

Leveraging Electronic Word of Mouth for Promoting Sustainable Tourism: Insights from Bali and Lombok Travel Agents

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Abstract

This investigation examines the significance of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in facilitating sustainable tourism by scrutinizing the digital marketing methodologies and operational practices of Lombok Hidden Trip and Goodfriend Travel in the regions of Bali and Lombok. Although eWOM has been established as an influential mechanism in shaping traveler behavior, its strategic deployment in the context of sustainable tourism marketing is yet to be thoroughly investigated. This research seeks to bridge this gap by evaluating both agencies' adherence to the standards set forth by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) through semi-structured interviews, analysis of social media content, and operational assessments. The findings reveal that Lombok Hidden Trip exhibits a robust commitment to environmental sustainability, integrating eco-tours, initiatives for reusable resources, and proactive engagement on social media platforms. Conversely, Goodfriend Travel prioritizes the preservation of cultural heritage, providing Balinese culinary workshops and traditional rituals; however, it lacks a coherent strategy for the effective utilization of eWOM. Despite their respective contributions, both agencies encounter significant challenges, such as constrained financial resources, inadequate visitor awareness, and a lack of systematic monitoring of sustainability practices. To optimize sustainability outcomes, this study advocates that Goodfriend Travel enhance its eWOM engagement strategies, while Lombok Hidden Trip should broaden its sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, both agencies are encouraged to implement visitor education programs, conduct systematic sustainability audits, and provide training for staff to improve adherence to GSTC standards. This investigation highlights the transformative potential of eWOM in promoting responsible tourism and provides actionable insights for travel agencies, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders to advance environmental, cultural, and social sustainability in the regions of Bali and Lombok.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Sustainable Tourism, Bali and Lombok, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

A. INTRODUCTION

Bali and Lombok are currently grappling with a myriad of sustainability challenges that have arisen as a direct consequence of the unchecked and rapid growth of tourism in these regions. These two prominent tourist destinations are experiencing immense pressure on their precious natural resources, particularly manifested in the increasing demands for water and significant alterations in land use patterns in Bali, which pose a serious threat to the effective management of water resources that are essential for the sustainability of the region (Rimba et al., 2019). Moreover, in the case of Lombok, the surge in tourist arrivals has precipitated a detrimental impact on local ecosystems, leading to degradation and placing considerable strain on the local communities, who are increasingly confronted with social transformations and pronounced economic inequalities as a direct result of the expansive growth of the tourism sector (Basri et al., 2021). In addition to these challenges, Gili Trawangan is increasingly struggling with the adverse effects of environmental degradation, which can be attributed to the overwhelming influx of tourists; while it is noteworthy that a substantial number of visitors express a genuine willingness to engage in and support sustainability initiatives, the implementation of effective sustainability policies remains fraught with challenges that hinder progress (Dodds et al., 2010). Efforts aimed at integrating environmental capacity into the management of tourist destinations in Lombok, exemplified by GIS-based

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assessments, underscore the critical importance of pursuing limited development strategies that are in harmony with the environmental carrying capacities of the area (Suhono et al., 2020). Given the indispensable role that both Bali and Lombok play within the broader context of Indonesia's thriving tourism industry, it is imperative to thoroughly comprehend the various factors that drive sustainable behavior among tourists, as such understanding is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability and resilience of these cherished destinations.

In response to these pressing sustainability challenges, both Bali and Lombok have embarked on the implementation of a series of innovative sustainability initiatives designed to mitigate the adverse effects of tourism. In the context of Lombok, collaborative partnerships have been forged between government entities, local communities, and various stakeholders in an effort to bolster sustainable tourism management practices; however, despite these efforts, significant challenges persist in achieving successful implementation on the ground, which continues to impede progress toward sustainability (Hendrayani & Darmastuti, 2019). A comprehensive understanding of the various factors that can incentivize tourists to engage in more sustainable behaviors is of paramount importance, as environmentally and culturally aware tourists can play a crucial role in the preservation of both natural resources and cultural heritage, thereby contributing significantly to the sustainability of Bali and Lombok as premier tourist destinations within the Indonesian tourism landscape.

