

The Role of Social Media Platforms in Promoting Kaamatan Festival During Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has emerged as a critical tool for creating, transmitting, and consuming information. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the event business. Event organizers must adhere to local government rules and public health requirements to avoid spreading the illness. Recently, Sabah's Harvest Festival, also known as *Pesta Kaamatan*, honored the celebration virtually, and as a result, this article aims to examine the role social media platforms serve in the Kadazan-Dusun community concerning the promotion of the Harvest Festival. Given that this is a new norm for many event attendees, we must comprehend how the audience perceives and prepares for the transition from physical to digital events. In addition, access to the internet is not always readily accessible in every location. In this study, researchers conduct in-depth interviews with Kadazan-Dusun members to learn more about their perspectives on Harvest Festival celebrations on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. The outcome of this study reveal that social media plays an integral role in promoting the virtual harvest festival among the KadazanDusun community. The roles include sharing medium, cultural event promotion, virtual competition medium, and information source. Nevertheless, there are challenges involved with celebrating virtual Kaamatan via various social media platforms, especially for those living in rural areas.

Keywords: Social Media, Covid-19 Pandemic, Harvest Festival, Virtual Festival, Kaamatan.

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) a worldwide public health emergency in January 2020, and it was declared a pandemic in March of the same year. Because of this pandemic, there has been a substantial rise in the amount

of content produced and distributed through digital media. According to the statistics, there has been a remarkable increase in the total number of people who use the internet and other social media platforms four months into the coronavirus pandemic. Since 2019, the number of people using the internet has increased by 7 %, and the number of people using social media has increased by more than 8 %. According to results released by Digital Information World, a staggering 3.9 billion people were using social media in July (<https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2019/07/3.5-billion-monthly-active-social-mediausers-globally.html>). This illustrates that as the epidemic spreads, individuals are increasingly communicating using social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp.

Furthermore, the Worldwide World Index statistics show that Facebook is the most popular social media network (<https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-mediastrategy/new-global-social-media-research/>) as of April 2020, with a 4% gain in popularity since the start of the global lockdown, while Instagram's growth since January 2020 is 4.5 %. According to a poll conducted under the COVID-19 Movement Control Order, 92% of Malaysians relied on YouTube as their primary source for watching the most television and video material (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1112677/malaysia-most-used-tv-videoservices-covid-19-mco/>). During the MCO, the top three platforms used by Malaysians were Youtube, Facebook Watch, and Netflix. Stay-at-home orders issued by the government to combat the spread of COVID-19 have had far-reaching societal consequences and a considerable influence on the cultural heritage business.

To sustain operations and enhance access to cultural treasures, cultural organizations worldwide have resorted to digital platforms that provide online exhibits, simulations, virtual visits, and tours of sites and museums. Similarly, social media provides an excellent chance to explore connective memory objectively via the discourse connected with uploaded photos using photo content analysis (de Juan, 2020).

Since social media has become an inseparable part of day-to-day life (Prideaux, 2018), the information it provides has become an indispensable resource for heritage studies. It displays people's ideas, sentiments, and opinions addressing contemporary events, social and technological trends, memes, and environmental catastrophes (Kietzmann, 2012). With the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has become a vital communication tool for information generation, diffusion, and consumption.

The widespread COVID-19 outbreak has profoundly impacted the events industry. To stop the virus from spreading further, event planners have a responsibility to adhere to the restrictions set out by the local government and the standards established by the public health community. Most events, including Sabah's Harvest Festival, also known as Pesta Kaamatan, the highlight of all yearly events in Sabah, have been reproduced as virtual events in 2021. The event was broadcasted live on social media to provide people who were interested with the opportunity to take part in and observe the celebration virtually. Aside from providing people from all over the globe with the chance to see this thrilling event, the broadcast also promotes the culture and traditions of Kadazandusun, which are emblematic of Sabah's commitment to maintaining a peaceful and harmonious environment. This study examines the role of social media platforms in promoting the Harvest Festival among the Kadazandusun community. This is considering the present scenario, in which travel restrictions are being placed in many locations throughout the globe, and it is now not permitted to have large-scale social gatherings. We need to understand how the public views the shift from physical

to digital events and how they prepare for it since this is the new normal for many people who attend events.

Literature Review

Digital Media as a Platform to Promote Social and Cultural Diversity

Following the fatal virus spread in 2020, significant changes were made to the operational procedures of companies and other organizations in response to the crisis. These changes affected all aspects of business, from production to marketing. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the events industry, as well as other economic sectors. Most of the activities were either postponed or cancelled all over the globe, including those scheduled to take place in Sabah. The debilitating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a significant and negative impact on the events sector. To assist in preventing the further spread of the virus, event organizers are obligated to adhere to the rules that have been established by public health professionals as well as the instructions given by the local government. As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO) has published a new paper that provides organizers of noteworthy events with general and COVID-19-specific recommendations for things to keep in mind. In this uncommon circumstance, event organizers are forced to reassess their alternatives and balance their responsibilities, which include ensuring the health and safety of their employees, sponsors, and spectators.

