

**WALKING TOUR AS A VILLAGE BRANDING STRATEGY:  
A CASE STUDY OF SIDOMULYO VILLAGE, BATU CITY**

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**Abstract** - *Walking tour, as a tourism method that allows direct interaction between tourists and destinations, is now an effective strategy in promoting local potential. This research focuses on the implementation of walking tours as a branding tool in Sidomulyo Village, Batu, East Java, which is known as a flower production center. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation. The results show that walking tours increase the attractiveness of the village through structured routes, aesthetic and educational tourist spots, and direct interaction between tourists and local guides. In addition, the use of Instagram as a visual promotional medium significantly expands the promotional reach and strengthens the image of Sidomulyo Village as a "Flower Village." This strategy has the potential to support the economic sustainability of the village. This strategy has the potential to support the village's economic sustainability through increased tourist visits and strong brand loyalty.*

**Keywords:** *Walking Tour, Tourism, Village Branding*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the important aspects in improving the community's economy, especially in areas that have rich natural and cultural potential. Indonesia has a variety of natural resources and traditions that are unique and interesting, but have not been fully explored and reached properly. Tourism development in villages not only has the potential to improve the local economy, but can also strengthen cultural identity and preserve the environment.

Sidomulyo Village in Batu City, East Java Province, is one of the villages that has great potential to be developed as a tourist destination. According to Batu Villa (2024), Sidomulyo Village is known as a flower production center, where the majority of the population work as flower farmers. With a geographical location at 1100 meters above sea level, and flanked by Mount Arjuno and Mount Kawi, Sidomulyo has a cool climate that is very supportive for the cultivation of more than 1000 types of ornamental flowers. In addition, the natural beauty filled with various types of flowers and the agricultural traditions of the local community are attractions that allow this village to become a nature and culture-based tourist destination.

According to research by Pamela Dinar Rahma (2017), Sidomulyo Village has developed a number of ornamental flower stalls that attract tourists. In addition to flower stalls, the village also has several creative Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that utilize flower commodities. However, the tourism potential of this village is still not fully utilized. One of the obstacles faced is the lack of effective promotion and less than optimal tourism support facilities. As a result, attractions such as flower gardens and creative MSMEs in this village have not been able to attract maximum visitors. Therefore, an innovative strategy is needed to increase the attractiveness of Sidomulyo Village as a tourist destination.

One approach that can be implemented to maximize the tourism potential of Sidomulyo Village is through the concept of a walking tour. With a walking tour, tourists can directly explore the beauty of the village, interact with local residents, and experience daily life that is closely related to flower farming activities. Through this concept, Sidomulyo Village has the potential to brand itself as a "Flower Village," a tourist destination that offers a unique and authentic tourism experience, both in terms of natural beauty and agrarian cultural life.

In the digital age, the success of village branding is greatly influenced by the use of social media as an effective promotional tool. Instagram, as a visual contentbased platform, offers a particularly relevant opportunity to promote the results of walking tours. Photos and videos that showcase the beauty of flowers, village scenery, and social interactions with locals can enhance visual appeal and expand promotional reach. Through features such as Stories, Reels and IGTV, Sidomulyo Village's visual content can be attractively packaged to increase public awareness of its uniqueness and tourism potential.

Furthermore, collaboration with influencers or tourism communities on Instagram, such as the *gang.gang.an* account, which collaborates in walking tour activities, can expand audience reach and increase the village's tourism appeal. Effective digital promotion through social media is expected to create a positive image of Sidomulyo Village as a distinctive and attractive tourist destination.

This research aims to explore the implementation of walking tours as a branding strategy in Sidomulyo Village. Specifically, it analyzes how the walking tour concept can enhance the village's image as a natural and cultural tourism destination, and identifies its social and economic impacts. In addition, this study also evaluates the effectiveness of using social media, especially Instagram, in expanding the reach of promotion and strengthening the village's brand as a "Flower Village." Thus, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the right promotional strategy to sustainably increase tourist visits in Sidomulyo Village.

## **2. METHOD**

This article uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe and analyze the implementation of walking tours as a branding strategy in Sidomulyo Village. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation. Participatory observation was conducted by following walking tour activities to record route conditions, aesthetics of tourist spots, and interactions between tourists and local residents. In-depth interviews were conducted with tourists, local guides, and community leaders to understand experiences, perceptions, and the impact of activities on the village economy. Documentation included photos, videos, and social media posts that were analyzed to see the contribution of digital promotion to village branding. Data analysis was conducted thematically with an inductive approach, using triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of data from various sources.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION A. Strategy Analysis**

The Walking Tour program strategy in Sidomulyo Village, Batu City is part of the village branding effort by utilizing local potential, especially in the ornamental plant sector. There are several main elements that are analyzed, including the search for travel routes, determining important points of tourist spots and tourist interactions with guides from local residents. The Walking Tour route selection was arranged by considering aesthetics, accessibility, and a comprehensive tourist experience. Walking tour routes are carefully designed to take advantage of the natural beauty of the village, such as flower gardens. The Walking Tour route is not only related to flowers, in this activity it also passes through thematic villages, namely Sakura Village and Sun Village, as well as several other unique spots. This activity also takes into account the accessibility of the route to ensure tourists can enjoy the tour with minimal physical strain. Rest stops are strategically placed at

approximately 25% intervals along the journey, while culinary spots are available at the midpoint, or 50% of the route, to help replenish tourists energy.

