INTEGRATING DIGITAL COMMUNICATION, LOCAL WISDOM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROMOTION: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL IN LEBAK REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital media has created new opportunities for promoting sustainable tourism through youth participation. However, many students possess limited competencies in producing digital tourism content that integrates local wisdom and environmental conservation values. This community engagement program aimed to empower the Student Council (OSIS) of SMAN 2 Rangkasbitung, Lebak Regency, Indonesia, as Digital Ambassadors for Sustainable Tourism by strengthening their digital communication skills while fostering awareness of local cultural heritage and environmental stewardship. The program adopted a participatory learning approach consisting of three stages, namely theoretical sessions, collaborative brainstorming, and hands on practice. Participants received training in smartphone-based photography, videography, content writing, and digital storytelling, complemented by practical activities involving composting, hydroponic seedling cultivation, and the promotion of Jojorong, a traditional local delicacy. The training also incorporated environmental values derived from the 2026 Baduy Seba dialogue under the philosophy of *"Ngajaga Amanat, Ngarumat Jagat"* as the ethical foundation for sustainable tourism communication. The program enhanced participants' understanding of sustainable tourism, digital content creation, environmental conservation, and local cultural identity. The provision of composting and hydroponic facilities further strengthened experiential learning and encouraged the continuity of environmental education within the school. This integrated empowerment model demonstrates that combining digital communication, local wisdom, and conservation practices can effectively develop youth capacity to become agents of sustainable tourism promotion and community development.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Digital Communication, Youth Empowerment, Local Wisdom, Environmental Conservation

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has significantly reshaped the tourism sector by changing how destinations are promoted, experienced, and evaluated. Social media platforms have become strategic communication channels that enable communities, institutions, and individuals to disseminate tourism information through visual storytelling, interactive content, and user generated media. This transformation has also shifted the role of local communities, particularly young people, from passive audiences to active creators of destination narratives. Consequently, digital communication competence has become an essential skill for supporting sustainable tourism development and strengthening destination competitiveness (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; UN Tourism, 2023).

Sustainable tourism is not solely concerned with increasing tourist arrivals but also emphasizes environmental protection, cultural preservation, and community welfare. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism should balance economic growth with the conservation of natural and cultural resources while ensuring long term benefits for local communities (UN Tourism, 2023). Therefore, tourism promotion should not merely highlight destination attractiveness but also communicate environmental responsibility, local identity, and cultural values that encourage responsible tourist behavior.

Young people represent an important stakeholder in achieving these objectives. As digital natives, they are familiar with smartphones, social media applications, and digital content production. However, digital literacy alone is insufficient to support sustainable tourism promotion. Effective tourism communication requires the ability to integrate persuasive communication with local cultural narratives, environmental awareness, and authentic destination storytelling. Without adequate guidance, digital content produced by young people often focuses only on aesthetic aspects while neglecting educational messages related to environmental conservation and cultural sustainability.

Lebak Regency, Banten Province, possesses abundant tourism resources, including natural attractions, cultural heritage, indigenous traditions, and local culinary products. One of its most distinctive cultural assets is the Baduy

Indigenous Community, which has consistently maintained traditional ecological knowledge through principles of environmental harmony and sustainable living. The philosophy expressed during the 2026 Seba Baduy Dialogue, "Ngajaga Amanat, Ngarumat Jagat" (Preserving the Trust, Caring for the Earth), reflects the community's commitment to protecting nature and maintaining harmony between humans and the environment. These indigenous values provide a valuable foundation for developing sustainable tourism communication that emphasizes conservation alongside destination promotion.

Despite this considerable potential, the participation of youth in promoting Lebak tourism remains relatively limited. Preliminary observations conducted in collaboration with SMAN 2 Rangkasbitung indicated that members of the Student Council (OSIS) actively use social media but have limited knowledge of strategic digital communication for tourism promotion. Their understanding of sustainable tourism principles, environmental communication, digital storytelling, and local wisdom integration into promotional content also remained insufficient. Consequently, existing digital activities had not yet contributed optimally to strengthening the image of Lebak as a sustainable tourism destination.

To address these challenges, Universitas Mercu Buana implemented a community engagement program entitled "Empowering Student Council Members of SMAN 2 Rangkasbitung as Digital Ambassadors for Sustainable Tourism Promotion Based on Local Wisdom and Environmental Conservation." Rather than focusing exclusively on digital content production, the program adopted an integrated empowerment approach by combining communication training, environmental education, creative economy promotion, and experiential learning. Participants received practical training in smartphone photography, videography, digital storytelling, and caption writing while simultaneously engaging in composting practices, hydroponic cultivation, and the promotion of Jojorong, a traditional local delicacy representing Lebak's cultural heritage.