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has fundamentally transformed the manner in which tourists disseminate their experiences and make travel-related decisions in the contemporary digital landscape. Characterized as online evaluations or endorsements disseminated through platforms such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Instagram, eWOM capitalizes on user-generated content to shape the perceptions and decisions of others. Empirical investigations indicate that platforms such as Instagram and Facebook exert a significant influence on the travel decisions of millennial tourists, exemplified in locales such as Tamansari, Yogyakarta, where eWOM has positively affected visitation rates (Setiyaningsih et al., 2023). In a similar vein, the hedonic and utilitarian attributes of reviews on TripAdvisor contribute to the formation of tourist preferences and the facilitation of online bookings, thereby highlighting the platform's critical role within the travel sector (Tariyal et al., 2022). Favorable eWOM not only enhances brand perception and purchase intentions but also promotes repeat visitation, as evidenced in Bandung, where Instagram-facilitated eWOM significantly augmented destination loyalty (Gunawan et al., 2020). By amplifying genuine traveler experiences and cultivating trust among consumers, eWOM serves a crucial function in the advancement of sustainable tourism by aligning consumer behaviors with environmentally and socially responsible practices.

While scholarly inquiry into the impact of electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on the decision-making processes concerning travel is experiencing growth, there exists a considerable deficit in comprehending the strategic methodologies employed by travel agents in the utilization of eWOM for the promotion of sustainable tourism, especially in the regions of Bali and Lombok. The prevailing body of research predominantly concentrates on the perspectives of tourists, evaluating their readiness for sustainable tourism in Lombok (Sayuti, 2023) or scrutinizing the involvement of governmental collaborations in sustainable tourism initiatives (Hendrayani & Darmastuti, 2019). Nonetheless, these investigations overlook the pivotal role played by travel agencies, which serve as essential intermediaries within the industry, in harnessing eWOM to champion sustainable tourism practices. This absence of attention to travel agencies is of paramount importance, as these organizations significantly influence travel experiences and guide tourists towards more sustainable choices.

This research endeavor aims to fill this gaps by examining the methods through which travel agents in Bali and Lombok deploy eWOM to advocate for sustainable tourism practices via digital marketing strategies. In particular, it investigates the approaches utilized by Goodfriend Travel (Bali) and Lombok

Hidden Trip (Lombok) in leveraging social media platforms to promote eco-friendly travel behaviors. Although prior studies underscore community-oriented sustainability initiatives (Pratama et al., 2020), they fail to acknowledge the influence of digital marketing strategies on sustainable travel behavior. By offering empirical insights into the implementation of eWOM within tourism marketing, this research enhances the comprehension of how digital engagement can be effectively optimized to foster responsible tourist conduct.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain a deep understanding of the role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in promoting sustainable tourism practices in Bali and Lombok. The qualitative methodology was chosen for its ability to capture nuanced perspectives and real-world implementation of sustainable tourism concepts. By focusing on rich qualitative data, this study aims to uncover the complexities of leveraging eWOM as a tool for sustainability, providing insights that are adaptable to the dynamic contexts of Bali and Lombok.

Sample Selection Justification

The subjects of this study are two travel agents—Goodfriend in Bali and Lombok Hidden Trip in Lombok—both known for their active promotion of sustainable tourism practices through unique travel packages. Both agencies were selected based on specific criteria: (1) their established reputation for implementing eco-friendly practices, (2) their significant presence on eWOM platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, and (3) their engagement with local communities in promoting responsible tourism. The selection process was informed by a preliminary review of sustainability-focused travel business operating in the region, ensuring that the chosen agencies were representative of best practices in digital marketing for sustainable tourism.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to comprehensively examine the online engagement strategies employed by Goodfriend in Bali and Lombok Hidden Trip in Lombok, this study meticulously scrutinized their activities across two digital platforms, namely Instagram and Facebook. The collected data encompassed promotional materials that emphasized sustainability, interactions with customers, and the application of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) to shape tourist decision-making processes. Parallel investigations, such as the assessment of social media data to delineate tourist behavior in Lombok and Bali, illustrated how platforms like Instagram yield valuable insights into tourist inclinations and movement tendencies (Azmi et al., 2020; Alamsyah et al., 2021).

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with representatives from both travel agencies, as well as content analysis of their social media activities. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns in sustainability messaging and stakeholder involvement. The coding process followed a structured framework, beginning with open coding to identify initial themes, followed by axial coding to refine these themes into broader categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This structured coding process ensured methodological rigor and transparency, mitigating researcher bias in theme identification.