Furthermore, the event organizer must devise several methods to continue the company's event. Therefore, many meetings and conferences are conducted virtually. If adaptive, this meeting structure is the most effective option in these trying times. Virtual events, by their very definition, make it possible for anyone to attend even if they cannot travel, making it much easier to disseminate innovative knowledge.

The use of social media is crucial in many facets of the tourist industry, particularly in information search and decision-making behaviours, tourism marketing, and the concentration on best practices for engaging with customers. Utilizing social media as a platform to advertise tourism-related items has shown to be an effective marketing technique. The definition of social media is constantly shifting to accommodate new developments and growing diversity in its applications. Cohen (2011) provided a summary of thirty distinct definitions of social media, each approaching the topic from a unique angle. These definitions have shed light on several qualities and aspects of social media that are significant in their structure. Among them are social media, online tools, apps, platforms, and media, and are thus dependent on information technology. It is also known as a peer-to-peer communication channel that allows the interactive web's content creation, collaboration, and exchange by participants and the public, aspects that make significant and widespread changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals. Finally, social media connects users to establish a virtual community by facilitating sharing of information and ideas.

Social media has evolved as a new means for individuals to engage socially by combining information and communication technology (such as mobile and web-based technologies), social interaction, and the creation of text, photographs, videos, and music. It is more than just a new means of communicating; it is a whole online world based on the contributions and interactions of members. The rise of social media has been exponential over the last several years. It plays an increasingly essential role in various facets of tourism, particularly in information search and decision-making behaviours (Fotis, 2012), tourist promotion, and in

concentrating on best practices for connecting with customers through social media channels such as social sharing of holiday experiences.

According to Fotis (2012), using social media as a platform to sell tourism-related goods and services has shown to be a practical approach. Furthermore, many nations see social media as a crucial instrument to promote their tourist industry. Thus, the event organizer must devise various business tactics to ensure the longevity of their event company. As a result, there is no room for debate on the significance of social media in celebrating virtual festivals. Research by Estanyol, 2022 on traditional Festivals and covid-19 illustrates how online events offer an alternative when it cannot organize events at their physical locations due to external reasons. Fairs, fiestas, and festivals are special events that may play a significant part in both the day-to-day life of a community and its economic growth and development. Over the last decade, such events' number, popularity, and diversity have expanded. These festivities result in various advantages, some of which are purely economic, such as increased revenue and job opportunities.

In contrast, others are more intangible, such as their function in boosting identity and creating more crucial social unity. In other words, because of their connection to a specific site, they can be considered tourist attractions that revitalize local traditions, positively influencing both the living circumstances and the image of the city or region. In addition, the regular occurrence of cultural festivities indicates a high cultural value. Nevertheless, they do not feature a particular program that offers culture-in-itself that differs from year to year. Instead, they represent a cultural and aesthetic expression based on established habits that reflect the uniqueness of a particular community and are, by definition, unique each time they are held. One of the areas in which the tourist industry is expanding at the quickest rate is the field of festivals and other special events. Festivals have helped to bring people together, which has improved the quality of life for individuals who attend festivals. Festivals are widely acknowledged for their ability to improve the image and attractiveness of a place, increase the number of possibilities available for leisure activities, contribute to local economies, and develop a sense of community pride.

Challenges of Social Media Platform

Chattopadhyay and Mohanty (2022) conducted qualitative research among Lodha tribals in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district to assess how access to digital media has influenced young people's social and cultural life in this tribal civilization. The research looked at whether there was a link between the availability of new media and the cultural marginalization of young people. Therefore, to direct their study, they set research goals, one of which is to explore how the advent of digital media has impacted the social and cultural life of the Lodha tribal people who reside in Odisha.

The findings indicate a clear association between the use of contemporary media by Lodha youth and their lack of cultural connection. Young members of the tribe were leaving the traditional cultural institutions that their predecessors had known in favor of a more urbanized way of life. This was a significant departure from what their ancestors had experienced. In addition, this study examines how the introduction of modern media technology, which has various channels, has undoubtedly impacted how indigenous people live their lives. Everything, from agricultural techniques to health and educational material, is readily available via a straightforward procedure that consists of clicking and going. Although tribal men and women are not well-versed in the technical parts of software, they are excellent at handling feature phones and smartphones that are provided with internet access.

In contrast to indigenous women, however, males dominate modern media due to the money sources that enable them to employ modern mediums. This contrasts with the position of indigenous women, who dominate traditional media. Most young Lodha women cannot take advantage of these digital opportunities because of their low socioeconomic situations. The research findings reveal that there has been a significant shift in the media landscape in the rural parts of India, mainly because of two factors: in recent years, both the technology and software associated with media have made significant developments. The availability of low-cost smartphones with low-cost monthly data plans, DTH TVs with free-to-air channels, and a range of regional language applications has encouraged rural teenagers to engage with the virtual world. In addition, the government of India has taken it upon itself, with the support of several commercial partners, to provide digital connections to India's rural regions at an affordable price.

