

The Cultural Narrative as a Digital Promotion Strategy in Selling Batik Tulis Lasem and Its Effect on The Economy in Lasem

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Abstract. In 2022, the pandemic Covid-19 has entered its second year and has severely hit the national and regional economic sectors. One of them is the sale of batik Tulis in Lasem. However, the situation triggers cultural awareness of the local community to raise stories about batik as a sales strategy. So that the buyers are not only buying because of the beauty of the pattern but also know the cultural meaning within it. This study aims to look at and analyse the intangible cultural narrative could be a good promotion in selling batik Tulis Lasem through digital platform in the pandemic era and the impact to the Lasem's economic condition. This qualitative research uses phenomenology approach and collecting detailed data from various sources related to the object of this study. The results show that the strategy provides economic improvement during the pandemic and ignites other creative ideas in digital sales. The research proves that "limited" circumstances do not rule out the possibility to contribute to the improvement of the regional economy while maintaining the sustainability of local culture.

Keywords: Cultural Narrative, Digital Promotion, Batik Tulis Lasem, Pandemic Era

1. Introduction

Promotion is a communication activity either directly or indirectly from individuals, groups, or organizations that facilitate the exchange of information to persuade one or several people or the general public to accept the products produced by a person, organization, or company [1] [2]. Since the covid 19 pandemic hit Indonesia, several offline promotions have shifted to digital promotion. Based on Purwaningwulan and Ramdan's research in 2021, digital promotion is a broad term that refers to various promotional techniques used to reach customers using digital technology [3]. The pandemic was triggered through the covid 19 outbreak in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and rapidly spread in many countries all over the world [4&5]. The virus spreads around the world, China, Italy, Spain, and the US being hit hardest. In March 2020, the World Health Organization has declared the situation as a global health emergency [6], and in April 2020 more than 1 million people have been infected, and more than 110,000 have died from the virus (www.who.int).

Covid-19 reached Indonesia in March 2020 and the government took immediate action. Furthermore, various protocol applied to slow down the spread of the virus, one of it is social distancing and restriction of movement which adversely affected the tourism sector, while also influencing the sale of local specialties, such as batik Tulis. Since Covid-19 around 2020-2021, the decline in tourists who come to Lasem, affects the sales and production of batik Tulis Lasem. Therefore, the news and research regarding tourism sector in Lasem has sprung up. The online media namely Gatra.com in July and Liputan6 in December 2020 wrote that Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs of the Republic of Indonesia agreed that Lasem's batik Tulis is known to have penetrated overseas, but the pandemic has shaken its existence. that the pandemic had damaged the economic order. One of the textile industries that developed quite poorly was the Lasem batik industry [7&8]. The statement is in line with the Rembang Regency Department of Industry, Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs (Kementerian UMKM & Koperasi) that stated around 120 Lasem's batik craftsmen who were affected by the pandemic, and 2020 was the hardest year in the last 10 years (see Fig. 1).

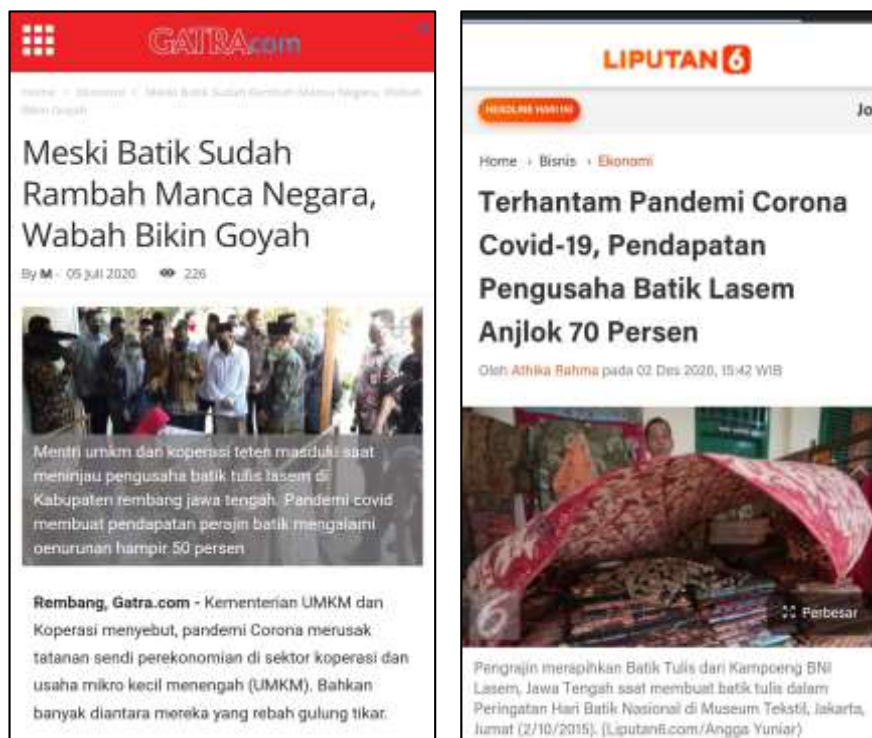


Figure 1. News in the online newspaper about the Pandemic affecting the production and sales of Batik Tulis Lasem.

