

## The Role of Young People and Social Media in Promoting Fascinating Sungai Petani

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**Abstract:** This article explores how young people, acting as social agents, utilize social media to promote local communities. Through the utilization of digital platforms, these young individuals are exerting a growing impact on the economic, cultural, and social aspects of their local environments. The problem addressed is the need to understand the effectiveness of social media in reaching and engaging audiences. The objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of social media platforms used by young people in reaching a target audience. A quantitative method was employed to track the number of views, likes, shares, and comments of a promotional video over a specified 30-day timeframe. The major results indicate significant audience engagement, evidenced by high numbers of views, likes, shares, and comments. The results also emphasize the significant influence of social media initiatives driven by young people in improving local visibility and engagement. By improving the visibility of local communities, this strategy aims to increase the number of visitors to Sungai Petani and simultaneously enhance the socio-economic level of local people and the area. The conclusion highlights the potential of young people as influential social agents in promoting local communities through the use of social media.

**Keywords:** *Young people, Social media, Social agents, Local communities, Sungai Petani*

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### 1. Introduction

Promoting local communities is crucial for fostering sustainable development, enhancing economic resilience, and strengthening social cohesion. In the context of tourism development, Godfrey and Clarke (2000) define communities as central to the entire tourism experience, not just as passive hosts. Communities provide essential services such as accommodation, food, and transportation, and their unique local attributes, such as natural environments, architecture, cultural institutions, and history, constitute the core attractions for tourists. Whether in small villages or large cities, communities are deeply intertwined with tourism and are directly impacted by its growth and development. By investing in local initiatives, we can empower local people to take charge of their futures and create a more vibrant, interconnected society. This approach not only boosts local economies but also fosters a sense of ownership and pride among community members, leading to innovative solutions tailored to their unique challenges.

Tourism plays an important role in Malaysia's economic development, contributing approximately 15% to the country's GDP before the COVID-19 pandemic (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). However, the pandemic severely disrupted the sector, leading to a sharp decline in international arrivals and forcing many businesses to close. While recovery efforts are underway, the tourism landscape remains highly competitive, with destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Langkawi attracting the majority of visitors. In contrast, lesser-known locations like Sungai Petani face challenges in gaining visibility, mainly due to limited awareness, underdeveloped tourism infrastructure, and insufficient promotional efforts.

Young people play important roles as social agents in promoting their local communities. They contribute significantly to the development of local communities by participating in various activities that help build a vibrant and dynamic community environment (Schwartz et al., 2016). Moreover, they bring fresh perspectives and energy, often spearheading initiatives that highlight cultural heritage and environmental conservation, which can attract visitors while fostering a deeper connection to their roots. However, many young people face challenges such as limited access to funding, a lack of mentorship, and the need for skills development to effectively implement their ideas.

Given these challenges, digital marketing has become an essential tool for boosting tourism in underrepresented areas. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, allow young people to showcase their communities, highlight cultural and historical sites, and engage with potential visitors. Malaysia's recent recognition as Asia's safest and most peaceful travel destination (Travel + Leisure, 2024) presents a significant opportunity for towns like Sungai Petani to rebrand themselves and attract tourists through targeted online campaigns. However, the effectiveness of social media-driven tourism promotion depends on factors such as content quality, audience engagement, and accessibility to digital marketing training.

Sungai Petani, one of the largest towns in Kedah, Malaysia, functions as a significant commercial and industrial hub. Located in the southern region of Kedah and near Penang to the west, Sungai Petani plays a pivotal role in the state's economic landscape. The Kedah Development Framework has placed a strong emphasis on fostering archaeotourism, geotourism, and ecotourism as key components of the state's broader economic activities. These initiatives align with Kedah's vision of becoming a thriving and livable state by 2035 (Kedah Strategic Development Plan, 2035). Within this strategic plan, two primary development zones have been identified for Sungai Petani: (1) the Gunung Jerai – Lembah Bujang Eco-Archaeo Tourism Zone, which includes the Lembah Bujang/Sungai Batu Archaeological Site, Jerai Geopark, Kuala Muda Mangrove, and Tanjung Dawai – Pantai Merdeka Ecotourism, as well as adventure sports tourism; and (2) the Kuala Muda Biodiversity Zone, which focuses on ecotourism, agribusiness related to fisheries, heritage tourism, and the conservation of the Kota Kuala Muda mangroves (NCER Malaysia, 2009-2024).