The program was designed using participatory and experiential learning principles that encourage participants to learn through direct involvement, collaborative discussion, and practical implementation (Kolb, 1984; Freire, 1970). This approach is consistent with community empowerment theory, which emphasizes strengthening local capacities to enable individuals and communities to become active agents of development rather than passive beneficiaries (Rappaport, 1987; Chambers, 1997). In addition, the integration of environmental communication into digital tourism promotion reflects the perspective that communication functions not only to disseminate information but also to cultivate environmental ethics and influence sustainable behavioral change (Cox, 2013).

This community engagement contributes to the development of an integrated empowerment model that combines digital communication skills, local wisdom, environmental conservation, and creative economy practices within a sustainable tourism framework. Unlike conventional digital marketing training, this program positions high school students as Digital Ambassadors for Sustainable Tourism who can produce meaningful digital narratives while promoting environmental stewardship and cultural preservation. Therefore, this paper aims to describe the implementation process, evaluate the outcomes of the empowerment program, and discuss its contribution to strengthening youth participation in sustainable tourism communication and community development.

2. METHOD

This community engagement program adopted a participatory empowerment approach by integrating Participatory Action Learning, Experiential Learning, and Project Based Learning. The program was implemented over six months at SMAN 2 Rangkasbitung, Lebak Regency, involving Student Council (OSIS) members as the primary participants. The overall design emphasized collaborative learning, practical experience, and community participation to strengthen students' competencies in digital tourism communication while fostering environmental awareness and appreciation of local wisdom (Kolb, 1984; Freire, 1970; Chambers, 1997).

The implementation consisted of five sequential phases. Initially, a needs assessment was conducted through observations, interviews, and coordination meetings with school management and OSIS advisors to identify students' digital literacy, environmental programs, and local tourism potential. The findings were used to develop training modules covering sustainable tourism communication, digital storytelling, smartphone photography and videography, copywriting, environmental communication, and local wisdom.

The capacity building stage employed interactive lectures, brainstorming sessions, demonstrations, and guided practice. Students learned to produce tourism promotional content using smartphones while integrating environmental conservation messages and the philosophy of the 2026 Baduy Seba Dialogue, "Ngajaga Amanat, Ngarumat Jagat" (Preserving the Trust, Caring for the Earth). Experiential learning activities included compost production, hydroponic

cultivation, waste segregation, and the documentation of Jojorong, a traditional culinary heritage of Lebak Regency. These activities served as authentic learning resources for producing digital storytelling content.

Following the training, participants received mentoring in developing digital communication action plans through the school's social media platforms. The mentoring process focused on content planning, publication strategies, and the sustainability of environmental campaigns managed by the Student Council. Program evaluation employed both output and outcome approaches. Output evaluation measured participant attendance, completion of training activities, digital content production, and environmental project implementation. Outcome evaluation assessed improvements in students' knowledge, digital communication skills, environmental awareness, and their ability to integrate local wisdom into sustainable tourism promotion. Data were collected through observations, pre and post training assessments, documentation, content evaluation, participant reflection, and focus group discussions. Data triangulation was applied to improve the credibility of the evaluation findings.

Table 1. Community Engagement Implementation Framework

Phase	***Main Activities***	***Expected Outputs***	***Evaluation Method***
Phase 1. Needs Assessment	School coordination, observation, interviews, mapping tourism and environmental potential	Needs assessment report and implementation agreement	Observation, interview, documentation
Phase 2. Training Design	Development of training modules and learning materials	Training module, presentation materials, field practice guide	Internal review
Phase 3. Capacity Building	Workshops, brainstorming, smartphone photography, videography, digital storytelling, copywriting	Improved digital communication competencies	Pre and post assessment, observation
Phase 4. Experiential Learning	Composting, hydroponics, waste segregation, Jojorong documentation, digital content production	Photos, videos, captions, environmental projects	Content assessment, group reflection
Phase 5. Mentoring and Sustainability	Action plan preparation, social media mentoring, monitoring	Student action plan and sustainable digital promotion program	Focus group discussion, monitoring, documentation

