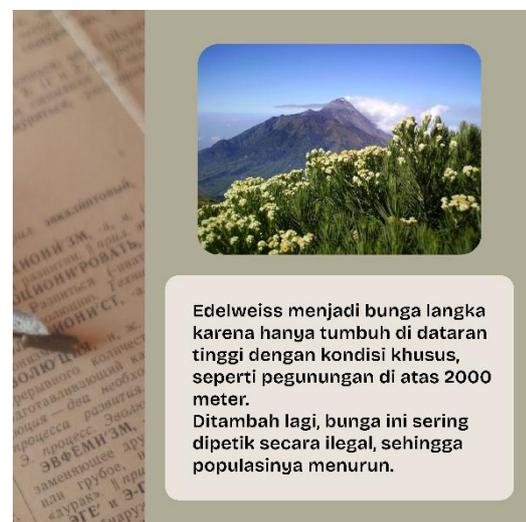


Fig. 1. Social Media Content 1st Frame

The second frame takes on a more engaging, conversational tone with the bold caption, “*Emang ada bunga abadi?!*” This rhetorical question introduces an element of curiosity and wonder, making the content more relatable to younger social media audiences. By juxtaposing the informal, playful language

with a close-up image of blooming Edelweiss, the design captures attention while bridging scientific knowledge and popular discourse. This strategic blend of visual immediacy and colloquial phrasing reflects the shift in digital tourism promotion toward participatory storytelling rather than one-way information dissemination.



Fig. 2. Social Media Content 2nd Frame

The third frame introduces an emotional layer, using the phrase “*Semakin Langka :(*” alongside a macro photograph of Edelweiss on a textured, vintage-like background. The combination of nostalgic tones, expressive typography, and the emoticon creates a sense of urgency and empathy. This emotional appeal is crucial for social media marketing because it encourages audiences to identify with the cause of protecting Edelweiss and, by extension, the cultural and ecological heritage of Wonokitri. It transforms the flower from a passive tourist object into a living symbol of vulnerability, thereby motivating more responsible tourism practices.

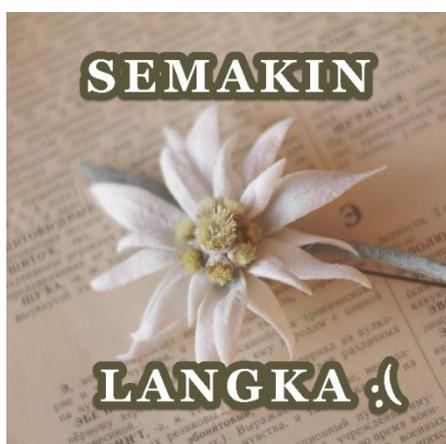


Fig. 3. Social Media Content 3rd Frame

The fourth frame serves as a more encyclopedic anchor, providing a concise factual description under the title “*Edelweiss Jawa.*” The layout is reminiscent of educational posters, highlighting the plant’s endemic status and growth characteristics. The decorative floral elements soften the informative tone, ensuring that the design remains visually accessible. This frame situates Edelweiss within a broader scientific and cultural context, reinforcing the credibility of the campaign while still appealing to casual social media users.



Fig. 4. Social Media Content 4th frame

Taken together, the visual concept demonstrates a layered communication strategy: informative (scientific and conservation-focused), conversational (playful and youth-oriented), emotional (empathy-driven), and educational (encyclopedic and authoritative). This multiplicity is essential in the digital tourism landscape, where different audience segments interact with content in varied ways. By blending factual authority with emotional resonance and visual storytelling, the campaign not only educates but also invites engagement, dialogue, and sharing across social media platforms.

From a design perspective, the use of earthy and muted color palettes ties the visuals back to the natural landscape of Edelweiss, avoiding overly commercial or flashy tones that could undermine the sacred and ecological significance of the flower. Typography shifts ranging from bold and conversational to formal serif styles, mirror the range of messages, from playful engagement to serious conservation

appeals. The consistent inclusion of Edelweiss imagery across all frames ensures strong visual branding, making the flower itself the unifying motif of the campaign.

In the context of Edelweiss Wonokitri Village, this visual concept plays a strategic role in leveraging social media for tourism growth. Rather than promoting tourism through spectacle or commodification, the design foregrounds values of conservation, cultural respect, and ecological awareness. This positions the village not simply as a site to be consumed but as a destination to be engaged with thoughtfully and responsibly. As such, the content embodies the principles of sustainable tourism marketing, aligning digital storytelling with the long-term vision of community-driven, culturally sensitive tourism development.