Ginzarly and Srour (2022) investigated cultural heritage through the lens of COVID19 in their research. The study's purpose is to understand better the myriad of feelings and cognitive processes associated with the online sharing of cultural heritage during challenging times. As a result, to accomplish this goal, they examined two Instagram hashtags, #shareourheritage, and #shareculture, which are promoted worldwide by UNESCO. As indicated by words such as home, virtual, online, travel tomorrow, and museums from home, the research indicates that people regard the virtual world as a substitute for losing their physical location. Online access to cultural content during mass incarceration might reduce social isolation and loneliness and serve many communities' educational and creative needs (Samaroudi, 2020).

Moreover, photo-sharing networks like Instagram are often considered as either venue where community viewpoints and experiences arise as a consequence of picture exchange or as visual archives where sharing photographs in the present naturally leads to a collective interpretation of the past, resulting in collective perspectives, experiences, and memories (van Dijck, 2011). Photo sharing on social media is a cultural expression, according to Crawshaw (2002), since photos result from selecting, sculpting, and constructing elements of the physical world to represent the photographer's mental image. As a result, sharing images on social media is driven by a combination of social and practical concerns (Ames & Naaman, 2007). The widespread habit of sharing on social media has affected many aspects of everyday life, including heritage traditions, which are now substantially mediated by digital technology. In addition, there are many distinct ways in which digital technologies are used to mediate cultural heritage.

As social media has become an essential part of everyday life (Prideaux, 2018), its integrated metadata is proving to be an excellent resource for heritage studies, providing insights into the viewpoints, reactions, and opinions around current events, social and technological trends, memes, and natural catastrophes (Kietzmann, 2012). In addition, the tags that people add to photographs on social media platforms are included in the metadata of the images. *Folksonomy* is a concept that refers to the phrases or tags that different people believe best define the subject matter of an image. Folksonomies, which are context-driven and describe the meaning of items, have a high degree of semantic value (Al-khalifa & Davis, 2006). Furthermore, due to network effects, sharing tags with others or seeing people in the context of what other people have tagged increases the value of tags and people (Vander Wal, 2005). Trant (2009) describes tagging as a process that includes users' selection of terminology, folksonomy as the resulting collective language, and social tagging as the sociotechnical context in which tagging happens, emphasizing social computing and

networks. Users have the option of tagging images with words of their choosing and tagging with hashtags that are either widely used or that have been specifically promoted.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed sports organizations to adapt and develop novel methods to market their sport and sustain interest among customers. This is because the pandemic has caused an increase in the number of people who are infected with COVID-19. As a result, social media is a significant route that may assist in spreading compelling messages to a bigger audience and seek to motivate people to engage in physical exercise and sports. Because social media looks to be deeply embedded in the sports sector, chances for sports organizations and individuals to maintain this form of involvement will persist after the pandemic has ended. Research by Hayes (2020) on social media and encouraging physical activity during COVID-19 and beyond reveals that many sports organizations have faced difficulties due to their restricted capacity to participate in various sports activities because of the social distance required to slow the spread of COVID-19. In addition, social media plays a part in giving a platform for athletes, such as female and paraathletes, who have been overlooked by conventional media coverage. Therefore, it might lead to various role models accessible to the community. However, while choosing athletes for physical activity campaigns, sporting organizations need to be mindful of the fact that the more the degree of similarity between a role model and a consumer, the greater the likelihood that a role model's behaviour would be relevant to the consumer, which may then lead to the consumer imitating the role model. Moreover, demotivating effects may arise if a role model is not both relevant and reasonable in their behaviour (Meier, 2015).

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs in-depth interviews with members of the Kadazan-Dusun community to discover more about their perspectives on celebrating a virtual harvest festival on social media during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Therefore, a qualitative research method is used for this study. Qualitative research comprises collecting and analysing nonnumerical data to get in-depth knowledge of a subject or generate novel research ideas. A component of this method is the interpretation of outcomes offered in words, pictures, or physical objects. One of the instruments used in the qualitative research approach is Nvivo 12. It assists researchers with collecting, analysing, and deriving conclusions from interviews and unstructured data. The phrase "research design" refers to the overall strategy used by researchers to combine various study components logically. The use of research logic guarantees that all research questions and challenges have been addressed.

Setting

This study was participated by the Kadazan-Dusun community in Sabah. Most participants come from rural areas of Sabah and work in Kota Kinabalu. These participants were selected because they had experience celebrating Kaamatan festivals in their hometown and the city where they worked. Therefore, their opinion on the virtual celebration of Kaamatan through social media is both essential and valuable to this research.

Participant

In this study, a purposive sample method is used. The participants were Kadazan-Dusun community and had similar experiences regarding their internet network experience and social media users. Alvi (2016) stated that purposive sampling is utilized in qualitative research

when the researcher has specified specific criteria that must be followed; hence, sampling does not include everyone available for the study but just those who match the predetermined criteria. Therefore, participants are chosen based on their fundamental similarity: they are all KadazanDusun who work in Kota Kinabalu. Between the ages of 28 and 35 years old. Participants' names are kept anonymous for the duration of the research to protect their privacy.