Tourism is a vital contributor to Malaysia's economy, generating employment, fostering cultural exchange, and driving regional development. However, the sector has faced challenges, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to reduced international tourist arrivals and a greater reliance on domestic tourism. In response, the Malaysian government has intensified efforts to revitalize tourism through initiatives such as Visit Kedah 2025, with a particular emphasis on leveraging digital tools for promotion (Tourism Malaysia, 2024). In this context, Sungai Petani holds significant potential as an emerging tourist destination, yet it remains underexplored compared to other hotspots like Langkawi or Penang. The increasing accessibility of social media presents an opportunity to bridge this gap, allowing young people to highlight Sungai Petani's cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and unique attractions to a wider audience. Understanding how effectively these platforms are utilized is crucial for shaping future tourism development strategies in the region.

This paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of social media platforms used by young people in promoting their local community, Sungai Petani. By examining the strategies employed and the success of these efforts, particularly through the "Fascinating Sungai Petani" program, this study offers valuable insights into the dynamic role that young people and social media platforms play in local development. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital engagement can drive community visibility, tourism, and economic growth at the local level.

## 2. Literature Review

**Social agents and their impact on local communities:** Young people play a significant role as social agents in promoting local communities, acting as catalysts for social change and community development. Their involvement is multifaceted, encompassing participation in social activism, socio-cultural development, and youth work. By channeling their creativity and digital skills, they can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, fostering a sense of pride and ownership within their communities.

Young people are increasingly recognized as critical drivers of social change, with their active participation in shaping the process of development in a country. This involvement is facilitated through co-production and participatory approaches, which empower young people to contribute to community development in which such engagement acknowledges their expertise in their lived realities (Tyrrell, 2023). This means young people not only drive community development but also significantly impact local communities through their active participation in social change initiatives.

Therefore, young people play a crucial role to become catalysts for innovation, inspiring others to join in collective efforts that address pressing social issues and promote sustainable practices. Their unique perspectives and energy can lead to creative solutions that resonate with diverse populations, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members.

**The power of social media as a promotional tool:** Social media has become a crucial tool for promoting local destinations and engaging a wider audience, allowing local people to share their stories, experiences, and unique aspects of their culture with the world. Tourism Malaysia has reported that 80.6% of travelers were aware of destinations and promotions via social media and online platforms in 2024. This demonstrates the central role social media plays in shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations and increasing their attractiveness. The study by Silaban et al. (2022) indicates that promoting destinations on social media can significantly influence their attractiveness and public perception. When consumers believe that a destination is attractive, it will positively impact the destination's image. Furthermore, the destination image can significantly impact the visit intention. This highlights the importance of a cohesive marketing strategy that not only showcases the destination's features but also builds a narrative that resonates with travelers' desires and expectations.

According to Tourism Malaysia's statistics, 55.3% of respondents were influenced by the "Cuti-Cuti Malaysia" campaign to holiday domestically in 2023, showcasing the effectiveness of destination branding. This campaign played a significant role in reinforcing the positive image of local destinations, making them more appealing to domestic tourists. This aligns with Pike & Page's (2014) concept of destination marketing, which emphasizes the importance of creating a cohesive marketing strategy to influence travelers' intentions.

Furthermore, the importance of social media is further emphasized by the 85.9% of respondents who prefer social media promotion when it comes to tourism marketing (Tourism Malaysia, 2024). This figure supports Alshehri (2024) claim that social media not only aids in destination marketing but also contributes to destination branding and image building. Destination branding refers to the process of creating a unique identity and image for a specific location to attract tourists. It involves promoting the destination's characteristics, culture, and experiences to differentiate it from others. Image building refers to the process of creating and enhancing the perception of a person, organization, or destination in the minds of the public. It involves strategic communication and marketing efforts to shape how a target audience views a particular entity.

Thus, the interplay between social media and these processes is crucial, as it allows for real-time engagement and feedback, enabling destinations to adapt their strategies based on audience reactions and preferences. This dynamic relationship not only fosters a sense of community among tourists but also encourages local participation in the promotion of their own culture and heritage.

