

Social media and optimization of the promotion of Lake Toba tourism destinations in Indonesia

Muhammad Said Harahap¹, Rizal Khadafi², Effiati Juliana Hasibuan³, Agung Saputra¹,
Sigit Hardiyanto¹, Faizal Hamzah Lubis¹

¹Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

²Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

³Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the largest contributors to Indonesia's foreign exchange earnings, surpassing taxation, energy, and gas. This study seeks to investigate the use of social media to optimize the promotion of Lake Toba as a tourist destination, which has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Using interview techniques and live field observations, it was discovered that social media, particularly the Instagram platform, play a significant role in promoting Lake Toba tourism. The Department of Culture and Tourism of the North Sumatra Province uses landscape photography as its primary promotion method, which has proved to be more effective and interesting than conventional methods such as the distribution of brochures or the use of manuals. The capture procedure and techniques for landscape photography were carried out by professional photographers in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Tourism of the North Sumatra Province. In addition to providing information, tourism_sumut's Instagram account functions as a platform to raise public awareness about Lake Toba tourism and as a promotional medium for North Sumatra's tourist attractions on an international scale. Department of Culture and Tourism of the North Sumatra Province collaborates with travel agencies and local communities to disseminate Lake Toba tourism information.

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Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Said Harahap
Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Sosial and Political Science
Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia
Email: muhammadsaid@umsu.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Before the COVID-19 pandemic spread in Indonesia, tourism was an outstanding product that contributed greatly to the gross domestic product (GDP) and currency of the country. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has destroyed the tourism sector in Indonesia. The decline in the number of tourist visits to the country automatically makes the contribution of the tourist sector to the GDP and the currency of the state decline drastically. In 2020, the contribution of the tourism sector to Indonesian GDP was only 4.05%, after the previous year reached 4.7%. According to data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS), there was a notable decline in the volume of tourist arrivals in Indonesia, with the number decreasing from 1.37 million visits in 2019 to 1.27 million visits in early 2020. The number of tourist visits

to the country in the region experienced a decline from 4.05 million in 2020 to 1.56 million in 2021, representing a decrease of 61.57%. This decline occurred despite the regional efforts to establish Indonesia incorporated destinations through technological innovations [1].

Furthermore, it has been approximated that a staggering 409,000 individuals employed within the tourism industry have also experienced job loss. Utilizing the seasonal autoregressive integrated moving average model (SARIMA) and autoregressive distributed lag model (ARDL) methodologies, this study aims to forecast the tourism demand for Indonesia's six primary inbound tourist countries spanning the period from 1989 to 2019. The findings suggest a projected decrease of 16.65 million tourists, potentially resulting in a loss of US\$19.07 billion during the period from January 2020 to March 2021 [2]. Given the significant economic implications, particularly within the tourism industry, in Indonesia, the initial measure to recover from the upheaval could involve the management of social capital and human resource capital [3].

In response to this matter, the Indonesian government, specifically the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (KEMENPAREKRAF), has implemented a range of policies. During the rehabilitation phase, an initial endeavor was made to gradually restore domestic tourist attractions while implementing the cleanliness, health, safety, and environmental sustainability protocol. Additionally, this phase also involved the execution of a revised strategy for tourism development. KEMENPAREKRAF/BAPAREKRAF, in its role as the capital for executing the recovery phase, has diligently adhered to the cleanliness, health, safety, and environmental sustainability (CHSE) protocol. This commitment is demonstrated via the implementation of simulations to ensure the effective execution of the protocol, as well as the dissemination of information, promotion of the protocol through socialization, and publication efforts. Furthermore, KEMENPAREKRAF/BAPAREKRAF has actively promoted the testing of targets that have already fully implemented the CHSE protocol. In the subsequent phase of normalization, the focus lies on preparing locations associated with the CHSE protocol, augmenting market interest through the sustained provision of incentives, discounts for travel packages, and meeting, incentive, convention, exhibition (MICE) activities. One proposed initiative is the organization of a virtual travel fair spanning a duration of five consecutive weeks, commencing from August and concluding in September of the year 2020.