To evaluate the congruence of these practices with sustainability benchmarks, the research juxtaposed findings against the criteria established by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), a methodology endorsed by prior studies on GSTC compliance in the Merapi and Kembang Arum villages (Azmi et al., 2020; Hatibie & Kasim, 2020; Multazam & Saniyah, 2020). Employing the four pillars of

GSTC—namely sustainable management, socio-economic benefits, cultural preservation, and environmental impact—the study rigorously assessed whether and how the observed practices met or surpassed these international standards, thereby providing actionable insights into their strengths and potential areas for enhancement.

Addressing Potential Biases and Ensuring Rigor

To ascertain the validity and reliability of the data, this research utilized triangulation by cross-verifying interview responses with online activity monitoring data. Nevertheless, the study recognized certain limitations, including the potential biases inherent in informant responses and the difficulties associated with real-time online monitoring, as noted in analogous tourism research scenarios (Wilodati & Utami, 2021).

Despite these methodological advantages, the investigation acknowledges specific constraints. Firstly, the dependence on publicly accessible social media data may not fully encapsulate the comprehensive range of internal sustainability initiatives undertaken by the travel agencies. Secondly, the challenges associated with real-time online monitoring hinder the ability to adequately capture ephemeral consumer interactions with eWOM content, as highlighted in prior tourism research (Wilodati & Utami, 2021). Subsequent studies could remediate these constraints by integrating traveler surveys or longitudinal digital ethnography to acquire more profound understandings of audience perceptions and engagement patterns. By enhancing the justification for sample selection, elaborating on thematic coding procedures, and openly addressing potential biases, this amended methodology fortifies the study's rigor and guarantees a more comprehensive analysis of eWOM's function in the promotion of sustainable tourism.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Overview of Research Findings: Implementation of e-WOM in both travel agents

Bali and Lombok both function as prominent tourism centers celebrated for their exceptional natural landscapes and profound cultural legacy. Nevertheless, the methodologies employed by travel agents in these regions to advocate for sustainable tourism via Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) illustrate divergent strategies and advantages. In the case of Bali, agents such as Goodfriend Travel adeptly harness eWOM by emphasizing intricately designed cultural experiences, which are visually showcased on platforms like Instagram. Their offerings encompass immersive pursuits such as crafting gebogan (traditional offerings comprising fruits and flowers), preparing Balinese culinary dishes, and partaking in indigenous rituals, all meticulously aimed at fostering meaningful engagement with tourists while actively incorporating local communities. This strategic approach empowers the agency to construct compelling and authentic narratives that motivate tourists to disseminate their experiences online, thereby amplifying awareness and interest in sustainable tourism methodologies. Conversely, Lombok Hidden Trip, which operates within Lombok, similarly utilizes eWOM with a distinct orientation. This agency strategically leverages social media to illuminate the lesser-known treasures of Lombok, which frequently remain overshadowed in comparison to Bali's more prominent attractions. By highlighting nature-centric adventures and distinctive cultural interactions, Lombok Hidden Trip accentuates the island's unique and exploratory allure. They disseminate enthusiastic customer endorsements alongside captivating visual materials to enlighten visitors regarding the significance of conserving the island's ecosystems and honoring local customs. This methodology not only motivates tourists to opt for more responsible travel choices but also transforms them into informal advocates for sustainable practices within the region.



Figure 1. Cultural activity promoted by Goodfriend Travel in Bali through Instagram
Source: Goodfriend travel account, 2024

A critical analysis of these agents unveils substantial divergences in their eWOM methodologies. Goodfriend Travel in Bali (Figure 1) predominantly accentuates structured, culturally immersive tourism, with a concentration on spiritual and community traditions that are readily accessible within well-trodden locales. Their strategy heavily relies on the portrayal of Bali's cultural magnificence through social and community-centered experiences, thereby reinforcing the island's attractiveness as a premier destination for global cultural tourism. However, this emphasis on established traditions may inadvertently restrict the focus on less-explored natural adventures.



Figure 2. Tour package promoted by Lombok Hidden Trip on Instagram
Source: Lombok Hiden Trip's Account, 2024

In contrast, Lombok Hidden Trip (Figure 2) differentiates itself by introducing travelers to more secluded and natural locales, frequently imparting knowledge about the local ecosystems that remain relatively uncharted. Their emphasis is on adventurous and exclusive experiences, such as discovering hidden waterfalls, snorkeling above pristine coral reefs, or interacting with traditional Lombok villages.