Other online media have covered one of Lasem's batik trademarks, namely Pusaka Beruang, which continues to make batik in the midst of a pandemic despite turnover being free-falling in a short time – in 20 days, you only get 30 million rupiah. [9]. Furthermore, research on the income of Lasem's batik entrepreneurs by Setyawan in 2021 said that the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed cut the income of entrepreneurs and batik artisans by more than 60%. In Lasem, batik entrepreneurs and artisans are small-scale businesses. Another research concerns the promotion strategy to develop tourism sector in Lasem during pandemic [10]. According to Ming Ming Lukiarti and Agustina Widodo, tourism activities in Lasem affects the sale of Lasem batik as traditional Lasem souvenirs. Cooperation with Lasem tourism driving groups or foundations and the government can motivate local communities that indirectly increase their income [11].

However, their studies has not touched on a detailed promotion strategy for the sale of Lasem's batik Tulis. Therefore to increase and maintain the stability of the batik industry business, it is necessary to adapt to conditions through digital transformation and nurture an entrepreneurial spirit to keep innovating, proactive, and creative. Based on these problems, a strategy is needed so that the production and sale of Lasem's batik Tulis sustain and survive. Several promotional strategies have been done by entrepreneurs and batik artisans in Lasem. One of the efforts that have been made and has had a positive impact is to package the sales process with cultural narratives about batik. Based on research by Darmayanti and Bahauddin in 2021, stated that narrative involves the process of sharing knowledge and experiences related to culture and influencing the way people perceive what is being told [12].

The narrative about the philosophy of batik motifs, although it sounds simple, actually contains richness because it contains the history and culture behind the intangible batik motifs [13][14]. The story complements the beauty of the motifs on the fabric. The narrative of the batik-making process becomes a marketing strategy, and that has proven to increase the purchasing power of batik buyers who have considered buying and understand the price because they understand the "beauty of the process" of batik. Previous explanation in line with the study aims to look at and analyse the intangible cultural narrative could be a good promotion in selling batik Tulis Lasem through digital platform in the pandemic era and the impact to the Lasem's economic condition. The purpose leads to the following research question - How can the batik narrative be a marketing strategy for digital sales?

2. Method

The research needs tool to carry out discussion and answer research questions so that research objectives are achieved. Research in this method focuses on cultural narrative as digital marketing strategy in selling batik Tulis Lasem during pandemic. Due to that, this research is closely related to culture. Therefore, this study always involves the oral narration of promotional activities through digital media. The importance of using narrative is to explore the culture built into batik, which is presented through language of the promote person. It is hoped that this study can provide a better understanding to the reader through the telling of oral "stories". The statement above, guides the researchers to use a qualitative method and a narrative analysis approach. According to Moleong in 2021, qualitative research is unique because it uses a natural setting, uses the view of sources to collect data – both verbal and visual, describes data, and interprets it effectively through narration. After the data is obtained, data analysis is carried out through the process of data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions or verification [15&16].

The research conducted direct observations and interviews with the informants in Lasem in late 2019. From 2020 to 2021, interviews were conducted through online media, and the observations were made by evaluating how to sell batik Tulis in Lasem. In addition, data collection uses literature exploratory and documentation from social media – online newspaper and Instagram to optimization of discussion and analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

The Initial Step of a Digital Promotion Strategy: Selling Batik Lasem

We are currently living in a new era. The Covid-19 pandemic stems from an external environment that cannot be controlled [17]. Its presence has changed social, economic, and related conditions. Santoso Hartono, the head of the Lasem batik cluster, stated in 2020 that 40% of batik sales came from tourists who could no longer come to Lasem during the pandemic. The market conditions during the pandemic are not yet clearly known, this situation encourages business people to take risks taking, such as readiness to face the risks of the decisions taken. According to research by Dess et. al in 2008, risk-taking is one of the five actions that underlie entrepreneurial orientation. In this study, the risk taken is that sales and various ways of promotion through digital media are carried out.

Digital promotion and sales are prospective to increase sales of Lasem's batik and become an advantage in business competition. In addition, four other entrepreneurial orientation actions such as Autonomy or the desire for independence to be able to progress and develop; then, Innovativeness, namely the desire to show or showcase the products they have after going through creativity and testing; next, Proactiveness which is the company's desire to see the movement or development of environmental conditions to be able to prepare new things; and the last one is Competitive aggressiveness, which is the desire to be superior to others [18].

