

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BASED ON MSMEs IN ACHIEVING SDGS 8

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the activities of integrated marketing communication of sustainable tourism based on micro, small, and medium enterprises in empowering their business activities to attain the Sustainable Development Goals 8 (SDG 8), focusing on sustainable economic growth for the welfare of community. Center of the theme is how to drive community initiatives and their contribution to SDGs for sustainable city in Garut Regency, Indonesia.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical frameworks are integrated tourism marketing communication, SDG 8, necessity entrepreneurship, and sustainable tourism.

Method: This study employs a qualitative case study approach in Garut Regency, consisting of 42 districts, 21 subdistricts, and 421 villages. Data are analyzed from the informants participating in the activities of integrated marketing communication of sustainable tourism, namely, government, businesses, community, business association, academia, media, and local society around the tourism sites.

Results and Discussion: The results show that MSME activities help improve tourist visits and boost regional revenue. MSMEs are the necessity entrepreneurs who run the business due to various environmental forces, and their revenue is not measured based on customer valuation. So, return on customer-investment still cannot be considered.

Research Implications: This study provides insights for policymakers and other stakeholders (MSME actors, businesses, tourism driving community, academia, and media) to develop an integrated marketing communication strategy of sustainable tourism, aligned with the SDGs 8.

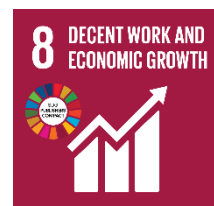
Originality/Value: This study offers a novel strategy of integrated marketing communication for MSMEs to support sustainable tourism for the welfare of community.

Keywords: integrated marketing communication, tourism, sustainable development goals 8 (SDG 8), MSMEs, necessity entrepreneur, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

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1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country committed to eradicating poverty, as stated in the SDGs, which are the consensus agreed by 160 countries to be reached by 2030. SDGs are a new development consensus expected to make positive changes toward sustainable development. Poverty is a significant issue in national development, especially in rural areas (Audina et al., 2024). SDGs-8 is 8 th United Nations Development Goals, that is promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, shortened as, decent work and sustainable development. SDG number 8 requires an inclusive and sustainable economic growth, which will impact the creation of jobs. The integrated tourism sector is a new solution that is expected to create job opportunities. For example, the Chinese government has developed its tourism sector to eradicate poverty in rural or village areas (Pan et al., 2021). Specifically, the tourism sector has played a substantial role in poverty alleviation, thus improving the welfare of society in the province of Anhui, China (Wang et al., 2023). Similarly, a study has shown that the tourism sector supported Kenya's economy by opening job opportunities (Njoya & Seetaram, 2018).

The tourism sector's contribution to developing a sustainable village must be explored. A partnership between the government and other stakeholders is needed to allocate funds to accelerate tourism development in rural areas (Liu et al., 2023). According to the UN report, the population in urban areas was estimated to increase from 55% in 2018 to 60% in 2030. Indonesia contributes to the population migration from rural to urban areas by 68%. Thus, developing rural areas through tourism is crucial to prevent larger urbanization.

Indonesia's tourism sector contributes to economic development, primarily by improving the welfare of society. Geographically, Indonesia has varied tourism destinations, including nature-based, artificial, and cultural tourism. Tourism is a sector that is expected to create a considerable number of jobs. Tourism and economic growth cannot be separated because tourism has been documented to significantly contribute to improving economic growth (Sun et al., 2025). However, a contrasting result was found in Peru, where

tourism development was still informal, thus providing challenges in attaining sustainable development goals (Rodriguez-Barboza et al., 2024).

Garut, a regency located in West Java province, Indonesia, has a high poverty level, namely, 9.68% of the population as per the data in March 2024. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of Indonesia, the poor people have a monthly income of Rp535,547. The average per capita income in Garut is only Rp 367,681. Figure 1 illustrates the comparison (in %) of poor in Garut Regency and Indonesia from 2015 to 2024. Mostly higher than Indonesia's average except for 2018 and 2019. The following graph illustrates the percentage comparison of poor in Garut and Indonesia from 2015 to 2024.

Figure 1

Comparison of Poor in Garut Regency and Indonesia 2015-2024



Source: Processed from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of Indonesia, *Berita Resmi Statistik*, 15 January 2025, and BPS of Garut Regency, *Berita Resmi Statistik*, 25 July 2024.