This strategy not only presents an enticing alternative for tourists in pursuit of novel experiences but also aids in distributing the economic advantages of tourism more equitably throughout Lombok, extending beyond the conventional tourism hotspots. While Goodfriend Travel capitalizes on Bali's esteemed cultural heritage to generate interest, Lombok Hidden Trip underscores the allure of intrigue and authenticity inherent in unexplored natural environments, thereby establishing a distinct yet comparably effective approach to promoting sustainable tourism.

Information shared by travel agents in promoting the implementation of responsible tourism

Table 1. Promotion of responsible tourism in travel agents through digital media

No	Informasi conveyed related to responsible tourism	Lombok Hidden Trip	Goodfriend Travel Bali
1.	Campaign/ program informed in social media about responsible tourism	√	√
2.	Any facilities supporting the implementation of responsible tourism offered by travel agents	√	√
3.	Any activities demonstrated the sustainable tourism value or responsible tourism offered	√	√
4.	Any feedback or comments from viewers about the product/ information shared on the social media about implementation related to responsible tourism/ sustainable tourism	√	X
5	Any research has been conducted related to customer/ traveller awareness of responsible tourism	X	X

Source: Research analysis, 2024

The table 1 delineates a comparative analysis of Lombok Hidden Trip and Goodfriend Travel Bali in their methodologies for fostering responsible tourism. Both entities strategically utilize social media platforms, including Instagram, to disseminate visually engaging content that informs audiences regarding responsible tourism practices. These promotional efforts frequently encompass cultural engagement and local community participation, which are congruent with the principles of sustainable tourism as emphasized in contemporary research pertaining to the role of digital storytelling within cultural tourism (Cahyani & Winarso, 2023; Wikantiyoso et al., 2021). The visual narrative techniques employed by both organizations are in alignment with empirical findings indicating that emotionally charged and narrative-driven content can augment audience engagement and further sustainability objectives (Luo et al., 2023).

Lombok Hidden Trip emphasizes eco-conscious travel by orchestrating nature-centric expeditions and integrating environmentally sustainable practices, such as the utilization of reusable containers and beach cleaning to mitigate waste generation (Figure 4). Conversely, Goodfriend Travel actively promotes eco-friendly initiatives by urging travelers to diminish plastic consumption and engage in sustainable practices (Figure 3). Such initiatives correspond with scholarly research suggesting that tangible support for sustainability enhances the overall efficacy of responsible tourism campaigns (Karzen & Demonja, 2020).

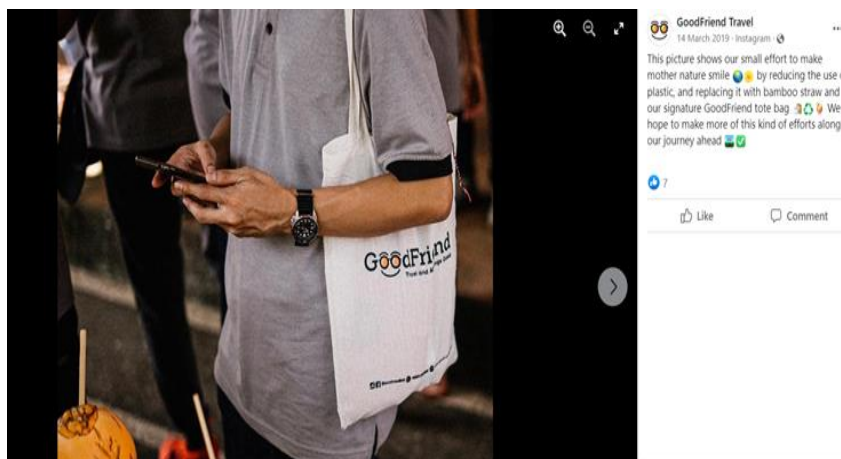


Figure 3. Promoting the use of tote bag provided during the trip by Goodfriend travel Bali
Source: Facebook account of Goodfriend travel, (2024)



Figure 4. Beach cleaning activities as a part of tour packages promoted by Lombok Hidden Trip
Source: Instagram account of Lombok Hidden Trip, (2024)

A significant divergence between the two travel agents is evident in their social media engagement practices. Lombok Hidden Trip actively garners feedback from followers who articulate their perceptions regarding the authenticity and value of the shared experiences. This feedback serves as a valuable source of actionable insights for refining their strategic approaches and fortifies their dedication to sustainability. In contrast, Goodfriend Travel seemingly exhibits diminished levels of observable audience engagement concerning responsible tourism-related content, thereby identifying an opportunity for enhancing community interaction and cultivating more robust online connections with their audience. Scholarly research underscores the significance of interactive electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in nurturing trust and augmenting the effectiveness of promotional campaigns (Yilmaz, 2016).