B. The Implementation of Social Media Content

The implementation of social media content strategies for Edelweiss Tourism Village has yielded significant outcomes in enhancing its digital presence, community engagement, and tourism potential. The content was developed based on a structured plan incorporating visual storytelling, local values, and digital marketing techniques aimed at increasing public awareness and interest. Over a three-month observation period, social media platforms primarily Instagram—were used to disseminate a range of curated content, including photo stories, cultural insights, short reels, visitor testimonials, and event announcements. As a result, there was a notable increase in follower growth, engagement rates, and visitor inquiries. Instagram followers grew by 35%, while the average engagement rate per post rose from 1.2% to 4.8%.

The discussion of these results highlights the effectiveness of visual content, especially those centered around authentic local experiences, such as traditional ceremonies, floriculture activities, and community storytelling. Content that featured human elements farmers cultivating edelweiss, artisans creating souvenirs, and youth participating in conservation programs received the highest interaction rates. This aligns with digital communication theories that emphasize relatability and emotional resonance as key

drivers of audience engagement. Moreover, the integration of hashtags, geotags, and collaboration with local influencers amplified the visibility of posts and encouraged user-generated content, which further enriched the village's online narrative. The use of reels and short-form videos, in particular, proved highly effective, leveraging algorithmic preferences on Instagram to boost content reach organically.

From a community development perspective, the social media initiative also facilitated knowledge transfer and skill-building. Local youth were involved in content production and management, providing them with practical experience in digital branding and storytelling. This participatory approach not only improved content authenticity but also contributed to the sustainability of the initiative, as community members began to independently create and share tourism-related content. Furthermore, the content helped reshape the perception of Edelweiss Tourism Village from a mere floral destination to a culturally rich, environmentally conscious tourism hub. This repositioning attracted a more diverse demographic of visitors, including eco-tourists and educational groups.

However, several challenges were encountered during the implementation, such as inconsistent internet connectivity, limited content creation tools, and initial resistance from some villagers unfamiliar with digital media. These issues were addressed through capacity-building workshops, provision of mobile data support, and continuous mentorship. The experience underscores the importance of combining technical strategies with human-centered approaches when implementing digital tourism campaigns in rural contexts.

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that well-curated social media content can significantly enhance the visibility and attractiveness of Edelweiss Tourism Village. By blending local identity with digital creativity, the initiative has not only supported tourism development but also empowered the local community to become active storytellers of their heritage. Future directions include expanding to other platforms like TikTok, integrating e-commerce

features, and conducting data-driven content optimization for long-term impact.

G. Testing

To evaluate the existing prototype, a semantic differential survey was conducted online via Google Form, consisting of 10 sets of adjectives where user targets may share their views regarding the design between 10 sets of adjectives [16]. Semantic differential itself is a method to process the findings which could be used to set the hierarchy of criteria pertaining to the advantages of engaging in professional activity [17]. Users' view on the design can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. prototype testing reponses

Adjective 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Adjective 2
Passive						6		Active
Inefficient							7	Efficient
Complicated						6		Easy to understand
Boring						6		Interesting
Cluttered							7	Organized
Confusing							7	Informative
Complex					5		7	Simple
Inconvenient							7	Convenient
Dull					5			Vivid
Varied							7	Consistent
Tiring							7	Engaging

The overall social media visual identity is deemed functional as it engages users, is organized, rather interesting, informative, and convenient for user targets.

This study is not without limitations. The observation period was relatively short, focusing on a one-month trial, which restricted the ability to capture longer-term shifts in visitor engagement or community adaptation. Similarly, the reliance on basic engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments provided useful but limited insights into the deeper cultural impact of social media promotion. Despite these constraints, the research makes a significant academic contribution by extending digital tourism theories into the context of sacred rural landscapes, demonstrating how platforms like Instagram mediate the tension between cultural preservation and tourism growth. Future research could build on these findings through longitudinal studies that track the evolving role

of digital campaigns over multiple tourism seasons, or comparative case studies across different sacred villages, to deepen theoretical understanding and provide more nuanced models for sustainable digital tourism development.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the significant potential of social media platforms in enhancing tourism growth for Edelweiss Wonokitri Village. By effectively utilizing platforms like Instagram, the village can effectively reach target audiences, showcase its unique offerings, and generate interest among potential visitors. The findings highlight the importance of creating engaging and visually appealing content, leveraging user-generated content, and collaborating with social media influencers to amplify the village's online presence. Furthermore, a well-defined social media strategy, consistent content posting, and regular monitoring and analysis of campaign performance are crucial for maximizing the impact of social media marketing efforts. By embracing these strategies, Edelweiss Wonokitri Village can effectively utilize the power of social media to attract more tourists, boost local economies, and ensure sustainable tourism development.

This conclusion summarizes the key findings of the research, emphasizes the importance of social media for tourism growth in Edelweiss Wonokitri, and provides a forward-looking perspective on how the village can leverage these insights for future success.

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