Data Analysis and Procedure

In this study, face-to-face interviews are conducted and recorded. Therefore, the researcher will transcribe the audio recorded and create themes associated with the research questions. The data of this research are analysed using a method known as theme analysis, whereby the themes are extracted to address the research objectives. The interview transcript was imported into NVivo 12 and evaluated using the three-step coding process in this research. NVivo is designed to assist prevalent qualitative methods for organizing, analysing, and sharing research data. Data management, investigation, and the identification of patterns are all possible using NVivo. Since the procedure is sequential, the researcher will need to repeat the selections numerous times to validate them and recode them. Furthermore, the researcher would be able to check to see whether the received data matches the codes and classifications. Thus, the researcher can explain and clarify how things operate together when enough information has been extracted from the data.

Finding and Discussion

Based on the thematic analysis, there are three major themes which include (1) the Kaamatan celebration before pandemic (2) the role of social media platforms in promoting Kaamatan Festival, and (3) Challenges in using Social Media Platform among Kadazan-Dusun Community.

The Kaamatan Celebration Before Pandemic

In Sabah, Malaysia, the Kadazan-Dusun people have a long history of working with rice paddy cultivation. While those who live in the hills and farther inland plant dry paddy, people who live in the coastal plains and lowlands grow wet paddy. The rice yield is of the highest importance to these agricultural communities. Given its prominence in their life, it is not surprising that paddy's planting, cultivation, and harvesting have immense spiritual significance for the Kadazan-Dusun. This could be seen in the following excerpt where the respondent expressed:

When we finish harvesting the rice, we usually process the harvested rice to taste new rice. It is a symbol of gratitude for the end of harvesting the rice itself. This is because the harvest session took a long time to finish, so we wanted to show appreciation by tasting the new rice with the family. Apart from eating new rice, we do something like a family gathering. We also played traditional games, Karaoke, and many more. This is how we celebrated kaamatan Festival before the pandemic (Informant 3).

Most respondents said that before the COVID-19 pandemic, they and their families often attended celebrations of this holiday at the local community hall. Additionally, the celebration varies across districts. However, the most prominent festivities are *Sugandoi* and *Unduk Ngadau*.

Before the Covid-19 Pandemic took effect, we celebrated kaamatan activities physically with family members. We had a small gathering and having meals together, traditional drinks and participated in traditional games such as managon (traditional storytelling competition) ,sugandoi (singing competition) and unduk ngadau (traditional beauty pageant) (informant 1) Before the covid-19 pandemic, we had a physical kaamatan celebration, or Harvest Festival, held physically at Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association or KDCA hall. During that time, we can participate in activities such as singing or sugandoi, memalu gong, traditional sports, dancing, traditional beauty pageant or unduk ngadau, and many more (Informant 2).

We celebrated the kaamatan festival at my hometown before the highlight event on May 30 and 31. Usually, in my village, there are 7 houses, and there is a rotation system. This means that every year the celebration in the village will be held in a different house. Every family will have a gathering, and that's where families from far away come. The activities are more like thanksgiving celebrations. There are meals and games sessions with relatives who rarely see each other. Before attending the highlight event at KDCA, the festival will take place at balairaya or the community hall. And the activities are also the same as at the KDCA, but in small groups only among the villagers. For example, Unduk ngadau, sugandoi, traditional food competition, managon traditional storytelling, and many more (Informant 4).

Before the pandemic, usually the way we celebrated the kaamatan was, of course, we would gather with family and friends, and there would be a kaamatan program, for example, the celebration at the districts level, and the main highlight event will be held at KDCA on 30 and 31 Mei every year. People will come from all over Sabah to celebrate the highlight event at KDCA. Before the pandemic, usually the way we celebrated the kaamatan was, of course, we would gather with family and friends, and there would be a kaamatan program, for example, the celebration at the districts level, and the main highlight event will be held at KDCA on 30 and 31 Mei every year. People will come from all over Sabah to celebrate the highlight event at KDCA (Informant 5).

Before the pandemic, we celebrate the harvest festival by attending Mass or prayer at the church and continue the celebration at home with family and friends. We also celebrate it together with other villagers where we will gather at balai raya or community hall. Hmm.. Sugandoi which is the singing competition, managon (traditional storytelling), unduk ngadau (traditional beauty pageant) and also traditional sports (Informant 6).

Furthermore, Kaamatan is a celebration of togetherness. The responses indicate that each district celebrates this holiday differently. However, the most significant event for most of them is the traditional beauty contest, also known as *Unduk Ngadau*, and the singing competition, also known as *Sugandoi*. Moreover, several respondents also welcomed it with a thanksgiving prayer in Church. Hence, the celebration showed the community's diversity despite their shared appreciation of the event.

The Role of Social Media Platforms in Promoting Virtual Kaamatan Festival

The term "social media" refers to computer/internet-based technologies and mass-personal communication channels that promote interactions among users and via virtual networks and communities. Social media facilitates widespread communication by exchanging information, documents, films, and images, enabling anybody to broadcast information to a large audience. According to Statista, as of January 2021, some of the most popular social media platforms are Facebook (2.74 billion users), YouTube (2.29 billion users), WhatsApp (2 billion users), Instagram (1.22 billion users), and TikTok (689 million users).