Ultimately, neither travel agent has undertaken formal research to evaluate traveler cognizance of responsible tourism. This deficiency signifies a pivotal opportunity for the enhancement of their strategic frameworks. A report issued by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) emphasizes the escalating demand for responsible tourism, particularly among younger cohorts who prioritize

sustainability in their travel decisions. Agents such as Lombok Hidden Trip and Goodfriend Travel stand to gain from capitalizing on this trend by integrating data-driven strategies within their promotional campaigns. For example, the incorporation of sustainability metrics or traveler testimonials emphasizing eco-friendly impacts could resonate profoundly with environmentally conscious travelers. Furthermore, collaborations with sustainability-focused organizations could enhance their outreach and impact, thereby ensuring a more holistic approach to the promotion of responsible tourism.

Leveraging eWOM for Sustainable Messaging

The interviews conducted with representatives from Goodfriend Travel and Lombok Hidden Trip elucidated sophisticated strategies employed by these agents to advance sustainability initiatives. Goodfriend Travel, an agency operating in Bali under the auspices of PT. Melati Jaya Tours and Travel, accentuated the critical importance of integrating inspirational narratives into their marketing communications. *“Our objective is to immerse tourists in the cultural and spiritual essence of Bali,”* the representative articulated, highlighting the agency's commitment to creating enriching experiences such as the crafting of gebogan, participation in Balinese culinary classes, or involvement in community rituals. The agency actively employs electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) by motivating visitors to disseminate these distinctive experiences via platforms such as Instagram, where the potency of visual storytelling captivates environmentally and culturally attuned travelers (Figure 5). The representative further emphasized the efficacy of this methodology, remarking that *“testimonials from guests who have experienced the enchantment of these activities not only corroborate our endeavors but also encourage others to partake in responsible tourism”*. The agency's profound dedication to cultural authenticity and its focus on community engagement render eWOM an essential instrument for amplifying their sustainability message.



Figure 5. Sharing culture performance during the tour created by Goodfriend Travel
Source: Instagram account of Goodfriend travel, (2024)

Lombok Hidden Trip articulated a distinct yet equally persuasive perspective on the application of eWOM. Their methodology is predicated on the exhibition of Lombok's pristine natural landscapes and concealed cultural treasures. As per the agency representative, the fundamental strategy encompasses the creation of content that highlights authentic adventure experiences, ranging from the exploration of secluded waterfalls to snorkeling in unspoiled marine ecosystems. They elucidated that these experiences

are frequently disseminated on social media through vivid imagery and genuine testimonials that encapsulate the essence of Lombok's untamed beauty. *"Our content not only educates tourists regarding the significance of safeguarding these delicate environments but also motivates them to opt for more ethical travel practices,"* the representative noted. The agency considers eWOM a catalyst for enhancing awareness and nurturing a sense of responsibility among travelers. By disseminating visitor narratives and visual content that underscore sustainability, Lombok Hidden Trip aspires to cultivate a lasting appreciation for the island's ecosystems and cultural heritage, thereby embedding environmental and cultural consciousness into their promotional narrative (see Figure 6).