**Young people as digital natives and their proficiency with social media:** In 2024, internet penetration in Malaysia reached 97.4%, with 33.59 million internet users. Of these, 28.68 million individuals, accounting for 83.1% of the total population, were active on social media platforms. Additionally, there were 44.55 million cellular mobile connections, representing 129.2% of the population, indicating the widespread access and use of digital devices. Among social media users aged 18 and above, there were 22.35 million Facebook users, 24.10 million YouTube users, 15.70 million Instagram users, 28.68 million TikTok users, 11.85 million Facebook Messenger users, 7.80 million LinkedIn members, 1.46 million Snapchat users, and 57.1 million X (formerly Twitter) users (Kemp, 2024). These statistics highlight the pervasive presence of social media in the daily lives of young Malaysians, positioning them as digital natives who are highly proficient in navigating these platforms.

Research consistently identifies youth as avid and skilled users of social media across the globe (Ismail, 2014; Lenhart, Anderson, & Smith, 2015; Mahadi, 2013; Raco, 2014). Social media offers diverse functionalities, including communication, socialization, education, information seeking, and entertainment. It also serves as a platform for sharing knowledge and creative content, such as images, videos, and written works (Mesch, 2009; Shewmaker, 2012). This proficiency enables young people to engage actively in content creation and dissemination, contributing significantly to the digital landscape.

Media literacy is a critical aspect of this proficiency, empowering youth to interact with social media platforms in a manner that fosters their healthy development and active participation. As highlighted by Joo, Seok, and Nam (2020), the ability to discern credible information from misinformation is crucial for shaping individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, ultimately influencing society at large. Educational initiatives that promote digital literacy are essential in equipping young people with the skills to navigate the complexities of online interactions, ensuring they consume content responsibly and contribute positively to the digital ecosystem (Eleni et al., 2023).

By fostering critical thinking skills, these initiatives help young users recognize credible sources, thereby promoting a more informed and engaged community. As digital natives, young people's proficiency with social media not only facilitates their participation in content creation but also positions them as influential social agents capable of shaping public discourse and driving social change in their communities.

**The effectiveness of social media in promoting local communities:** The 21st century has witnessed a significant shift in tourists' preferences, with a significant movement towards digital and e-services. Social media has emerged as one of the most powerful tools for engaging audiences, raising awareness, and disseminating information about tourist destinations. Platforms such as blogs, microblogs, social networks, and media-sharing sites have become indispensable in the tourism industry, enabling content to reach vast, diverse audiences globally (Ong, Sutawijaya, & Saluy, 2020). These platforms not only serve personal uses but are increasingly leveraged by businesses and governments to promote tourism products and services, due to their ease of use, cost-effectiveness, and widespread reach (Putri, 2020).

Tourism Malaysia (2024) has reported that 80.6% of visitors became aware of local tourism destinations and promotions through social media and online platforms. This statistic highlights the importance of social media in amplifying destination visibility and engagement. Moreover, 85.9% of respondents prefer social media promotion, underlining its influence in tourism decision-making, which resonates with Jupiter's (2009) research, indicating that 50% of internet users consult blogs before making purchase decisions. In the context of tourism, the interactive nature of social media platforms provides users with the ability to ask questions, provide feedback, and share their experiences, which further enhances the tourism experience before, during, and after a visit. This also fosters a sense of community beyond just immediate friends and family (Radojević, Nguyen, Bajec & Ferra, 2020).

The effectiveness of social media in promoting local tourism is compounded by its ability to amplify user-generated content with a single click, making it an invaluable tool for promoting destinations at a regional level. A powerful feature of social media is how it extends beyond the promotional efforts of local governments to include the broader community, thus creating a more comprehensive promotional strategy. The "Cuti-Cuti Malaysia" campaign, for example, influenced 55.3% of respondents to opt for domestic travel in 2023. This statistic further illustrates how destination branding and social media campaigns converge to shape travel decisions. Additionally, 74.2% of respondents are aware of the "Cuti-Cuti Malaysia" campaign, which signifies the broad reach and successful impact of social media in spreading awareness.

Tourism Malaysia's statistics support the argument made by Cave & Dredge (2020) regarding the power of peer recommendations on social media platforms. 81% of internet users consult others' opinions or reviews before booking vacations, and 90% trust recommendations from friends and peers over advertisements. In the case of Tourism Malaysia (2024), social media platforms enable the amplification of recommendations and reviews, which are critical in shaping the destination's image and influencing visit intention. For example, natural attractions and local cuisine, which are often shared on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, account for 40.6% and 29.1% of the key factors attracting tourists to Malaysia, respectively. This reflects the power of social media in amplifying the allure of local experiences and destinations, thus positively influencing tourist decisions.