Garut Regency is a buffer zone of West Java province and mainly consists of highlands. Administratively, Garut has 42 districts, 21 subdistricts, and 421 villages. The population of Garut was around 2,716,950, with a poor population of 259,000 and unemployment of 100,108 people (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Garut, 2024, 2025).

Meanwhile, Garut Regency has potential in its tourism and trade sectors that can be developed sustainably to reduce poverty. In fact, Garut is well known for its city brands of Swiss Van Java, Diamond City, and Dodol City. These



brands indicate that Garut Regency has the potential to develop its sectors that will boost economic development. A report from BPS shows that 43.98% of the workforce in Garut are business actors. However, the ratio of formal entrepreneurs was still around 2.86%. It shows that business actors perform their economic activities simply because of economic force without considering a comprehensive economic ecosystem. Therefore, their business still runs less optimally. There should be a radical change to strengthen their growth. Specifically, rebranding may be required to develop Garut Regency, primarily to enhance the economic independence of the society.

As agreed in the SDGs, sustainable economic growth will impact the reduction of the poverty rate. One of the solutions conducted by the Indonesian government is to boost MSMEs growth in rural areas as the foundation of sustainable development (Suci, 2016). Active involvement of society in providing job opportunities will enhance economic independence and empower the whole community. Development policy aimed at various productive activities is expected to boost the growth of MSMEs. Thus, creativity and innovation related to entrepreneurship are required. In addition, it is crucial to develop integrated marketing communication (IMC).

Some prior studies revealed that IMC relates to market performance. The more communication channels are, the better the effectiveness of the campaign program will be (Ang, 2021). IMC is a strategy integrating the whole communication channel so consumers can get clear and convincing messages about the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2016); IMC requires marketing coordination among various communication channels, not individually (McCabe, 2009).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The tourism sector affects society's welfare in emerging countries. It can improve the regional economy and environmental development (Rasyid et al., 2024). Moreover, tourism in rural areas can create employment for new generations by creating and developing MSMEs (Ahmadi et al., 2023). To develop sustainable tourism, a holistic and integrated strategy is required. The integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy is employed to develop the

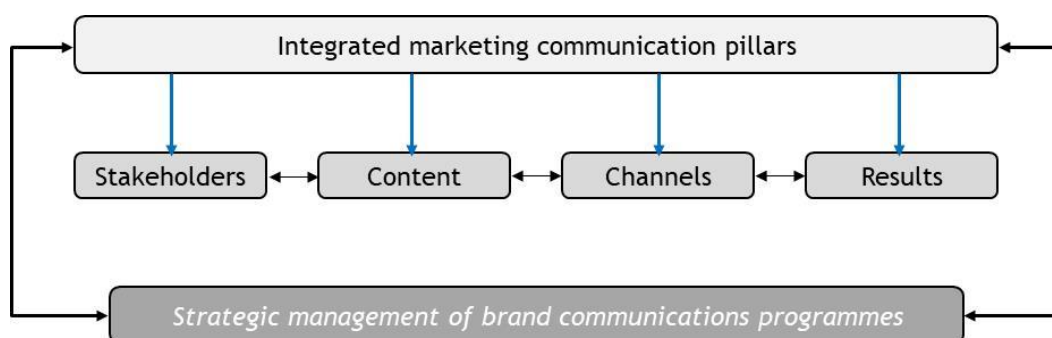
tourism sector by integrating various marketing communication techniques.

IMC is the integration of all communication channels, so the received messages can be convincing for the customers because of consistency in the products, whether goods or services. IMC aims to create effectiveness in all communication elements of the firm (García et al., 2019). With such importance, IMC has been a central research topic in the past decades (Butkouskaya et al., 2021; Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017). IMC widely affects a firm's communication strategy (Rehman et al., 2022). IMC was also defined differently in the literature. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), IMC is a marketing strategy that uses various communication disciplines so the intended messages can be received clearly and consistently and provide maximum added value. IMC cannot be separated from the activities focused on brand information delivery, which is explained clearly and consistently through various media by involving all communication elements. Therefore, IMC plays a role in informing, persuading, entertaining, and motivating the customers (Juska, 2022). The involvement of the whole communication media should be performed harmoniously to boost behavioral change in the intended market.