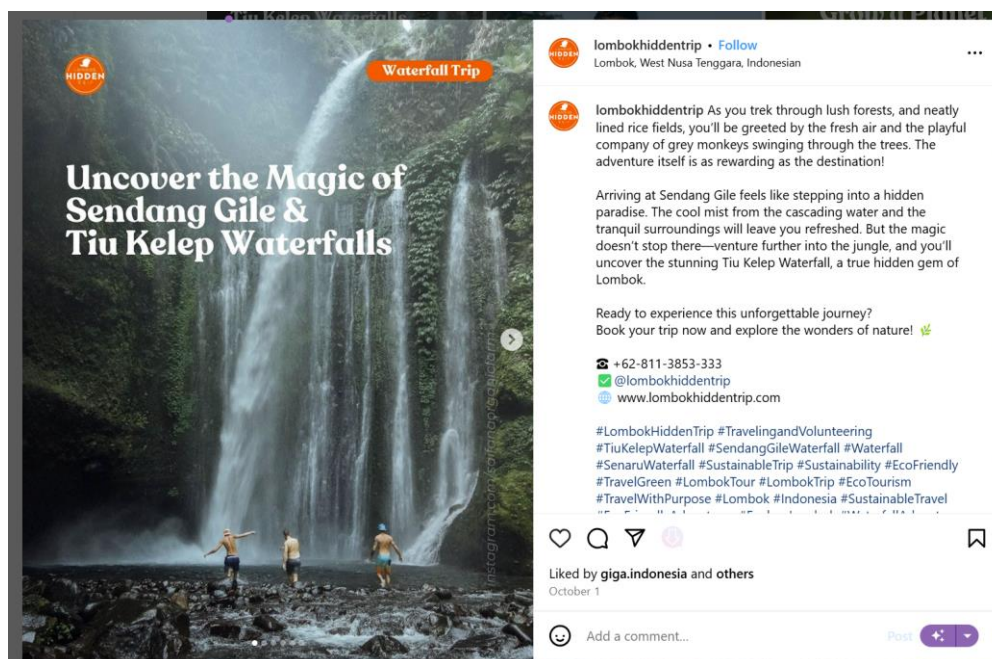


Figure 6. One of tour packages promoted by Lombok Hidden Trip
Source: Instagram account of Lombok Hidden Trip, (2024)

Challenges to compile with GSTC Standards

The analysis of Lombok Hidden Trip and Goodfriend Travel in relation to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards elucidates that both travel agencies have made significant advancements in the advocacy of sustainable tourism. The focus of Goodfriend Travel on the preservation of cultural heritage, illustrated through the involvement of tourists in Balinese traditions such as the crafting of *gebogan* and participation in culinary workshops, resonates with the GSTC's emphasis on cultural sustainability and community involvement (Muhamad et al., 2021; Wardani et al., 2023). In a parallel manner, Lombok Hidden Trip exemplifies robust environmental stewardship by integrating eco-tours, endorsing the use of reusable resources, and engaging in collaborations with local stakeholders, which mirrors GSTC's prioritization of nature conservation and responsible visitor engagement (Hizmi & Junaid, 2023).

In spite of their sustainability endeavors, both agencies encounter significant deficiencies in adhering comprehensively to GSTC standards. A primary limitation identified is the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation frameworks, which impedes their capacity to rigorously assess their sustainability performance. Although both agencies champion responsible tourism, impediments such as constrained financial resources, insufficient infrastructure, and low levels of sustainability consciousness among tourists obstruct their ability to effectively expand sustainability initiatives. An interview with a

representative underscored this concern, articulating, “Sustainability awareness is growing, but we still struggle with operational limitations to implement comprehensive standards.” These findings are consistent with research that underscores the significance of institutional capacity and resource allocation in the realization of sustainable tourism objectives (Pratama et al., 2020). The lack of structured evaluations further limits these agencies’ capacity to pinpoint areas necessitating improvement, a challenge similarly noted in other nascent eco-tourism destinations (Kusumawardhana et al., 2021).

The imperative for more systematic methodologies, including periodic sustainability audits, standardized sustainability reporting, and enhanced visitor education, is vital for augmenting the alignment of both agencies with global sustainability benchmarks. Empirical research indicates that sustained adherence to sustainability principles is more effectively accomplished when structured evaluations are integrated into tourism operations (Azmi et al., 2020). By instituting visitor education initiatives, Goodfriend Travel and Lombok Hidden Trip can bridge the gap in tourist awareness, a strategy that has been proven effective in destinations that successfully incorporate sustainability messaging within travel experiences (Dodds et al., 2010).