Walking tour routes and spots were chosen based on the potential and direct interaction between collaborators and local communities. Tourists are led by the guide through the flower garden area and the houses of the residents, giving rise to in-depth dialogues about local agricultural practices. Weiler and Black (2015) mentioned that a good Walking Tour should consider aspects of social interaction and education as part of the tourist experience. In Sidomulyo Village, tourists not only walk through the village but are also invited to interact with the community, with the aim of enriching tourists' understanding of local life and culture. In addition, route selection also pays attention to aesthetic and educational aspects by highlighting strong local characteristics. This is in line with the opinion of Fletcher et.al. (2013), which states that the selection of tourist routes must pay attention to aesthetic as well as educational values to improve the quality of the tourist experience.

## **B. Tourist Spots**

The selection of important points or tourist spots on the Walking Tour route is based on visual and educational potential. The results of field observations show that several strategic points, such as flower gardens, nursery centers, flower craft making, and unique buildings are the main attractions for tourists. These spots not only highlight the natural beauty of the village but also provide and enhance insight into the flower cultivation process which is the main advantage of the village.

Mariani et.al. (2016) explained that the existence of visually appealing tourist spots plays an important role in increasing the attractiveness of a destination, especially in the digital era such as tourists who often promote tourist destinations through social media such as Instagram. Some of the selected spots proved effective in promoting the village as a tourist destination, with the peacock flower garden and a House that made by full of woods being a favorite place for tourists to take pictures. This adds a strong digital promotion dimension, as the content shared by tourists on social media also supports the branding efforts of Sidomulyo Village as a "Flower Village".

In addition to aesthetic value, educational spots such as flower nursery centers provide a more in-depth experience for tourists who want to learn the process of cultivating ornamental plants. Richards and Palmer (2010) emphasize that a successful tourist destination must be able to provide educational and cultural value to tourists. In Sidomulyo Village, this educational spot becomes a medium for tourists to learn about cultivation techniques and innovations in flower production, thus enriching the tourist experience.

### **C. Interaction with Local Guides**

Interaction between tourists and local guides is an important element in creating an authentic personalized tourism experience. Based on the results of interviews with tourists and local guides, it is known that the role of local guides in the Walking Tour is crucial in providing in-depth information related to the traditions, history, and daily life of the Sidomulyo community. In addition, the local guide also acts as a narrator who introduces tourists to local values and flower cultivation techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation.

(Salazar, 2005) emphasizes the importance of the role of local guides in providing a deeper insight into the destination, especially in the context of cultural tourism. In Sidomulyo Village, local guides succeeded in creating a warm and informative atmosphere for tourists, so that tourists could easily interact and learn directly from the villagers.

### **D. Impact on Tourist Perceptions**

Based on interviews conducted with visitors, it was found that the Walking Tour experience had a positive impact on the image of Sidomulyo Village. Tourists not only enjoy the natural beauty of Sidomulyo Village, but also feel directly involved with the local culture and community. This is in line with the findings of Black and Weiler (2015), which state that social interaction-based tourism can increase satisfaction and strengthen positive impressions of the destination.

Documentation in the form of promotional video uploads uploaded by tourists on Instagram social media proves that tourists are willing to recommend Sidomulyo Village to others, besides that in the uploads there are comments from several tourists who express the desire to return in the future. Based on the concept of brand loyalty (Keller, 2013), this reflects the potential success of Walking Tour as a branding tool that can strengthen tourists' emotional attachment to the destination. Thus, the Walking Tour not only introduces the physical attractiveness of the village, but also influences tourists' perceptions in the long term, creating brand loyalty for the village as a tourist destination.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Walking tours in Sidomulyo Village are an effective strategy in branding the village as a nature and culture-based tourist destination. Carefully chosen routes, aesthetic and educational spots, and close interaction between local guides and tourists create an authentic and immersive experience. Walking tours not only introduce the physical beauty of the village but also promote local agricultural practices, which in turn increases tourists' awareness of rural life and local culture. The use of Instagram social media as a promotional tool has also been shown to increase the reach and attraction of tourists to Sidomulyo Village. Through videos and photos uploaded by tourists, the village's image as a "Flower Village" has become more widely recognized. Therefore, an integrated walking tour and digital

promotion strategy can create strong brand loyalty, which has the potential to increase tourist visits in a sustainable manner.

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