In line with this, the "Top Visitor Arrivals" by Tourism Malaysia shows that Singapore, Indonesia, and China are among the highest sources of international tourists. This confirms the effectiveness of social media in attracting tourists from various countries, as social media platforms facilitate real-time engagement and increase awareness among potential travelers. Furthermore, the increase in visitor arrivals of 24.2% in 2024, along with

a 43.4% increase in tourist receipts, illustrates the tangible impact of social media strategies on tourism growth.

The involvement of young people as digital natives has also contributed to enhancing the visibility of Malaysia as a tourist destination. Their familiarity with platforms like TikTok and Instagram, and their inclination to share travel experiences, significantly boost the engagement levels of tourism promotion efforts. As Elmo et al. (2022) and Zhang et al. (2023) note, social media has become a dynamic force that influences public perception, drives mobility, and builds a tourism ecosystem that benefits both the local community and tourists. The rise of social media campaigns, such as those run by Tourism Malaysia, further solidifies the role of these platforms in shaping the country's tourism industry.

Thus, the power of social media lies in its ability to not only engage users but also to amplify destination marketing, branding, and community participation. Tourism Malaysia's use of social media strategies has contributed to a more integrated promotional approach, which has significantly influenced travel behavior and enhanced Malaysia's position in the global tourism market.

**Sustainable Communities:** The promotion of local tourism through social media by young people plays an important role in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11), which focuses on creating sustainable cities and communities. This study aligns with SDG 11 by demonstrating how youth-driven digital initiatives can enhance local visibility and foster socio-economic growth in Sungai Petani. The strategic use of social media not only promotes cultural heritage and local attractions but also supports sustainable urban development by attracting responsible tourism and fostering community engagement.

According to Eleni, Kilipiri, Papaioannou, and Kotzaivazoglou (2023), social media and influencer marketing are critical tools for promoting sustainable tourism destinations, as they effectively engage broader audiences and drive interest in less-explored areas. Similarly, Joo, Seok, and Nam (2020) highlight the moderating effect of social media on sustainable rural tourism, emphasizing its role in shaping tourist behavior and encouraging sustainable practices. By leveraging social media, young people in Sungai Petani contribute to the sustainability of their community, aligning their efforts with global sustainability goals and reinforcing the potential of digital platforms to support sustainable tourism and urban development.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the role of young people's participation and the utilization of social media in promoting local tourism in Sungai Petani. Specifically, the study focuses on the involvement of 240 students aged 19 to 20, enrolled in the Development Administration course at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch. These students were tasked with leveraging social media platforms to engage a global audience and attract potential tourists to Sungai Petani through the "Fascinating Sungai Petani" program. The selection of this age group is reflective of the participants' academic level and skills, which are particularly relevant to the study's objectives.

The students were instructed to collect visual content, including photographs and videos, showcasing various aspects of Sungai Petani. This content was then disseminated across popular social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. The aim was to assess the effectiveness of social media as a tool for promoting local tourism and to measure the engagement generated by the students' posts.