Table 2. Comparison the GSTC criteria with both travel agents

GSTC Criteria	Lombok Hidden Trip Implementation	Goodfriend Travel Implementation	Observations
A3: Reporting and Communication	Actively uses Instagram and Facebook to highlight eco-tourism adventures like snorkeling and waterfall exploration. Encourages sharing authentic experiences through eWOM.	Promotes cultural sustainability activities such as Balinese cooking and ritual participation. Less active in engaging through comments or interactions.	Both meet the criteria of reporting sustainability practices, but Lombok Hidden Trip shows stronger audience interaction and feedback integration.
B1: Community Support	Promotes community-guided eco-adventures and collaborates with locals to showcase hidden destinations.	Focuses on cultural preservation by organizing workshops on traditional crafts and rituals with local communities.	Both align with the GSTC’s emphasis on local community support, but Goodfriend emphasizes cultural education, while Lombok Hidden Trip prioritizes eco-tourism or nature education.
C1: Cultural Interactions	Highlights cultural immersion through authentic storytelling but focuses primarily on adventure-based activities.	Strongly emphasizes preserving cultural heritage through interactive experiences, e.g., crafting gebogan.	Goodfriend demonstrates stronger alignment with cultural interaction standards, while Lombok Hidden Trip integrates cultural storytelling into adventure.
D1.2: Efficient Resource Use	Uses reusable containers and encourages eco-friendly travel practices during tours.	Advocates for reducing single-use plastics but lacks a systematic approach compared to Lombok Hidden Trip.	Lombok Hidden Trip exhibits a more structured and proactive approach to resource efficiency.
D3.3: Visits to Natural Sites	Organizes eco-tours with guidelines to minimize	Primarily focuses on cultural sites but	Both adhere to GSTC guidelines, but Lombok

Challenges Identified	environmental impact, focusing on visitor education and capacity management.	includes guidance on respectful and sustainable behavior.	Hidden Trip places a stronger emphasis on environmental sustainability in its site visits.
	Resource limitations in scaling eco-tourism practices to broader audiences.	Limited online engagement limits their ability to fully capitalize on eWOM for sustainability education.	Both face challenges in achieving a full GSTC alignment due to operational constraints and varying degrees of audience engagement.

Source: Research analysis, 2024

A comparative evaluation of the application of GSTC principles by both agencies yields significant insights into their respective strengths and potential avenues for enhancement (Refer to Table 2). Goodfriend Travel distinguishes itself in the realm of cultural sustainability, actively engaging tourists in heritage-oriented activities, thereby corroborating prior research that underscores the significance of cultural involvement in promoting sustainable tourism practices (Luo et al., 2023). Nevertheless, its insufficient engagement on social media constitutes an impediment to harnessing electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as a potent mechanism for sustainability communication. Empirical studies have established that interactive and visually stimulating content on social media markedly increases tourist engagement and awareness regarding sustainability issues (Cahyani & Winarso, 2023), indicating that Goodfriend Travel would gain from augmenting its digital footprint to fortify its promotion of responsible tourism.

Conversely, Lombok Hidden Trip exhibits a more systematic methodology towards environmental sustainability, integrating marine conservation strategies, eco-tourism initiatives, and sustainable resource management practices. These endeavors are consistent with scholarly work that highlights the significance of experiential learning in fostering sustainable tourism behaviors (Hizmi & Junaid, 2023). However, infrastructural deficiencies and financial limitations present obstacles to scaling eco-tourism offerings while ensuring the efficient use of environmental resources. Comparable challenges have been documented in eco-tourism locales that lack governmental or institutional backing for sustainability initiatives (Pratama et al., 2020). To alleviate these challenges, Lombok Hidden Trip might consider forging partnerships with conservation entities and government agencies to obtain supplementary funding and infrastructural assistance, a strategy that has demonstrated efficacy in sustainable tourism projects in various other Southeast Asian contexts (Wilodati & Utami, 2021).

The findings of this study underscore the increasing importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as an instrumental mechanism for the promotion of sustainable tourism practices. Lombok Hidden Trip adeptly leverages platforms such as Instagram to craft visually engaging narratives centered around responsible tourism, a strategy that is congruent with existing research that elucidates the influence of digital storytelling on fostering engagement with sustainability (Setiyaningsih et al., 2023). In contrast, Goodfriend Travel's limited engagement with interactive digital platforms diminishes its capacity to effectively shape tourist perceptions through eWOM. Prior investigations have established that eWOM, particularly when integrated with direct community involvement, significantly augments tourists' propensity to adopt sustainable practices (Arisandi et al., 2014; Gunawan et al., 2020).