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the emergence and growth of social media as a viable means of quick information distribution. As they enable people to continue ongoing connections with a vast and varied network of contacts, social media, and associated technologies can be social capital enhancers. Although individuals often develop social capital due to regular contact with friends, co-workers, and strangers, it is also feasible to make deliberate investments in social interaction (Resnick, 2002).

Medium of Sharing

The Kadazan-Dusun community utilized this social media to participate in celebrating the harvest festival online during the COVID-19 pandemic. People can only watch the event digitally since all the activities will take place online. As a result, people share information about their favourite finalists (*sugandoi* and *unduk ngadau*) through social media. The first informant stated:

If friends or family join a Sugandoi competition or an online dance competition, I will help them share their video in my Facebook feed and share it on whatsapp with other families (Informant 1).

Following this statement, the informants utilize Facebook platforms to watch the event virtually and WhatsApp to share the information with friends and family. This was mentioned by informant 4 and informant 2:

Because even young people and their parents already have Facebook, right? So, since everyone have these platforms, we use it to share information on kaamatan celebration among each other. If we get the information on facebook, we will paste the link on whatsapp so everyone can get information about the event (Informant 4).

We share the information on whatsapp and facebook. If not, we just share it by words of mouth. The video shared on social media mostly about the kaamatan celebration, competition schedule such as the unduk ngadau and sugandoi competition. That's life in the village, exchanging information among each other (Informant 2).

As we can see from this excerpt, the value of social media lies in its capacity to facilitate connections and the exchange of information with any individual or group simultaneously. Although there are various applications for social media, they are all intended to accomplish the same thing. The primary objective and purpose of social media is to communicate. People may communicate ideas, information, and even obscene or humorous images and videos.

Users have complete choice over the content they see on social media platforms, so nobody can make them read anything they do not want to. The social media user may select who to be friends with what information to see, what information to click on to learn more about, what information to believe, whom to accept messages from, and eventually, to have an active presence on social media. According to Baruah (2012), social media is integral to exchanging ideas.

Consequently, social networking services let users share ideas, activities, events, and hobbies with their networks. Web-based social networking services link individuals with shared interests and activities across cultural, political, economic, and geographical boundaries. Consequently, the Kadazan-Dusun Community is using this technology to directly improve the Harvest festival celebration, which may indirectly contribute to community unity and togetherness, which is one of the celebration's primary objectives.

Medium of Cultural Event Promotion

The use of social media provides us with several different channels we may use to interact with other people. For instance, Tourism, as mentioned by Klien (1999), is a hybrid industry dominated by information that provides a physical and authentic service. This shows the one-of-a-kind nature of the tourism industry and implies that technology in the virtual world may be as effective as marketing in the real world. As a result, social media platforms have the potential to serve as proper instruments in the promotion of cultural events, which in turn contribute to Sabah's tourist economy. The excerpt shows that:

This celebration will be increasingly recognized, not only in Sabah but outside of Sabah. For example, the story about Huminodun history which is very insightful especially for the young people to know more about their culture (Informant 2).

My suggestion is that this live streaming on Facebook should be continued in the future. So that everyone can watch this celebration, whether outside or inside Sabah. For example, like me in Tamparuli, I can watch the kaamatan activities on Facebook. People outside Sabah also can watch the celebration and they also can know more about our celebration (Informant 3).

So, it's better to use the familiar platform to promote the Harvest Festival among our people. After all, not only it will help reaching out our community but people outside our community can also know about our culture. Indirectly we already help promoting our culture (Informant 4).

But when it comes to the effectiveness of using social media platforms to reach out to a wider audience, for example promotion related to the unduk ngadau competition, who represents each district, promotion in terms of traditional attire from each districts promotion of activities throughout the kaamatan, for me it is very effective because it can reach a wider audience which is outside and inside Sabah. For me, online platforms can be used as an addition to reaching out to a broader audience to introduce the variety and uniqueness of our culture (Informant 5).

According to the response given by the informants, social media does play a significant role as a medium in the process of marketing the cultural event not only inside Sabah but also

outside Sabah. The tourism business is one of the fields in which modern communication technology has had one of the most significant effects (Hughes, Martin, Morgan, Robson, 2010). As a result, global tourism attractions compete for tourists. Having an online presence and adequately managing social media are the two most crucial factors in attracting tourists and increasing the recognition of localities. Informants 1 and 6 indicate:

When we do live streaming on Facebook, we can also help promote our culture to other people because they, too, can watch the event online (Informant 1)

People outside Sabah can also watch the event virtually and learn about our culture (Informant 6).

Therefore, this study gives continuity to the growing literature on the impact of social media on promoting cultural celebration.

Source of Information

Social media is used to disseminate information. The information may be accurate or inaccurate or represent the author's perspective. The information that circulates via social media has the potential to alter an individual's or a group's beliefs. The Kadazan-Dusun community uses this social media as a source of information to celebrate Kaamatan digitally. Participants 1, 2, and 4 stated that they utilize Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube to exchange and get information within their group

I have seen advertisements on social media. For example the promotion of unduk ngadau and sugandoi on Facebook. So for me this promotion was a success because I also wanted to watch the live streaming event on Facebook (Informant 1).