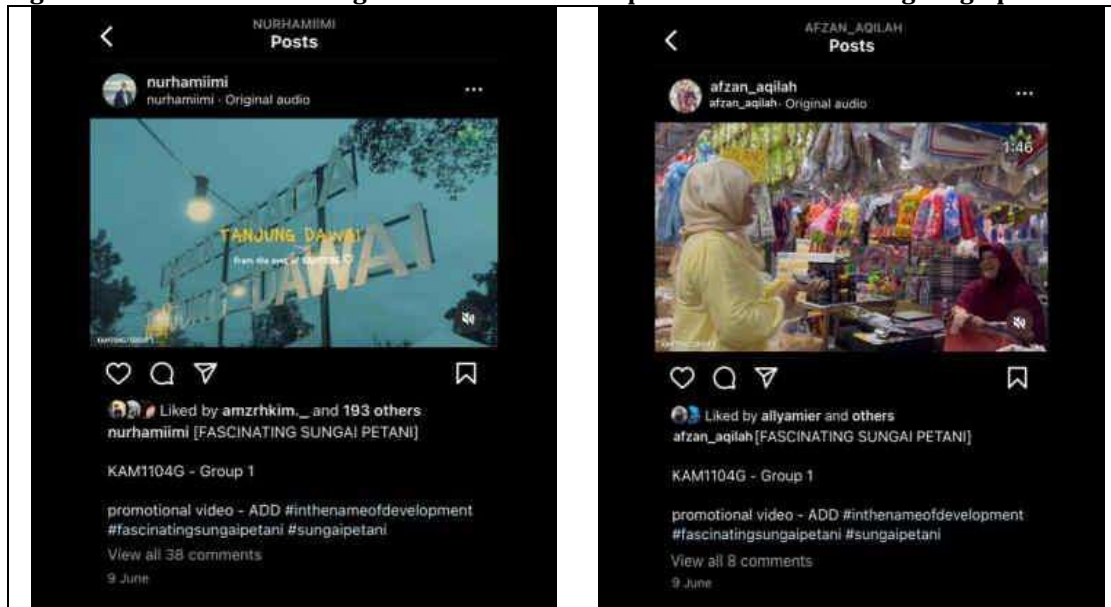
The study was conducted over one month, from 9th June 2024 to 9th July 2024, in alignment with the requirements of the Development Administration course for that semester. While one month may seem short for a long-term impact evaluation, it was sufficient for assessing the initial engagement and reach of the social media campaigns. During this time, the students actively shared their content on social media, and the impact of their efforts was tracked by monitoring key metrics such as the number of views, likes, shares, and comments. These metrics provided quantitative data to evaluate the immediate reach and engagement of the social media campaigns initiated by the students.

This methodological approach allows for an in-depth analysis of how young people, as social agents, can effectively utilize digital platforms to promote local tourism and contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities.

#### 4. Findings

**Strategies Employed by Young Social Agents:** The findings of this study provide a comprehensive insight into how young social agents, who are well-versed in digital media, utilized visual storytelling techniques such as photos and videos to effectively promote local attractions, events, and businesses in Sungai Petani. These students, acting as content creators, identified two primary development zones about Sungai Petani: (1) the Gunung Jerai – Lembah Bujang Eco-Archaeo Tourism Zone, which includes the Lembah Bujang/Sungai Batu Archaeological Site, Jerai Geopark, Kuala Muda Mangrove, and Tanjung Dawai – Pantai Merdeka Ecotourism, as well as adventure sports tourism; and (2) the Kuala Muda Biodiversity Zone.

**Figure 1: Videos with hashtag #inthenameofdevelopment and #fascinatingsungaijetani**



Each of these locations was meticulously featured in the videos created by the students, with a focus on highlighting the most compelling aspects of each site. This included not only visually appealing elements but also informative content such as interesting historical facts, details about the available facilities, and the cultural significance of the sites. For instance, the videos on Lembah Bujang and Sungai Batu Archaeological Site emphasized its rich historical background, while those on Jerai Geopark highlighted its geological importance and scenic beauty.

In addition to this, the students provided practical information on how to access these locations, making the content highly user-friendly and informative for potential visitors. They also took the opportunity to showcase upcoming events and local businesses, including souvenir shops and eateries, which are integral to the visitor experience. This not only enhanced the content's relevance but also supported local businesses by driving tourist traffic to these areas.

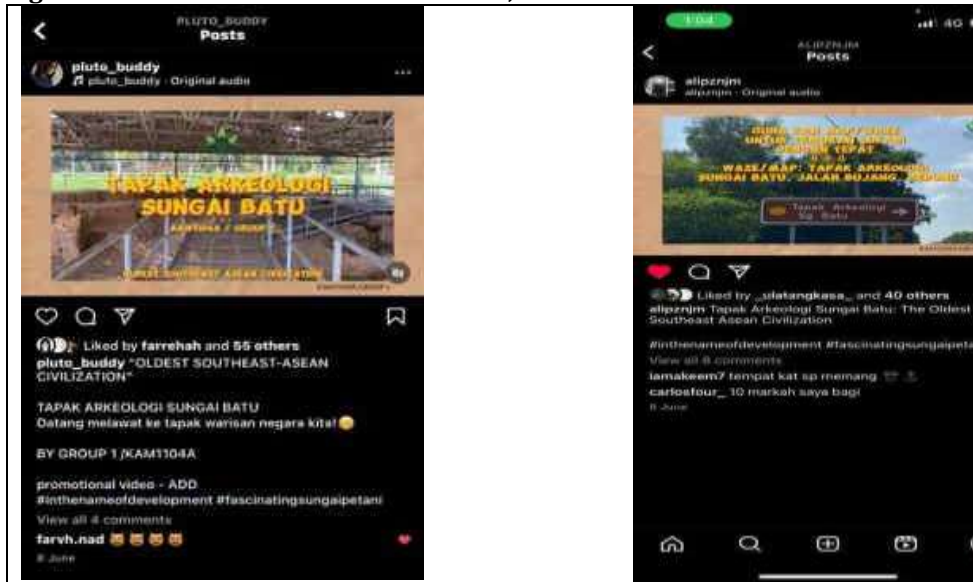
To further increase the reach and engagement of their content, the students strategically employed hashtags, a critical tool in digital marketing. By using local-themed hashtags such as #inthenameofdevelopment and #fascinatingsungaijetani, they tapped into the power of user-generated content, encouraging the audience to engage with the campaign and contribute their own experiences and stories. This tactic was particularly effective in fostering a sense of community pride and participation, as it allowed the audience to become co-creators in the promotional efforts.