Notwithstanding their contributions to sustainability, both agencies exhibit a deficiency in a systematic framework for evaluating the ramifications of their eWOM strategies on tourist behavior. Empirical investigations suggest that sustainability communication within digital marketing is most

efficacious when underpinned by data-driven insights and audience engagement analytics (Tariyal et al., 2022). The incorporation of social media analytics tools to evaluate tourist engagement and sentiment regarding responsible tourism initiatives would enable both agencies to refine their digital marketing strategies and enhance the efficacy of eWOM.

The principal impediments that hinder full compliance with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards among both agencies encompass financial constraints, infrastructural inadequacies, and disparate levels of visitor engagement with sustainability messaging. These difficulties are in alignment with previous research indicating that small-scale tourism enterprises frequently encounter challenges in attaining global sustainability benchmarks due to economic limitations and restricted access to sustainability training resources (Azmi et al., 2020).

To augment their sustainability impact, the following strategic interventions are proposed:

First, implementation of Periodic Sustainability Audits – Conducting regular assessments of sustainability in accordance with GSTC criteria can assist both agencies in identifying deficiencies and monitoring advancements in sustainability compliance. Comparable evaluation frameworks have proven effective in sustainable tourism initiatives within Southeast Asia (Hatibie & Kasim, 2020). Second, strengthening Visitor Education on Responsible Tourism – The creation of pre-trip sustainability guides, on-site workshops, and interactive digital campaigns can significantly enhance tourists' engagement with sustainability principles, a methodology that has been validated in nature-based tourism settings (Kusumawardhana et al., 2021).

Third, optimizing Digital Strategies for eWOM Effectiveness – The integration of artificial intelligence-driven social media analytics, collaborations with influencers, and interactive storytelling techniques can amplify sustainability messaging and enhance audience participation (Cahyani & Winarso, 2023). Fourth, facilitating Public-Private Collaborations. Collaborating with governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and sustainable tourism entities can facilitate the acquisition of funding, technical support, and policy advocacy to bolster environmental conservation and community development initiatives (Pratama et al., 2020).

By adopting these targeted interventions, Lombok Hidden Trip and Goodfriend Travel can enhance their sustainability compliance, refine eWOM strategies, and contribute more effectively to the long-term sustainable tourism development of Bali and Lombok. These findings enrich the broader discourse on digital sustainability marketing and responsible tourism management, emphasizing the necessity for integrated policy frameworks and collaborative efforts across the industry to advance sustainable tourism initiatives.

D. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of Lombok Hidden Trip and Goodfriend Travel elucidates their substantial contributions to sustainable tourism, congruent with the standards established by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Lombok Hidden Trip demonstrates excellence in environmental sustainability, integrating eco-tourism initiatives, waste reduction strategies, and proactive digital engagement to foster responsible tourism practices. In contrast, Goodfriend Travel prioritizes cultural preservation and community engagement, providing immersive experiences such as Balinese culinary classes and traditional rituals. Notwithstanding these commendable efforts, both agencies encounter significant challenges, including inadequate digital engagement strategies, resource management limitations, financial constraints, and minimal traveler awareness regarding responsible tourism practices. These obstacles impede their capacity to fully capitalize on Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) as a potent instrument for promoting sustainable tourism. It is imperative to address these deficiencies

through the enhancement of social media strategies, the establishment of structured sustainability incentives, the fortification of community partnerships, and the implementation of systematic monitoring frameworks to maximize their sustainability impact and bolster their compliance with GSTC guidelines.

To advance eWOM-driven sustainability initiatives, travel agents and policymakers must implement strategic interventions that prioritize digital engagement, incentive-based sustainability programs, collaboration with local communities, and ongoing impact assessments. Travel agencies ought to refine their social media strategies by incorporating interactive campaigns and collaborations with influencers to more effectively engage environmentally conscious travelers. Policymakers can bolster these initiatives through training programs and financial incentives, including tax reductions and sustainability certifications, to promote responsible tourism practices. Strengthening public-private partnerships (PPPs) can facilitate collaboration among travel agents, local enterprises, and conservation organizations, ensuring that tourism yields tangible benefits for local communities. Furthermore, the implementation of systematic evaluations and sustainability reporting obligations will furnish actionable insights for continual enhancements. By adopting these targeted measures, travel agents can optimize their digital outreach and sustainability initiatives, while policymakers can cultivate a conducive environment for responsible tourism. Such collective actions will not only enhance the reputations of Bali and Lombok as eco-conscious travel destinations but will also ensure their enduring sustainability and resilience within the global tourism sector.

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