According to Kliatchko (2008), there are four pillars of IMC: stakeholders, content, channel, and results, as shown in the following figure (Kliatchko, 2008a):

Figure 2

Four Pillar of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)



Source: (Kliatchko, 2008b)

Those four pillars are employed in the tourism development strategy based on IMC. A stakeholder refers to all parties interacting in the development of tourism activities. Content refers to the published content in the digital



media, such as blogs of individuals and communities, vlogs, podcasts, wikis, and storytelling available on YouTube or Google. Channels refer to the communication channels that are preferred by the audience. For some audiences, the communication channel is more important than the content. Results refer to the accountability of IMC programs related to various performance metrics, primarily financial. It can be measured using customer valuation and ROCI (*return on customer-investment*), namely, the increase in income generated from customers.

According to Porcu et al. (2019), IMC in the tourism industry, mainly the hotel industry, relates to the broadly integrated organization (Porcu et al., 2019). Meanwhile, according to Ngan et al. (2023), IMC is related to market performance (Ngan et al., 2023). A consistent and interactive communication plan has a substantial impact on market performance. Sustainable tourism development will influence the individual, family, society, and nation (Amerta, 2017). Integrated marketing communication in sustainable tourism should be modified to add value to trade, property, handicraft, and other sectors, thus boosting local industry growth (Dai, 2022; Panasiuk, 2017). Sustained IMC aims at realizing societal welfare. It actively involves society in making decisions. Such an involvement of the local community will enhance their motivation to develop their area to be much better.

According to Noronha, developing sustainable tourism can be done in three phases: (1) finding; (2) response and initiative of the local community; (3) institutionalizing. The response and initiative of the local community can be in the form of MSMEs, which serve as an economic buffer for the tourism sector (Travis, 2011). As a buffer of the economy, MSMEs should be standardized institutionally, increasing public trust in the brand. MSMEs contribute significantly to a country's job creation and economic growth (Disli et al., 2023). For example, MSMEs in India play a role as the economic backbone in reducing employment and eradicating poverty, mainly in rural and less-developed areas (Kotak Mahendara Bank, 2015). MSMEs also contribute substantially to eradicating poverty and improving the socioeconomic conditions of poor people in East Asia (Harvie, 2003). MSME growth affects poverty alleviation in various economic sectors. A poor society involved in MSMEs plays a role in increasing



economic growth nationally or even internationally (Nursini, 2020). The study by Jatmiko et. al (2021) reveals that increasing MSME competitiveness requires several aspects: business strategy, human resources, information technology, product, promotion, partnership, and CSR (Jatmiko et al., 2021). Also, MSMEs can be Indonesia's primary economic development booster (Arifin et al., 2021).

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a case study method by chronologically investigating a city or region. This method allows for studying the actual condition and situation of the environment and the people in the region (Yin, 2018). This study relates to managing integrated marketing communication for sustainable tourism based on MSMEs in Garut Regency, Indonesia. According to Creswell, a case study consists of several stages: (1) identification; (2) specific case; (3) understanding; (4) approach; (5) description; (6) theme; (7) conclusion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection techniques include direct observation, archive collection, interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. A case study is suitable for extensively and deeply explaining social phenomena (Yin, 2018).

The informants of this study are those involved in developing marketing communication for tourism, including central and regional stakeholders, tourism driving community, sociocultural community, MSMEs, local community around the tourism sites, academia, and media organizations. According to Yin, case studies can employ five data analysis techniques: pattern matching, explanation building, time series analysis, program logic models, and cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2015). This study employs pattern matching, analyzing empirical patterns developed through the research proposition. Denzin and Lincoln differentiated triangulation into four types: sources, methods, theory, and data (Denzin et al., 2023). This study employs data validity techniques of theory, source, and data. Triangulation of the source means comparing information from each source. Information is compared with the data obtained from the field observation. Several theories were used to explain the phenomenon, and



data were obtained through interviews. One of them is through observation in some locations with similar characteristics.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Indonesian government, through the regional government acting as the policymaker in the region, is expected to keep improving economic growth by creating opportunities and utilizing the available resources in each area. Regional governments can partner with various parties to develop sustainable tourism. The Indonesian government also supports MSMEs in contributing more to exports. As the backbone of the economy, MSMEs have contributed 60.5% to Indonesian GDP and absorbed almost 97% of employment. In fact, the number of MSMEs has increased to 64 million entities. MSME contribution in the next five years was targeted to reach 9% for the export market (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian RI, 2025). Such a policy in the central government is also implemented at the regional level of government.