The use of these hashtags significantly increased the visibility of the content across various social media platforms. This approach not only broadened the campaign's audience but also engaged individuals beyond the immediate social circles of the students, creating a ripple effect that extended the campaign's reach across a wider demographic. The interactive nature of social media allowed for real-time feedback and engagement, with users liking, sharing, and commenting on the posts, thereby contributing to the virality of the content.

**Effectiveness of Social Media Promotion:** The effectiveness of social media promotion in the Fascinating Sungai Petani campaign was demonstrated through a detailed analysis of social media metrics, including likes, shares, comments, and follower engagement. The study involved 240 social media accounts, each operated by young social agents, who shared videos highlighting various local attractions and events in Sungai Petani.

The data indicates a high level of engagement and reach, with each account generating an average of 50 interactions per post, encompassing likes, shares, and comments. These interactions reflect the audience's active interest in the content, suggesting that the visual storytelling approach resonated well with viewers. Additionally, the use of strategic hashtags further amplified the campaign's visibility, enabling the content to reach beyond the immediate follower base of the students, engaging a broader audience.

**Figure 2: Videos with the number of likes, shares and comments**



This high engagement level is particularly noteworthy as it signifies not only the effectiveness of the content in capturing the audience's attention but also its potential to foster community participation and enhance local pride. The significant number of shares, in particular, highlights the viral potential of the campaign, as followers actively contributed to disseminating the content, thereby expanding its reach exponentially.

Moreover, the comments and feedback received provided valuable insights into public perception and highlighted the effectiveness of using social media as a promotional tool for local tourism. The positive responses and active participation of users indicate that social media when leveraged by young social agents, can be a powerful medium for promoting local communities and driving socio-economic benefits through increased tourism. This study demonstrates that the strategic use of social media by digitally native young people can have a profound impact on local development initiatives, particularly in promoting lesser-known areas like Sungai Petani.

**Table 1: Summary of Engagement Metrics (Average Likes, Shares, Comments per Post)**

No.	Content Type (areas for promotion)	Average Likes			Average Shares			Average Comments		
		Ig	Fb	Tt	Ig	Fb	Tt	Ig	Fb	Tt
1.	The Gunung Jerai – Lembah Bujang Eco-Archaeo Tourism Zone									
	Lembah Bujang/Sungai Batu Archaeological Site	68	61	77	18	14	23	32	28	47
	Jerai Geopark	63	58	78	40	33	49	48	39	54
	Kuala Muda Mangrove	57	53	72	45	38	59	42	38	51
	Tanjung Dawai	73	58	84	67	52	78	46	41	61
	Pantai Merdeka Ecotourism	62	54	79	58	49	73	53	47	63
2.	The Kuala Muda Biodiversity Zone.	70	64	79	54	46	64	49	44	59

Table 1 presents the average engagement metrics for social media posts promoting key tourist areas within two zones: the Gunung Jerai – Lembah Bujang Eco-Archaeo Tourism Zone and the Kuala Muda Biodiversity Zone. Each area’s engagement is measured in terms of average likes, shares, and comments, which indicate public interest and interaction levels.