The vice chairman of the Indonesian Tourism Industry Association, the tourism company can adopt five strategies to address the repercussions of the COVID-19 epidemic on the tourism sector. The initial action to be undertaken involves restructuring the promotion and marketing plan in alignment with the prevailing circumstances. The subsequent phase entails directing attention towards the current customer base through the implementation of enticing incentives, so fostering a propensity for repeat transactions. The third phase involves the development of a novel company operating model through the integration of pertinent operations and the elimination of obsolete business processes. The fourth step involves adapting the business to align with customer behavior, as customer behavior experiences notable shifts during periods of epidemic. The last stage involves the generation of novel opportunities through the ongoing process of innovation and creation [4].

There are various strategies that can be used to revitalize the tourist industry in Indonesia and position it as a significant contributor to the country's development, similar to the leading migas sector which has been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the tourism industry in the region is highly competitive, generating significant economic value. Strategies to bolster this sector may involve extensive promotional campaigns, the establishment of residential support infrastructure, the cultivation of a conducive climate, and the fostering of innovation in tourism. It is worth noting that the current approach to promoting Indonesian tourism is deemed inadequate, as many captivating tourist destinations remain unknown to both domestic and international travelers due to insufficient promotion and the need to reposition these locations as safe and secure places to visit [5]. In conjunction with the utilization of promotional endeavors and branding as a mechanism for marketing strategy, the enhancement of competitiveness pertaining to tourism aims also presents a challenge necessitating resolution [6]. In order to enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotion and marketing, it is imperative to have a comprehensive tourism policy that encompasses the development of public infrastructure, enhancement of tourist amenities, diversification and improvement of gastronomic offerings, and elevation of service standards [7], [8].

The efficacy of tourism promotion and marketing necessitates the integration of a secure and pleasant infrastructure to cater to the needs of tourists [9]. Prioritizing the availability of local infrastructure and resources is crucial prior to the implementation of promotional activities. Consequently, fostering synergy and cooperation among stakeholders becomes essential for effectively promoting and branding tourist destinations. In the current phase of coordination, planning, regulation, and legislation, the social protection of tourism is intricately connected to the establishment of a tourist institution that encompasses many stakeholders, including government bodies, business organizations, and society as a whole [10], [11].

Enhancing the efficacy of tourism promotion necessitates effective collaboration among governmental entities, private stakeholders, and the general populace. Additionally, diversifying local cultural offerings, enhancing event management, bolstering destination image, and refining visitor

management systems are viable strategies for augmenting the success of tourist destination promotion. Furthermore, considering Indonesia's status as the country with the highest Muslim population globally, it is imperative for Indonesia to capitalize on the promotion of halal tourism as a key aspect of its efforts to promote Indonesian tourism destinations. This research also examines the emergence of growth and development components that possess significant potential and are regarded as focal points for development within the tourism sector [12]–[14]. Given the rich biodiversity present in Indonesia, it is imperative for the country to recognize the significant potential of the eco-sector in terms of promotion and management [15], [16].

Based on the aforementioned literature, there is a need for a study that examines the utilization of social media in the context of promoting tourist destinations in Indonesia. The findings of previous research indicate that social media platforms have been widely adopted across different age cohorts, demonstrating their potential as efficient tools for rapid dissemination of information and effective promotion [17]. The promotion of global competition as a tourism destination has emerged as a highly effective campaign strategy. This approach successfully captures the attention of tourists and mobilizes resources through greater social media engagement from stakeholders. Additionally, it involves the establishment of content development branches that aim to enhance the whole value proposition offered to tourists. The concept of image destination strategy refers to the strategic approach employed by organizations to manage and shape the perception and reputation of a certain destination or location. This strategy involves the deliberate [18], [19]. The available data indicates that promotional activities conducted on the Twitter social media platform played a role in the observed growth in both domestic and international tourism in Indonesia between 2015 and 2019. Furthermore, there was a notable increase in revenue generated by the tourism sector during this period. Additionally, a separate study indicated that the majority of posts seen on Indonesian vacation Instagram accounts, which incorporate Islamic symbols such as riding and shooting in their photographs, captions, and hashtags, were met with favorable reactions from users on the platform [20].