So, we get the information about kaamatan festival from Facebook. Apart from that, we use whatsapp to share the information among us. On whatsapp, we create a group so that it will be easier to share information (Informant 4).

I got the information from youtube. However, some of my friends got it from Facebook (Informant 2).

From the extract, it is evident that the Kadazan-Dusun Community uses Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp to share and find out information about the virtual Kaamatan event. This thereby confirmed the Statista website's statement that, as of January 2021, Facebook (2.74 billion users), YouTube (2.29 billion users), and WhatsApp were the most popular social media platforms (2 billion users). This is also shown by the responses of informants 3, 5, and 6:

We only watch through Facebook, and we get the information about Virtual Harvest Festival through Whatsapp. The reasons being is... That's the only platform we can get the information about this kaamatan event. I think it's very effective because we can get the information on our social media and not wait until the event day to get the information (Informant 3).

Frankly, based on my experience, the information i get from these social media is mostly about sugandoi and unduk ngadau. And many of my friends on Facebook are promoting their favorite participants to gain a vote on social media. And also, they promote the highlight event at KDCA.

Following my experience, those were the only events people promoted at that time (Informant 5).

Most of the time people share the information about participants of unduk ngadau and also sugandoi (Informant 6).

In general, Facebook event pages and social media make it easier for attendees to find local events, read reviews, and build more connections with the public; these aspects are crucial for event organizers and enhance total attendance (Becker, 2009). Additionally, social interactions between followers on Facebook event pages would create an emotionally engaging atmosphere, which may enhance participation. Therefore, these platforms may also assist the virtual Kaamatan festival.

Medium of Virtual Competition

Although there are many benefits to virtual events, engaging the audience in the same way as a traditional in-person event may be challenging. Because of the advantages that come with it, social media has emerged as one of the most powerful platforms, particularly if we can tap into the audience using the finest social media management tools. Compared to all other channels, social media certainly stands out as one of the most effective ways to promote events and engage audiences. Due to the pandemic, the Kaamatan festival was held virtually. Consequently, the main organizer used social media to conduct the event virtually. Among the highlights of this yearly event are the sugandoi and unduk ngadau competitions. This is shown by the responses of informants 3 and 4, who stated:

I didnt join as participant but I watched the activities which is sugandoi. This is a good platform for the sabahan who want to join sugandoi. This is because before Covid-19 pandemic, those who live far from Penampang could not enter the competition. But when it is held online, many talented participants participate in this Sugandoi competition (Informant 3).

For example, in the past, events like Sugandoi were the main attraction, so there were people who took part online. In which the person involved may join the Sugandoi online (Informant 4).

When a contest is conducted effectively, it is an excellent approach to attracting a significant following. People may not be aware of a product or an event until they have heard about it after it has been shared by their family, friends, and social circles – and a contest would most surely assist them in doing that precisely. When addressing the advantages of conducting the event virtually, creating a community is undoubtedly essential. Through social media contests, for instance, companies spend a great deal of effort cultivating communities in their immediate vicinity. The way social media competitions are implemented nowadays, participants are often encouraged to speak out and tell their friends and family about it.

During the virtual Kaamatan event, the organizers use this platform to hold the *Sugandoi* and *Unduk Ngadau* competitions where the audience can vote for their favorite competitors. Participants 1 and 2 responded that they would share that their friends shared the video for them to vote.

I did not join, but my friend participated in the sugandoi competition. He submits his singing video to the main organizer, and then they will be shared on Facebook. So, on Facebook, people can vote for their favorite participant. Likewise, with other activities such as unduk ngadau and Mr kaamatan. So, everything will be transparent if the match is made virtually (Informant 1).

I can also see the comment section on Facebook which is helping me to vote and share to my facebook feeds about my favorite participants in unduk ngadau competitions to help them win the competition.this is because during the pandemic, the unduk ngadau can only participate it online to gain vote from people. And then the highest votes will then participate at KDCA where they showcase the event virtually (Informant 6).

According to the responses, social media is a powerful medium for community engagement, as seen by the virtual competition. This was visible in how the audiences shared their votes and discussed their favourite finalists. In addition to creating a fan page for the contestant using this voting mechanism, users also create a page for the contestant. They will indirectly establish a community using this fan page base as their primary platform. Therefore, social media is an effective tool for promoting brand awareness in the Kadazan-Dusun culture. For instance, the Kaamatan festival, which is held once a year and is a cultural event, has already established itself as a brand within the community. Therefore, social media is an excellent platform for the *Sugandoi* or *Unduk Ngadau* candidates to leverage the Facebook page to get votes and promote this cultural event to interact with the audiences. This may be done by using the hashtag #sugandoi or #undukngadau. Social media significantly impacts a company's product recognition in the community (Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). The result of this research is the *Sugandoi* and *Unduk Ngadau* participants. Therefore, it is essential to monitor these behaviors on Facebook and other social networks to identify social network users and build marketing and communications strategies to convert followers into paying clients (voters).