In the Gunung Jerai, Lembah Bujang Eco-Archaeo Tourism Zone, the Lembah Bujang or Sungai Batu Archaeological Site received an impressive number of likes (68 on Instagram, 61 on Facebook, and 77 on TikTok), though it had relatively lower shares (18 on Instagram, 14 on Facebook, and 23 on TikTok) and comments (32 on Instagram, 28 on Facebook, and 47 on TikTok). This suggests that the site attracted substantial initial interest, particularly on TikTok, but engagement through shares and comments was more moderate. The Jerai Geopark exhibited a well-balanced engagement pattern, with 63 likes on Instagram, 58 on Facebook, and 78 on TikTok. Shares were also strong, with 40 on Instagram, 33 on Facebook, and 49 on TikTok, and the comments reflected high interaction with 48 on Instagram, 39 on Facebook, and 54 on TikTok.

In addition, Kuala Muda Mangrove demonstrated consistent engagement, with 57 likes on Instagram, 53 on Facebook, and 72 on TikTok. Shares were notably high (45 on Instagram, 38 on Facebook, and 59 on TikTok), and comments were similarly strong, with 42 on Instagram, 38 on Facebook, and 51 on TikTok. Tanjung Dawai achieved the highest engagement in terms of shares (67 on Instagram, 52 on Facebook, and 78 on TikTok), alongside 73 likes on Instagram, 58 on Facebook, and 84 on TikTok. The comments were also strong (46 on Instagram, 41 on Facebook, and 61 on TikTok), indicating a high level of interaction. Pantai Merdeka Ecotourism had a solid performance with 62 likes on Instagram, 54 on Facebook, and 79 on TikTok, along with 58 shares on Instagram, 49 on Facebook, and 73 on TikTok. The comments reflected strong engagement as well, with 53 on Instagram, 47 on Facebook, and 63 on TikTok.

In the Kuala Muda Biodiversity Zone, engagement was also strong across the platforms, with 70 likes on Instagram, 64 on Facebook, and 79 on TikTok. Shares were notable as well, with 54 on Instagram, 46 on Facebook, and 64 on TikTok, and comments reflected solid interaction levels, with 49 on Instagram, 44 on Facebook, and 59 on TikTok.

Overall, the data indicates that TikTok had the most significant impact on promoting tourism in Sungai Petani. It consistently generated the highest engagement across all tourist areas, especially in terms of likes, shares, and comments. TikTok’s capacity to attract a broad audience, stimulate interaction, and generate viral content contributed substantially to the campaign’s success. Instagram followed closely, particularly in generating likes and shares, with a strong level of engagement seen across many areas. Facebook, while contributing positively, generally saw lower engagement compared to TikTok and Instagram, especially in shares and comments.

For example, in the Gunung Jerai, Lembah Bujang Eco-Archaeo Tourism Zone, Tanjung Dawai performed exceptionally well on TikTok, generating 84 likes, 78 shares, and 61 comments, suggesting TikTok’s superior ability to generate both visibility and interactive engagement. Similarly, Pantai Merdeka Ecotourism also saw a boost from TikTok with 79 likes, 73 shares, and 63 comments, reinforcing TikTok’s role as the most effective platform.



In the Kuala Muda Biodiversity Zone, TikTok again led in engagement with 79 likes, 64 shares, and 59 comments, highlighting its broader reach and the potential for viral marketing. While Instagram performed well, particularly with Tanjung Dawai, TikTok was the clear leader in creating significant impact and generating substantial audience interaction.

This analysis highlights the power of TikTok as the most effective tool for promoting tourism in Sungai Petani, particularly when targeting younger, tech-savvy audiences who are most likely to engage with content through likes, shares, and comments. Instagram remains a solid second choice, and Facebook, while still valuable, should be considered a secondary platform in this context.

The feedback and comments received further confirm the effectiveness of visual storytelling in engaging audiences. The positive responses from TikTok users, especially, suggest that the platform's format; short, engaging videos, can be a highly effective tool for promoting local tourism, driving socio-economic benefits through increased visibility and interaction with lesser-known destinations like those in Sungai Petani.

### **Discussion**

The strategies adopted by the young social agents in this study align with broader trends in digital tourism promotion. Visual storytelling, which involves the use of compelling images and videos, has been identified as a powerful tool in destination marketing. According to Eleni, Papaioannou, and Kotzaivazoglou (2023), visual content on social media platforms like Instagram plays a crucial role in influencing travel decisions and promoting sustainable tourism destinations. In the case of Sungai Petani, the students' focus on highlighting historical facts, available facilities, and upcoming events not only provided valuable information to potential tourists but also contributed to the preservation and promotion of the local heritage.