Table 2. Technologies and Learning Methods Applied

Technology / Method	***Purpose***	***Program Outputs***	***Expected Impact***
Smartphone Photography and Videography	Produce tourism promotion content	Digital photos and short videos	Improved media production skills
Mobile Editing Applications	Simple postproduction	Edited visual content	Increased digital literacy
Instagram and TikTok	Content dissemination	Published promotional content	Increased audience engagement
Interactive Workshops	Digital communication training	Improved conceptual understanding	Stronger communication competence
Digital Storytelling	Integrate local wisdom into tourism promotion	Persuasive captions and narratives	Enhanced destination branding
Composting Practice	Environmental conservation learning	Compost production	Increased environmental awareness
Hydroponic Cultivation	Project based environmental learning	Hydroponic demonstration unit	Improved collaborative learning
Waste Segregation	Environmental education	Waste management practice	Sustainable environmental behavior

Traditional Culinary Documentation	Promote local cultural heritage	Jojorong promotional content	Increased appreciation of local wisdom
Project Based Learning	Integrate theory and practice	Student generated projects	Higher student engagement
Experiential Learning	Learning through direct experience	Authentic field practice	Contextual understanding
Mentoring Program	Ensure sustainability	Student digital promotion action plan	Long term institutional commitment

Flow of Community Engagement Program:
Needs Assessment
↓
Training Module Development
↓
Digital Communication Workshops
↓
Experiential Learning
• *Composting*
• *Hydroponics*
• *Traditional Culinary Documentation*
↓
Digital Content Production
↓
Mentoring and Social Media Publication
↓
Monitoring and Evaluation
↓
Sustainability Plan

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial Conditions and Needs Assessment
The community engagement initiative started with a needs analysis that included school administration, educators, and Student Council (OSIS) representatives of SMAN 2 Rangkasbitung. Initial observations revealed that students frequently utilized social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Nonetheless, their online activities were mainly focused on personal interaction and entertainment instead of educational or tourism development aims. Discussions with educators and student delegates uncovered that while students recognized local tourist spots in Lebak Regency, their understanding of sustainable tourism concepts, environmental communication, destination branding, and digital storytelling was limited. The majority of participants had not undergone formal instruction in smartphone photography, videography, writing persuasive captions, or developing tourism content. Similarly, their grasp of local knowledge, especially the environmental beliefs of the Baduy Indigenous Community, was still narrow.

The evaluation also recognized chances for merging environmental education with tourism messaging. SMAN 2 Rangkasbitung started environmental initiatives but did not have adequate facilities for composting and hydroponic farming. As a result, the program aimed to enhance students' communication skills while also fostering environmental responsibility through hands-on learning experiences. These results align with earlier research highlighting that digital literacy must be enhanced by environmental consciousness and understanding of local culture to foster effective communication in sustainable tourism (UN Tourism, 2023). Consequently, capacity development must integrate technological skills with social, cultural, and environmental principles.

Capacity Building through Digital Communication Training
The training program utilized an engaging and participatory learning method that included theoretical discussions, brainstorming sessions, demonstrations, and supervised practice. Students were taught sustainable tourism messaging, smartphone photography, videography, visual design, digital storytelling, writing for media, and social media interaction. Instead of concentrating solely on technical abilities, the training prompted attendees to share genuine tourism experiences by incorporating local stories into digital materials. Students discovered how to recognize tourism values, environmental themes, and cultural distinctiveness prior to creating visual content. They practiced taking photos and making short promotional videos with their smartphones, followed by group discussions to enhance content quality.

The guiding principle of the 2026 Baduy Seba Dialogue, "Ngajaga Amanat, Ngarumat Jagat" (Preserving the Trust, Caring for the Earth), served as the core theme during the training. Students were urged to view tourism not just as an economic endeavor but also as a means to maintain environmental sustainability and cultural identity. Participants showed great enthusiasm during the workshops. Engaging dialogues, joint content creation, and prompt feedback helped students enhance their technical skills and deepen their critical comprehension of sustainable tourism communication. This discovery aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which highlights that significant learning takes place by combining concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

Experiential Learning in Environmental Conservation
A unique aspect of this community involvement initiative was the combination of digital communication education with hands-on environmental protection efforts. Students took part in compost creation, hydroponic seedling growth, and sustainable waste management techniques. The composting demonstration familiarized attendees with organic waste management as an effective method for decreasing school waste and generating eco-friendly fertilizer. In the meantime, hydroponic farming showed a sustainable method for food production that uses limited land and water resources. These activities enhanced students' comprehension that environmental preservation can be turned into actionable steps appropriate for schools.