Challenges in Using Social Media Platform Among Kadazandusun Community

Social media connects individuals all over the globe, regardless of their differences or the physical limits that separate them from one another. However, diverse cultures highly emphasize the customs, beliefs, and standards that are unique to them. According to Chen and Zhang (2010), "thanks to the confluence of new media and globalization, the compression of time and space has compressed the globe into a much smaller interacting field." People in distinct parts of the world can communicate with one another in a matter of seconds by sending and receiving messages. The emergence of new social media has attracted individuals from many cultural backgrounds. Social media plays a significant role in our lives because it fosters connection and interdependence in our culturally varied global community. People can communicate and interact with information that is readily available on the Internet via the use of media for social interaction. Because of the growing number of people who have access to the Internet today, new forms of social media have grown more prevalent in

people's everyday habits and routines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kadazan-Dusun community relies on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp to participate in a virtual harvest celebration. However, there are obstacles, such as internet coverage issues, a lack of Kaamatan information, a need for more virtual Kaamatan activities, and a lack of satisfaction with live events.

Internet Coverage Problem

Despite the internet's fast expansion in the recent five years, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) announced in 2020 that half of the world's population, 3.7 billion people, still needs access. Regarding the technical gap, global citizens have been split between developed and emerging nations. A 2022 research on the digital divide in Sabah revealed that the community's connectivity to telecommunication services, including telephone and internet, was hindered by the digital divide between rural and urban communities. Despite their limitations, the local people were open and eager to accept ICT in a way that would benefit their everyday lives. During the celebration of virtual Kaamatan, Informants 1, 3, and 6 claimed that the internet connectivity in their rural areas is inadequate. As a result, it ruined the thrilling experience of watching the action being streamed live on social media

The main challenge to organizing the event virtually is the internet or data coverage. Because not all areas in Sabah get good internet coverage (Informant 1).

In my area, tamparuli, the internet coverage is not really ok. I stay in a village, so whenever i want to watch live streaming on Facebook, sometimes the internet coverage is not okay. That is very sad because I will stop watching it due to the internet interruption (Informant 3).

The disadvantages are not all areas in sabah can get good internet coverage. So if there is live streaming, some of the sabahan wouldn't know about the program (Informant 6).

In addition, a few informants claimed that they would seek alternative methods to locate the network because the Internet coverage is unsatisfactory. Considering that we live in the digital age, this is a huge disappointment. As a result, specific rural communities in Sabah are still experiencing a digitalization gap. This can be seen by the statement from informant 2 and 4.

However, sometimes the internet coverage is weak. So, this also makes it difficult for us to watch the live broadcast event. But we also tried going up the hill to watch the celebration on Youtube. We had to go up into the hills and go to friends' rubber fields with a decent internet network. And, we will gather in small huts to search for internet networks and watch kaamatan programs on youtube and Facebook (Informant 2).

For the internet or data coverage, it's quite satisfying. Because sometimes, whenever I want to check whatsapp or other social media, I need to find a place

with a good range. Mostly I can only open my whatsapp and Facebook (Informant 4).

The extract shows that there is still a gap in digitization among members of the Kadazan-Dusun community, particularly those who reside in rural areas of Sabah. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines the digital divide as the "difference between people, families, enterprises, and geographic regions at various socioeconomic levels in terms of their access to ICTs and their usage of the Internet for a broad range of activities." As a result, this extract reflects on Fang's (2022) research on the digital divide, which found that the first level of a digital gap, physical access, is particularly prominent among the native people in Sabah, who predominantly dwell in rural regions.

Lack of Kaamatan Information

Social media has transformed our online interactions with one another. It enables us to gain real-time awareness of global events, engage with one another, maintain long-distance relationships, and access endless knowledge. In numerous ways, social media has enabled users to discover common ground with others online, making the globe seem more accessible. Information is spread throughout one another with the usage of social media. The material may be accurate or inaccurate or represent the author's perspective. The use of social media is sometimes justified because it satisfies certain aspects of individuals' self-perceived social needs. However, more than social media is needed to satisfy these demands. However, during the virtual Kaamatan celebration, several attendees complained that the organizers should have provided more information. This is because, while establishing a Facebook page, some users choose to keep the material private. Therefore, it is challenging to connect with the audience. This can be seen from the response from informant 4:

Because when people usually make advertisements on Facebook, they make it private, so it's difficult for us to access them and didn't get information on kaamatan celebration. So, make sure the festival promotion on Facebook is public so people can comment and share with their friends and family (Informant 4).

Furthermore, the informant said that there is still much room for improvement. Therefore, the main organizers need to utilize the social media platform while disseminating information on the celebration of the virtual harvest festival. The following are the responses of informant 1 and informant 2 addressing this issue:

The organizers should put more information regarding the festival on the Facebook page so we can gain more knowledge about this cultural celebration. Not only to watch the competition but also to gain knowledge of the event (Informant 1).