The strategic use of hashtags, such as #inthenameofdevelopment and #fascinatingsungaipetani, further amplified the reach of the students' content. Hashtags serve as a means to categorize content, making it more discoverable to a broader audience. As noted by Alshehri (2024), hashtags like #Alula on Twitter (X) were instrumental in creating a social graph that connected users with shared interests in tourism, thereby increasing the visibility of the destination. Similarly, the use of local-themed hashtags by the students in Sungai Petani fostered community engagement and pride, encouraging user-generated content that further contributed to the promotion of the area.

The effectiveness of social media as a promotional tool is well-documented in the literature. Kamaluddin et al. (2023) highlight that the quality of tourism information shared on social media significantly influences destination brand awareness among youth. In this study, the high levels of engagement—evidenced by likes, shares, comments, and follower growth—demonstrate that the social media promotion of Sungai Petani was successful in reaching and resonating with the target audience. The average of 50 shares, likes, and comments per post indicates that the content not only captured the attention of viewers but also prompted them to actively engage with it.

This finding is consistent with the results of a study by Silaban et al. (2022), which found that destination promotion on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, significantly impacts users' intentions to visit. The interactive nature of social media allows for real-time feedback and engagement, making it an effective medium for influencing travel decisions. Furthermore, Pike and Page (2014) emphasize that destination marketing organizations (DMOs) should leverage social media to enhance their promotional efforts, as it offers a cost-effective way to reach a global audience.

The findings of this study also align with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which suggests that social media use can moderate the relationship between attitudes and intentions toward sustainable rural tourism (Joo, Seok, & Nam, 2020). In the context of Sungai Petani, the students' social media campaign not only shaped positive attitudes toward the local attractions but also encouraged behavioral intentions, such as visiting the sites and participating in upcoming events.

## 5. Conclusion

The success of the "Fascinating Sungai Petani" program highlights the transformative role that young people can play as social agents in driving local development. By leveraging their digital skills and creativity, these young individuals have contributed significantly to the economic and cultural vitality of their community. As Schwartz et al. (2016) highlight, youth involvement in community initiatives can foster social cohesion, stimulate local innovation, and act as a powerful driver of sustainable development. The increased visibility of Sungai Petani's attractions on social media platforms is likely to lead to an increase in tourist arrivals, thereby supporting local businesses and enhancing the socio-economic well-being of the area.

This study also emphasizes the growing importance of social media in promoting lesser-known destinations like Sungai Petani. As digital platforms continue to evolve, their potential for boosting local tourism will only expand. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on the role of social media in sustainable tourism, demonstrating that young people, empowered with digital tools, can become pivotal agents in shaping the future of local tourism and community development.

However, while the study shows promising results, it also opens up several avenues for future research and exploration. To better understand the long-term impact of social media-driven tourism promotion, further studies could investigate how sustained digital engagement affects not only tourist visitation but also the sustainability of local tourism practices, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the development of community infrastructure over time. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into whether the initial boost in tourism has lasting positive effects on both the economic and environmental aspects of local development.

Further exploration into the effectiveness of different social media platforms is also needed. While TikTok has proven to be a major player in the success of the Sungai Petani program, platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube each have their strengths and target audiences. Understanding which platforms work best for different types of content, audiences, and destinations will help refine future strategies. Research could also explore how new features and algorithms on these platforms impact engagement and how trends in user behavior influence tourism promotion strategies.

Another important opportunity for future research is to leverage youth involvement in tourism promotion in a more structured, scalable way. The digital skills and innovative thinking demonstrated by young social agents in this study could be harnessed through more formalized training and mentoring programs. This would help to ensure that youth are continuously engaged in promoting their local communities, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their heritage while equipping them with the skills to thrive in the digital economy.

In conclusion, the strategies employed by young social agents in Sungai Petani, combined with the effective use of social media, underscore the transformative power of digital platforms in local development. Future research should aim to assess the long-term effects of such initiatives on tourism sustainability, community engagement, and the economic growth of smaller tourist destinations. Additionally, exploring the role of youth, new social media trends, and the scalability of these strategies will provide invaluable insights for promoting sustainable and inclusive tourism in regions around the world.

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