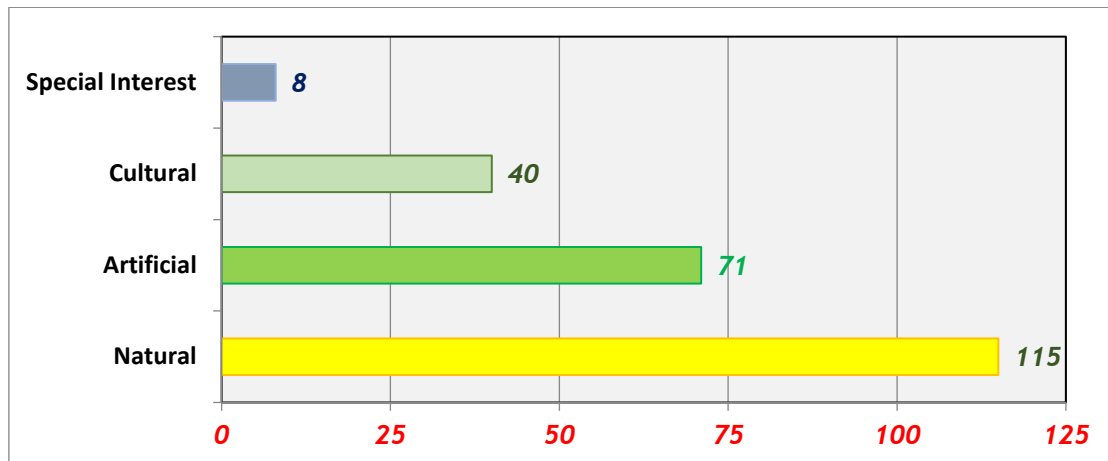
As outlined earlier, according to BPS, someone is categorized as poor if his or her monthly expenditure is a maximum of Rp535,547. The average per capita income in Garut is only Rp367,681. This amount is way below the poverty line in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Garut Regency has potential in its tourism and trade sectors that can be developed sustainably to reduce poverty. Currently, the Garut government is conducting a contest for branding of this regency, namely: (1) Joyful Garut, (2) Garut Gurilap, (3) Garut SAE (See And Explore), (4) Garut Intan Tatar Priangan, (5) Absolut Garut. These brands indicate that Garut Regency has the potential to develop its sectors that will boost trade and economic development.

The mission of Garut Regency is to increase the economic independence of society based on local potential and agriculture, as well as competitive tourism, by paying attention to sustainable natural resources. Tourism development activities include: 1) tourism destination following the principle of 4A (Attraction, Accessibility, Amenity, Ancillary); 2) industry in various businesses related to tourism; 3) marketing through market analysis and promotion for various tourism-related activities; 4) institutionalization through

determining human resources and organization of tourism, as well as procedures for tourism development. Mapping the data for tourism potential has been conducted, covering natural, artificial, cultural, and special interest tourism, totaling 234 destinations as shown in the following figure:

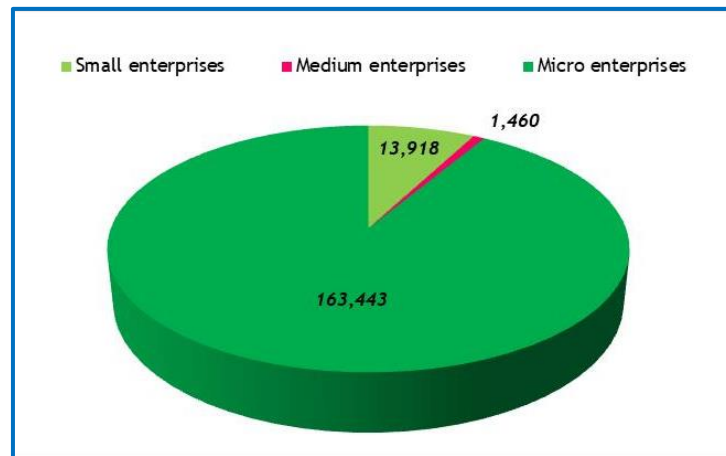
Figure 3

Number of Tourist Destination in Garut Regency 2024



Source: (Garut Satu Data, 2025)