The present analysis focuses on the growth of the digital economy and its impact on tourism from 2021 to 2023. Specifically, it examines the influx of tourists and the promotional efforts undertaken to attract visitors, such as the Powerboat F1 event organized by Lake Toba, which serves as both a tourist attraction and a component of sports tourism. By identifying and addressing various challenges and digital social trends, this study aims to assess the early diagnosis of issues related to domestic tourist movement in the destination area. It further investigates how these efforts have contributed to the enhancement of economic development in the region, resulting in positive and sustainable economic growth [21]. The case study conducted on the point leverage destination system in the context of Toba Lake's isolation reveals the adverse impact of pollution on tourist numbers, exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure and hindered competition. Consequently, the government has implemented a policy aimed at developing competitive resource destinations [22]. The outcome of the destination is influenced by various factors, including the accuracy of data and the F-measure number of uploads and opinions in social media. These uploads and opinions, shared by both the community and tourists, provide valuable insights and positive judgments. Consequently, social media has emerged as a significant source of information. To gather this data, several opinion mining techniques have been employed [23].

This research aims to investigate the utilization of landscape photographs for promoting tourist sites in Lake Toba through the official Instagram account of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the North Sumatra Province. The successful promotion of tourist destinations relies on various factors, including development factors such as increased visitors through public systems, conservation *geowisata* strategies in the economy, private-public sector partnerships, development of human resources, and improving internet infrastructure. Additionally, factors such as digital promotion, observations, and interviews also contribute significantly to the effective promotion of tourist destinations [24], [25]. Landscape architectural management has emerged as a strategy for enhancing tourist destinations by showcasing their unique attributes and fostering a positive perception of them as desirable places to visit. This approach involves highlighting the diverse range of archaeological relics, historical fauna and flora, and leveraging the power of social media and mass media to promote tourism through captivating photographs shared by tourists. This promotional method has proven to be highly efficient and effective [26]–[28]. This study represents the inaugural attempt to examine the utilization of landscape photographs on the official government agency's Instagram account as a means of promoting tourist destinations through media. The photograph of the landscape discussed in this research pertains to the depiction of Lake Toba as the primary focal point, observable from a specific vantage point. In landscape photography, it is typically uncommon to include discernible human or animal subjects. However, on occasion, such subjects may be present, albeit in a diminished scale within the frame, serving primarily to provide a sense of proportion and contribute to the overall composition. This study aims to investigate the impact of landscape photography featuring tourist destinations on the official social media accounts of government agencies. Specifically, it seeks to explore

how such photography positively influences the promotion and branding of tourism destinations, particularly in the context of the digital era and the current new normal.

2. METHOD

The study employed descriptive qualitative methodologies to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies for optimizing the promotion of Lake Toba locations on the Instagram social media platform. This study aims to examine the utilization of landscape photographs as a means of media promotion on the Instagram account of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the North Sumatra Province, namely @pariwisata_sumut. The collecting of data is facilitated through the utilization of interviews and direct observations as data collection methodologies. The study involved interviews with managers responsible for tourist promotion at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the North Sumatra Province, as well as individuals who follow the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut. Interviews were done with the head of the field of promotion and socialization, as well as the operator of the Department of Culture and Tourism of the North Sumatra Province, on behalf of the government authorities. The interview questions primarily addressed the rationale for the necessity for new promotional techniques in Lake Toba tourism, as well as the selection process for these strategies. Furthermore, the interview sought to understand the reasoning behind the chosen strategies and the response of Instagram users to the utilization of Toba Lake scenery photographs as a means of promotion. The research framework can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Research framework

Determining the research theme	Problems and problem-solving methods	Discussion results and suggestions
Promotion of Lake Toba tourism destination in Indonesia's North Sumatra Province during the COVID-19 pandemic	The ineffectiveness of conventional tourism promotion methods especially in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic (observation and interview) Strategy changes from conventional to digital methods related to tourism promotion (Interview)	Analysis results from interviews and observations with Lake Toba tourism promotion managers Use of Lake Toba landscape photos on the Instagram social media platform of the North Sumatra Provincial Culture and Tourism office