An essential aspect included documenting Jojorong, a traditional food item from Lebak Regency made with palm sugar. Students discovered that highlighting local cuisine involves more than just presenting food items. It also conveys cultural identity, traditional wisdom, and eco-friendly production methods. Through the creation of digital content highlighting Jojorong, participants connected the advancement of the creative economy to the preservation of culture and the encouragement of sustainable tourism. Engagement levels among participants rose significantly through hands-on practice. Students engaged in discussions about environmental concerns, worked together to address practical problems, and considered ways to integrate conservation messages into tourism communication. These findings correspond with community empowerment theory, highlighting participation, ownership, and collective learning as essential factors for enduring behavioral change (Chambers, 1997; Rappaport, 1987).

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Strengthening Students as Digital Ambassadors
The initiative effectively enhanced the position of Student Council members as future Digital Ambassadors for Sustainable Tourism in Lebak Regency. Instead of just using social media, participants gained a deeper insight into digital communication as a means for community growth and promoting destinations. Students showed enhanced

assurance in creating tourism-related photos, videos, captions, and digital storytelling material that highlighted environmental preservation and local knowledge. Their action plans involved using school social media platforms to share information about local tourism sites, environmental initiatives, hydroponic projects, composting methods, and cultural heritage. The inclusion of auxiliary facilities, such as a composting system, hydroponic nursery tools, and instructional modules, enhanced program sustainability. Educators demonstrated dedication to incorporating these activities into upcoming Student Council initiatives, guaranteeing that environmental communication and tourism advocacy persist after the project's conclusion. This result illustrates the empowerment viewpoint suggested by Freire (1970), where education allows individuals to become active agents who can spark positive social transformation in their communities.

Integrating Digital Communication, Local Wisdom, and Sustainable Tourism

This community engagement initiative shows that effective promotion of sustainable tourism necessitates abilities beyond just digital communication skills. Successful destination promotion arises from combining communication skills, environmental responsibility, cultural respect, and engaged community involvement. In contrast to traditional digital literacy training, this initiative created a cohesive empowerment framework that linked four supporting aspects. The initial aspect focused on enhancing digital communication skills via photography, videography, digital storytelling, and the creation of social media content. The second dimension highlighted local knowledge by integrating the environmental beliefs of the Baduy Indigenous Community into tourism stories. The third dimension emphasized environmental preservation via hands-on initiatives like composting and hydroponic farming. Ultimately, the fourth dimension encouraged youth empowerment by framing students as proactive participants in sustainable tourism communication.

The combination of these aspects created a comprehensive learning experience where students concurrently enhanced technical skills, environmental consciousness, cultural identity, and collaborative leadership. This result backs environmental communication theory, which asserts that communication serves as a strategic tool for influencing public awareness, ecological responsibility, and sustainable actions (Cox, 2013). Similarly, digital storytelling served not just as a marketing instrument but also as a means to safeguard cultural narratives and enhance destination identity.
This study posits an Integrated Sustainable Tourism Communication Empowerment Model that includes four related components: digital communication abilities, internalization of local wisdom, practices for environmental conservation, and engagement of youth. These elements together enhance students' ability to serve as Digital Ambassadors, effectively advocating for sustainable tourism while safeguarding environmental and cultural assets. The model could act as a useful framework for upcoming community engagement projects that involve educational institutions in tourism locations with rich cultural and ecological traits.

4. CONCLUSION

The community engagement program successfully enhanced the capacity of Student Council (OSIS) members of SMAN 2 Rangkasbitung to serve as Digital Ambassadors for Sustainable Tourism through an integrated empowerment approach combining digital communication, environmental conservation, local wisdom, and experiential learning. The participatory learning model effectively improved participants' competencies in smartphone photography, videography, digital storytelling, copywriting, and social media communication while simultaneously strengthening their understanding of sustainable tourism principles and environmental responsibility. The integration of the Baduy philosophy "Ngajaga Amanat, Ngarumat Jagat" with practical activities such as composting, hydroponic cultivation, and the promotion of Jojorong demonstrated that local wisdom can serve as an ethical foundation for sustainable tourism communication and environmental education among young people.

The provision of environmental facilities, including composting equipment and hydroponic seedling systems, supported the continuity of project based learning and encouraged the institutionalization of environmental conservation activities within the school environment. This study proposes an Integrated Sustainable Tourism Communication Empowerment Model that connects four key dimensions, namely digital communication competence, local wisdom internalization, environmental conservation practices, and youth participation. The model contributes both theoretically and practically by providing a transferable framework for community engagement programs aimed at strengthening youth participation in sustainable tourism promotion.

Future community engagement initiatives are recommended to include longitudinal monitoring of students' digital communication activities and to expand collaboration with local governments, tourism stakeholders, indigenous communities, and creative economy actors to ensure the sustainability and broader impact of youth led sustainable tourism promotion.

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