Breakthrough change needs to be conducted to strengthen economic growth through rebranding Garut Regency as a sustainable tourism destination based on MSMEs. A large number of MSMEs should be utilized to improve Garut Regency and increase society's economic independence. Most business entities already have a Business Identification Number (NIB) as an entity's identity, which was provided via the Online Single Submission (OSS) system. The number of business entities in Garut Regency with NIB is shown in the following figure :

**Figure 4***Number of Business Entities in Garut Regency with NIB*

Source: Research Finding

The Garut Regency government has made various efforts to support MSMEs and develop sustainable tourism. Partnerships have also been conducted between MSMEs, the government, and other stakeholders. One specific program was also launched by the regional government together with the Cooperatives and Small Business Service (Disduk) of West Java Province, namely, creating the program of “UMKM Naik Kelas” (MSMEs get to the Next Level) in Garut Regency. In this program, training and assistance were given to 120 MSMEs. This program aims to increase the competence of MSMEs so their products will be more competitive nationally and internationally. At the minimum, their products will be marketable outside Garut. Also, the program includes skill enhancement for business actors and business matching with investment, financing, and business partnerships. Some 86.212 (15%) business actors work in formal business, and 85.814 (99%) micro enterprises are categorized based on the size of capital. Micro enterprises focus on the food processing industry, which results in a homogeneous product and identity. Thus, their competitiveness is relatively low. It implies the urgency to develop the potential of local MSMEs so their products will be more competitive and able to increase society's welfare.

Garut has 567.230 business actors dominated by necessity entrepreneurs, lacking innovation. Those business actors run their businesses because they are forced to do so due to the existing conditions. Therefore, although they run the business independently, they do not consider customer valuation. They rarely calculate the economic aspect, such as profit or loss calculation. Entrepreneurs



with a high potential for revenue increase are those who can optimize opportunity; for that reason, they are called opportunity entrepreneurs (Urban, 2012). The study by Sellidj (2023) in Aljazair reveals that necessity entrepreneurs are formed because of the needs of forces related to economic hardships, culture, low capital, and self-perception (Sellidj et al., 2023). Necessity entrepreneurs are common in many developing countries (Salih et al., 2024). One weakness of a necessity entrepreneur is the lack of competitiveness, resulting in poor business growth.

The regional government supports creating high-quality job opportunities, which is expected to improve MSME productivity. That is why the regional government improves MSME productivity through the following activities:

1. Developing cooperatives in the production sector. Specifically, the government develops agromarine based cooperatives, improves the human resource capability of the cooperatives, and strengthens the supervision of the cooperatives.
2. Increasing business capacity and access to productive resources by conducting the following activities: expanding access for business licensing, providing schemes and facilities for business financing, providing competency-based training, expanding market access, involving MSMEs in the value chain ecosystem of superior commodities, accelerating digitalization and utilization of appropriate technology, and improving product quality through standardization and certification.
3. Developing entrepreneurship by conducting the following activities: business incubation, providing an integrated platform that connects entrepreneurs with the ecosystem, increasing the capability of labor and MSME actors through training and assistance, and updating regulations on national entrepreneurship development.

Efforts to improve the quality and capability to gain economic independence must involve MSME development. Some factors contributing to the low MSME development are: 1) tight competition among MSMEs, 2) low capability and skill of the MSME actors, 3) relatively low capital, and 4) the informal characteristic of MSME business. In consequence, the efforts to





develop the market competitiveness of MSMEs can be made in two categories as follows:

1. Empowering the cooperatives and micro enterprises, given to the business entities aged 0-2 years. This program will facilitate business legality and product development activities, NIB for micro enterprises, and licensing of cooperative establishments. Halal certification and home industry food production certificate (SPP-IRT) can also be provided or encouraged to ensure compliance with the prevailing regulations. These can give quality assurance for the offered products, thus increasing customer trust.
2. Empowering the cooperatives and micro enterprises, given to the business entities aged more than 2 years. Having been provided with business licensing, the micro enterprises must be redeveloped and upgraded to move to the next level: small businesses. The activity can include facilitating product packaging enhancement and making the products more competitive in the market.