The data analysis involved the examination and visualization of the outcomes obtained from interviews conducted with managers responsible for promoting and socializing tourism locations in Lake Toba. These managers are affiliated with the Department of Culture and Tourism of the North Sumatra Province. The research was carried out between the months of May 2021 and May 2022. The study is situated within the Province of North Sumatra, Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The advent of novel technologies has brought about a transformative shift in the tourist sector, leading to a substantial impact on sustainable tourism. This evolution can be attributed to the emergence and proliferation of social media platforms. The utilization of social media as a means of obtaining information for the purpose of strategizing tourism promotion is an unavoidable reality at present [29]. Prospective tourists typically seek pertinent and trustworthy information from the government portal prior to ascertaining the intended destination for their visa. The efficacy of social media in influencing travelers' decisions before to embarking on a journey has been well-documented. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the North Sumatra Province asserts that the utilization of landscape photographs on their official Instagram account is anticipated to effectively persuade prospective travelers, both domestic and international, regarding the captivating allure of Lake Toba, as shown in the showcased landscaped imagery. The exhibited landscape photographs also encompass notable locations, environmental circumstances inside Lake Toba, its lodging options, and further supporting facilities. Furthermore, landscape images can function as a medium for effectively communicating precise facts pertaining to Lake Toba to prospective tourists. Through the presentation of comprehensive and diverse data pertaining to Lake Toba, the community is able to assess the aesthetic qualities of the natural environment encompassing Lake Toba. In order to procure optimal and utmost scenery images of Lake Toba, the Department of Culture and Tourism of the North Sumatra Province collaborates with reputable photographers situated in the Northern region of Sumatra. Photographs of unaltered natural landscapes provide greater aesthetic allure when devoid of alterations or imaginative elements that deviate from the familiar visual experiences of the human eye, hence enabling them to effectively encapsulate the inherent beauty of a certain location [30]. Collaboration with travel companies

and local communities is also undertaken in order to access lesser-known locations, so enabling photographers to capture compelling and captivating outcomes. The purpose of collaborating with photographers, travel agencies, and the local community is to facilitate the comprehensive exploration of Lake Toba's captivating beauty as a tourist destination through the medium of landscape photography. The provision of high-quality photographs can serve as an engaging preliminary informational tool that has the potential to pique the interest of prospective tourists, so encouraging them to go on a visit to Lake Toba.

Research has indicated that the aesthetic appeal of landscaped environments is notably influenced by the composition of landscape images. The arrangement of landscape elements that are positively viewed has a substantial impact on enhancing the overall evaluation of the landscaping in a good manner followers of the @tourism_sumut Instagram account who were interviewed to test the effectiveness of the landscape photos of Lake Toba displayed on the Instagram account mentioned that they felt interested and trusted with the results of the photos posted on Instagram account, @tourism_sumut. The images and information contained are also in line with the real conditions that exist in Lake Toba. In addition to the spot-spot photos good, interesting and latest followers of the @tourism_sumut Instagram account, also get a lot of new information such as the annual tourist events Lake Toba and other latest news. In addition to posting landscape photos in the Instagram account of @tourism_sumut, admin, and the public relation or *Humas* of Culture and Tourism Service of North Sumatera also added other information related to Lake Toba tourism, such as information about tourist attractions, supporting infrastructure, accommodation, hotels, and other accommodations. This is done so that tourists have accurate information related to the places they want to go when in the Lake following facilities support. North Sumatera tourism promotion Instagram account can be seen in Figure 1.