There's lots of improvement that can be done. This is because sometimes, we didn't get the festivals schedule on facebook official page such the sugandoi (singing) competition. So we didn't managed to watch the live competition, instead we have to re-watch the live recording on Facebook which is not exciting anymore (Informant 2).

Moreover, the virtual harvest festival focuses on the Sugandoi and Unduk Ngadau celebrations. Accordingly, the informants said that to encourage more people to participate in the event and watch it, the organizer should also provide information about alternative activities. This is to guarantee that harvest festival attendees may get more information outdoors. These are the responses of informants 5 and 6:

Because personally, there are not enough information we get from the celebration. This is because the kaamatan celebration only pays a lot of attention to unduk ngadau compared to the real meaning of the kaamatan itself. Indeed, during the unduk ngadau competition, many come together to support the participants in the unduk ngadau, but again, back to the original objective, which is togetherness and unity, and thanksgiving of the harvest seasons. So to improve the use of virtual platforms in promoting this event, the organizers need to emphasize or promote the real meaning of the kaamatan itself rather than just highlighting popular events such as Sugandoi and unduk ngadau. Maybe we need to provide more awareness about how important it is for us to continue our tradition of events from generation to generation from our ancestors because that makes us unique, and uniqueness makes us united (Informant 5).

In my opinion, mostly the organizer only highlight the popular event such as unduk ngadau and sugandoi. They did not highlight much on other program such as Manangon, traditional dish competition and many more. Because I believe these activities are important too and part of the festival. Other than that nothing much I can participate because it is held virtually. Maybe I can join if there much more activities (Informant 6).

The Kaamatan is the most important and well-known cultural festival in Sabah. Therefore, the main organizer needs to fully utilize social media platforms to promote the event, particularly to non-locals. Moreover, if the locals feel that the Kaamatan festival is just focused on a particular event, then those from outside the community would comprehend the celebration primarily due to the highlight events, such as *Unduk Ngadau* and *Sugandoi*. Moreover, if this situation continues in the future, the other traditional games and traditional stories will be forgotten, particularly among the younger generation.

Lack of Virtual Kaamatan Activities and Live Event Satisfaction

Social media has evolved as a significant tool for online marketing events with the emergence of the Internet. Individuals and businesses can generate commercial chances utilizing social media by creating fan pages on internet platforms. According to the findings, the informants said there need to be more virtual Kaamatan activities. Consequently, it has contributed to the general public's feeling of contentment over the event. For instance, the organizer emphasized the most popular competitions, like *Sugandoi* and *Unduk Ngadau*. Thus, it is recommended that the organizer also concentrates on other competitions. Informant 4 stated:

Another suggestion is that to do more activities that we can participate on the social media platform. This is because mostly only unduk ngadau and sugandoi

only the activities that been highlighted. So it is better to have other activities related to the kaamatan celebration as well (Informant 4).

The perceived experience of virtual activities performed during the Covid-19 pandemic was often inferior to the perceived experience of actual events staged before. The satisfaction levels of those who participated in virtual events were much lower. Digital or virtual events have been recognized as a new form of communication and connection for some time now. Richards (2014) argued that digital events might eventually begin supplanting physical ones. The responses from informants 2 and 5 stated that:

It isn't easy because it's not common to participate in virtual events. Because before this, physically, we could still meet people. For example, if it's like football matches, traditional sports, ... Hmmm... Weaving, sugandoi, and unduk ngadau, everything before this, was done physically. But on social media, we can only watch and cannot participate in any activities (Informant 2).

For the sugandoi or singing competition, the quality of voice virtual and physical are different. Sometimes, the voice is not good enough online but much better if you listen to them physically. For the unduk ngadau which is traditional beauty pageant, you can only depend on the cameraman to see your favorite contestants, however if you attend the event physically, you can see your favorite contestants' event from a far (Informant 5).

According to Biaett & Richards, 2020, experiences are central to events and, by extension, events research. The event experience literature is dominated by offline events, which should not come as much of a surprise. Numerous studies verify the cognitive, conative, emotional, and novelty features of offline event experiences (De Geus et al., 2016). As a result of this data, we can assert that the audience's level of satisfaction with the virtual activities is indeed lower.

Conclusions

This study shows that social media is crucial for promoting a virtual harvest celebration in the Kadazan-Dusun community during the COVID-19 pandemic. These roles include the medium of sharing, the means of promoting cultural events, the medium of conducting virtual competitions, and the media providing information. Despite all the digital benefits, the Kadazan-Dusun community has identified several digital drawbacks, most of which are attributable to restricted resources and the need for an internet connection, particularly in rural regions. This research examines the role played by social media platforms in promoting the Harvest Festival among the Kadazan-Dusun community. The collected findings also demonstrate how online events may become a viable option when it is difficult to host events at their physical locations due to external factors.

Consequently, this research contributes to the expansion of the literature on digital transformation and event management. This research assists the communities and the government in meeting the technical infrastructure needs of the communities. The growth of technology has divided Sabah's society; thus, the State government may utilize this research as a guide to strengthen the infrastructure. Moreover, the Kaamatan organizer will be able to make future improvements to the promotional and virtual celebration.

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