The government conducted empowerment programs to strengthen the regional economy and improve economic equality. In this regard, the roles of cooperatives and MSMEs were strengthened to improve the regional economy. The Garut Regency government also provided coaching through direct meetings and using a special car called a 'Mobil Layanan' or 'Moyan' (Service Car). The services include free assistance for MSMEs obtaining NIB, halal certification, and packaging design. The reasons for providing such services are as follows. First, MSMEs tend to be informal and do not have a legal entity. Second, they tend not to have a proper accounting or bookkeeping system, with limited capital and capabilities. Moyan was used to serve MSMEs in 421 villages across Garut Regency.

Innovations in the use of technology and virtual networks have created new tourism markets, driving economic recovery. It is important to make adjustments related to market supply and demand (Rodriguez-Barboza et al., 2024). In Garut Regency, innovation-based artificial intelligence (AI) was also conducted as a breakthrough in improving the competitiveness of MSMEs, namely by establishing the MyOpiA (Make Your Own Packaging Design Through



AI) program. This innovation was made to answer the MSME ecosystem challenges by highlighting the conditions and potential of Garut Regency, rich in unique features. MyOpia was designed to enhance product competitiveness by making innovative packaging. This technology utilization reduced production costs by 10-20%. This program has also enabled MSMEs to run their business more professionally to enter the global market. Those results align with a prior study, revealing that creativity, digital technology adoption, government policy, and partnership with various stakeholders improved MSME growth in Poliwali Mandar, West Sulawesi (Sunuantari et al., 2021). In short, technology-based marketing innovation is much more important now than ever before. This is also supported by a prior study, which reveals that high technology adoption, such as AI, consumer-based services, government regulation, brand reputation, and strategic partnership, affects market performance (Li, 2024).

Based on our study, marketing programs were manually conducted so far, contributing to the products' poor competitiveness on a global scale. That creates an issue in today's era, where speed is more important to build a better brand image. An AI-based platform provided freely by the government can reduce such issues. This breakthrough was intended to enhance the product image of MSMEs so that they could be more competitive with their rivals. The platform also helps MSMEs minimize cost barriers when marketing their products. To be successful, the AI-based platform for MSMEs should also be used by qualified and competent human resources; therefore, they are expected to enhance product competitiveness in the global market. It is clear that innovation-based digital technology is of paramount importance in global competition. Additionally, digital technology provides more opportunities for MSMEs to reach a broader market and improve their marketing efficiency (Hendrawan et al., 2024).

In addition to marketing, the quality of human resources is an important challenge for MSME management. Based on our observation, 545 owners of MSMEs are junior high school graduates. Improving human resources' quality includes improving their digital-based technology literacy. Business training is also important to improve the owners' capability to analyze their product





weaknesses and strengths. Besides, business modeling and planning can be introduced, mainly for micro and small enterprises.

Meanwhile, coaching branding for a product needs to be conducted to help MSMEs actors recognize the importance of brand building for a product to be offered to potential and existing consumers. The program should introduce AI and allow the MSMEs actors to implement digital technology in their marketing activities. However, technology adoption among MSMEs was low, primarily in e-commerce. This technological adoption gap was even more prevalent in rural areas. We believe that the portion of digital technology training should be increased, mainly in e-commerce. It will help the MSME actors improve their digital marketing strategy according to their needs. To do so, the MSMEs must also identify their products' strengths and weaknesses in formulating the appropriate strategy. The results of research by Shukaili et al. (2025) show that non-financial support provided by the Omani government to support MSME promotional activities, such as the establishment of business networks for marketing development, service provision, training, mentoring, and technology utilization, has had a positive impact on MSME development (Shukaili et al., 2025).