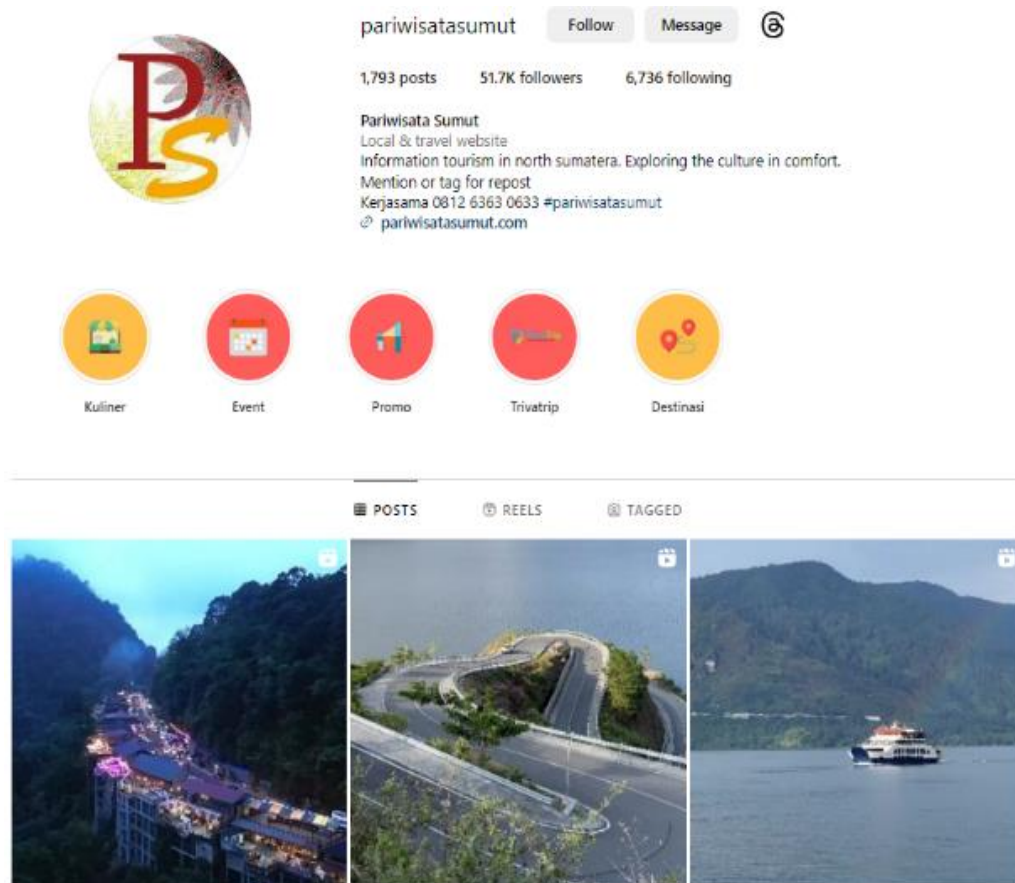


Figure 1. Instagram account of North Sumatra tourism

The Department of Culture and Travel of North Sumatra Province actively promotes travel packages tailored for journalists who produce written content about the tourist attractions surrounding Toba Lake that they have personally experienced. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism consistently monitors tourist exhibitions held beyond the borders of North Sumatra Province, namely in Jakarta, Yogyakarta,

Surabaya, and Bandung, with the aim of promoting the many tourist attractions present in the region. In order to ensure the precision of data and information, the public relations and administration team of the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut organized a familial excursion to visit several travel businesses. Furthermore, aside from functioning as a vehicle for advertising, this endeavor also aims to get precise and reliable data. The *Humas* Tourism Department of the North Sumatra Province has implemented a strategy to enhance public engagement with Toba Lake landscape photography information through the organization of an ASEAN youth exchange program. Participants of this activity are requested to incorporate the designated hashtag provided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the North Sumatra Province into their social media posts and associate it with the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut. The objective of this initiative is to enhance the promotion and dissemination of information pertaining to the tourist destinations of Lake Toba, ensuring a wider reach, enhanced precision, and increased reliability. The results of the study indicate a considerable association between the attractiveness of photos and the confidence conveyed by their content, and the impact of Instagram on individuals' decisions regarding travel destinations [31].

In addition, followers Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut, acknowledged that many of the information contained in the landscape photos of Lake Toba uploaded, the information is related to the development of Toba Lake tourism in general, its support facilities as well as other information tourist attractions that are not exposed. The weakness of this study is the unknown effect of landscape photography on increased tourist visits to Lake Toba. In addition, it is not known exactly how many tourists visited Lake Toba after seeing the landscape photo upload on the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut. Advanced research using statistical analysts is still needed to calculate the exact number of tourists visiting Lake Toba after the strategy of using Toba Lake landscape photos is used by the cultural and tourism services of the North Sumatra Province on their Instagram accounts. The results of this study align with previous research that has investigated the favorable effects of utilizing social media platforms, including photographs, videos, hashtags, and applications, to enhance the promotion of vacation destinations and assess levels of trip satisfaction [32]–[35]. The efficacy of actively promoting sustainable tourist sites on social media platforms in enhancing the visibility and accessibility of these places to travelers has been established by several research. The research reveals many sustainable tourism items that may be effectively promoted and made visible on social media channels. In addition, the benefits of social media have also been adopted as a strategy in tourism development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of tourism policies. While previous research has indicated that there is no clear association between posting information on Instagram and the inclination to visit tourist places in Indonesia, it is noteworthy that social media usage continues to serve as the predominant factor influencing individuals' decision-making process regarding their next tourism destination [36].

Thus, the study suggests that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of North Sumatra Province not only posted landscape photos on the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut, but also photos and videos with other models and creativity. The North Sumatra Cultural and Tourism Service should also post other unexposed tourist attractions that are in the surrounding area of Lake Toba in the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut. The study also suggested that the Sumatera Northern Cultural and Tourism Service in the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut also posted all the tourist attractions that are in Northern Sumatra in general along with information about the attractions. In addition, the tourism department must maximize cooperation with other tourist departments, especially those at the district/city level.

4. CONCLUSION

The use of landscape photos on the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut proved more effective in presenting information related to Lake Toba travel to the public. The uploaded Toba Lake landscape photo also serves as a media to explore other sides of Lake Toba that are not yet exposed, improve knowledge and information of the public/public towards Lake Toba tourism as well as as a medium to promote North Sumatra tourist attractions to the international world. The majority of followers on the Instagram account @pariwisata_sumut interviewed also gave positive responses related to the use of Lake Toba landscape photos as a media promotion, because this method is considered more interesting, effective, and efficient in the era of social media and new normal as it is today. To maximize the promotion of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the North Sumatera Province also cooperates with professional photographers, travel agencies, and local communities in the surrounding area of Lake Toba. This collaboration proved effective in an effort to maximize the promotion of Lake Toba tourist destinations by finding more interesting and rarely publicly known photo spots. The process of taking and landscape photography techniques carried out by photographers who work with travel agencies and local communities also proved to be able to provide new information in efforts to promote the development of Lake Toba tourist destinations ahead of it.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Muhammad Said Harahap    works as a permanent lecturer at the Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. He is expert in the field of communication science with specialization in public communication and journalist photography. He got a doctor of communication science from the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Currently, he active as an environmental photographer, nature conservation, and Sumatran Orang Utan preservation. He can be contacted at email: muhammadsaid@umsu.ac.id.






Rizal Khadafi    working as a permanent lecturer at the Public Administration Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. He is expert in the field of political science, specializing in government science, public policy, and political marketing. He is a graduate of the doctor of political science-Islamic politics from the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. He can be contacted at email: rizalkhadafi@umsu.ac.id.






Effiati Juliana Hasibuan    is a doctor of communication science currently working as a permanent lecturer in the Communication Science Study Program, and at the same time is the dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Medan Area University. She is expert in the field of communication science with specialization in public communication and journalist photography. She can be contacted at email: Effiati@uma.ac.id.






Agung Saputra    works as a permanent lecturer at the Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. He graduated with a master's degree in Public Administration from Medan Area University. He is expert in the field of political science, specializing in public administration, public policy, and political marketing. He is a doctoral graduate of Sociology from Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. He can be contacted at email: agungsaputra@umsu.ac.id.



Sigit Hardiyanto    works as a permanent lecturer at the Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. He graduated with a master's degree in communication science from Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. He is expert in the field of communication science with specialization in public relations, public communication, and inter-personal communication. He graduated with a doctorate in sociology from Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. He can be contacted at email: sigithardiyanto@umsu.ac.id.



Faizal Hamzah Lubis    works as a permanent lecturer at the Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. He graduated with a master's degree in communication science from Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. He is expert in the field of communication science with specialization in public relations, broadcasting, and photography. He is currently completing his doctoral studies in sociology at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang. He can be contacted at email: faizalhamzahlubis@umsu.ac.id.