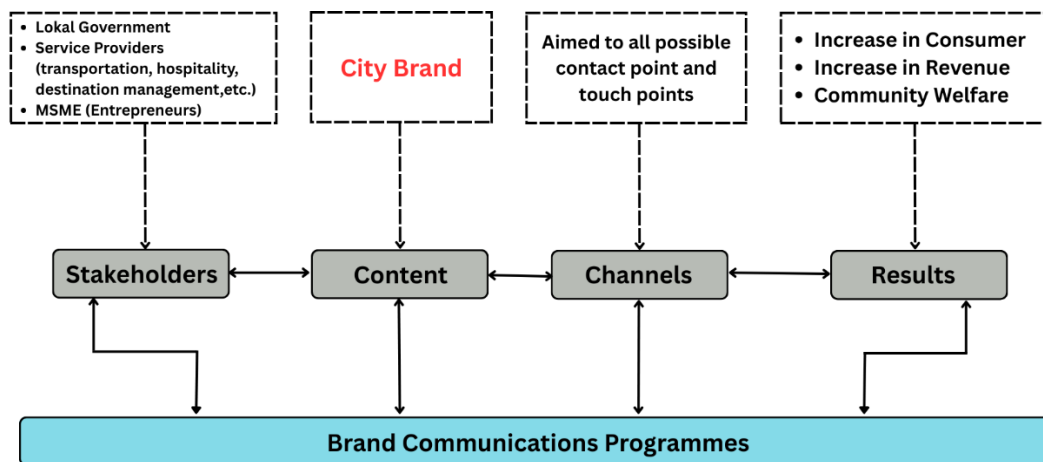
A strategic partnership in Garut regency involving all stakeholders will create opportunities to develop sustainable tourism based on MSMEs. The partnership among government, academia, businesses, media, and community, known as Pentahelix, should also pay attention to the characteristics of society as the object of development. To some extent, the involvement of society should reach a point where they are not just the object, but also the subject of this sustainable tourism. Community involvement in planning and implementing marketing communication will be the enabler for society. Such involvement of the community in the tourism communication activities will develop tourism branding (Sunuantari, 2021). Moreover, cultural factors strongly support MSME development. Cohesiveness of communities in the village areas is still strong, thus requiring both personal and group-based approaches. A personal approach can be taken by informal leaders in each area. It will accelerate society's acceptance of the innovation that will be developed. Technology adoption through group and informal leaders will strengthen

society's trust when the new idea emerges. Society will take action when it sees the successful examples. Policymakers must understand such a condition when implementing IMC.

Based on the study findings, the model of integrated marketing communication of sustainable tourism based on MSMEs can be illustrated as follows.

Figure 5

Model of Integrated Marketing Communication Based on MSMEs



Source: Adapted from Kliatcho (2008) Based on Research Finding

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that having organized MSMEs is critical to creating a welfare society through integrated marketing communication to support sustainable tourism based on MSMEs. It can be attained by involving the stakeholders. They are policymakers (central and regional government), society, media, the private sector, the community, and academia. Regional regulations are used as a legal basis for managing sustainable MSMEs. Product innovation is a must for MSME actors to maintain business sustainability. In addition, rebranding for tourism products and other supportive products is needed. This is because the low product value will be challenging for conventional marketing to reach.

Promotion activities are important in implementing IMC to generate appropriate information about tourist destinations and MSME locations needed by tourists. Utilizing various communication media for promotion will improve



society's understanding of tourist destinations (Stancioiu et al., 2013). Using digital-based communication technology in promotion activities is critical in supporting MSMEs to go to an international level. Digital literacy is an important element in developing MSMEs, which are the backbone of the economy. In today's digital era, MSME actors must be technology literate. Additionally, capacity development of the standardized human resources for managing digital-based MSMEs is the key to marketing activities. The digital marketing skills of MSME actors will enable their products to be recognized globally. Standardization is also required for the products set as a brand, mainly to enhance public trust, allowing such a brand to be recognized locally, nationally, and globally.

Developing sustainable tourism will support the growth of tourist visits annually, thus impacting regional economic growth. The phenomenon of necessity entrepreneurship results in a lack of capability for improving the family's economic condition. Developing opportunity entrepreneurs among MSME actors in the tourist destinations is therefore important. Also, a review of the current policies of the regional government related to tourism development is required. Capacity development for MSME actors should be conducted continuously and sustainably. That is why partnerships among all stakeholders should be developed to create an economic ecosystem for a welfare society.

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