The five Entrepreneurship Orientation actions that have been described previously are under the steps taken by business people and Lasem batik craftsmen. They use social media to narrate historical, cultural values and the process of the birth of Lasem's batik Tulis as an attraction and selling point to customers or buyers.



Figure 2. Online “Invitation” to Join Virtual Tour in Lasem

Figure 2 shows a news headline in one of the online newspapers that indirectly “invites” readers to turn into Lasem batik enthusiasts and then become buyers when they find an unforgettable virtual tour experience. The content of the news is the promotion of Lasem's batik through virtual walks to the "kitchen" of batik making. In there, the cultural narrative of Lasem's batik takes place and the various processes of making motifs are shown to become beautiful and valuable cultural works. This was conveyed by Didiet Maulana, a fashion designer and curator of clothing products [19].

“Melalui pasar digital, semua proses membatik dapat dilihat, tanpa harus pergi ke mana-mana, pemirsa juga bisa memilih batik sesuai selera, semua diakses dari rumah”

Translation:

“Through the digital market, all batik processes can be seen without having to go anywhere, viewers can also choose batik according to their taste, all accessed from home.”

(Didiet Maulana, 2020)

Didiet also said that the virtual tour would take him to his final destination, a virtual place called Pasar Rakyat. A digital market that contains various Lasem batiks and their innovative products such as masks, prayer mats and clothes. All products that enter the Pasar Rakyat have through testing or curation beforehand. The products come from entrepreneurs and batik craftsmen throughout Lasem who work closely with the Lasem cultural activist community such as the Lasem Heritage Foundation and the Lasem Lasem. This situation is in line with one of the entrepreneurial orientation actions, namely Innovativeness - the desire to show the products they have after going through creativity and testing.



Figure 3. The Online News: The batik sales have decreased, Lasem batik craftsmen survive through online sales

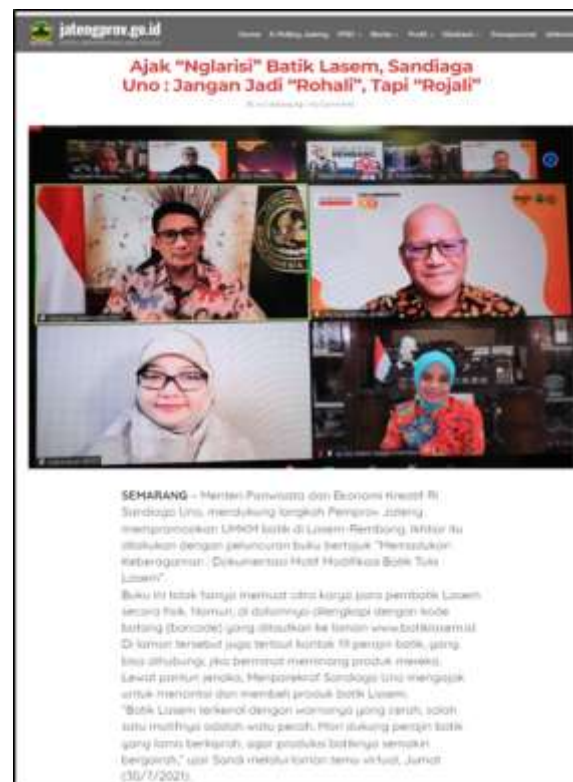


Figure 4. Support for Batik Lasem Digital Promotion

The survival mode should be activated immediately during the pandemic. Based on the story in Kompas.com, in March 2020, there are no more tourists who come to Lasem to buy batik. Large-scale orders for batik have also been postponed or even canceled. The artisan was off because there were no more orders [20]. 45-year-old Sutimah said that she stayed at home during the pandemic and did not make batik because there was no demand (see Fig. 3). Various ways and support must be done so that the economic situation is stable and improving, for entrepreneurs and Lasem batik artisans, namely promotion and sales through digital media. In the virtual book launching, the promotion of Lasem batik was also carried out by the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Sandiaga Uno. He narrated that - "Lasem Batik is famous for its bright colors, and one of the motifs is called watu kricak (broken stone). Because of its uniqueness, we support batik artisans who have been active for a long time so that batik production is more passionate. Batik Lasem already has its place in the eyes of batik enthusiasts. The motif reflects the acculturation of Java, China, Champa, and the Netherlands [21][22][23]. In addition, the geographical condition of the sub-district in the east of Rembang is a selling point in itself" [24] (see Fig. 4). Sandiaga's statement is one of the first steps in promoting Lasem batik digitally through the delivery of cultural narratives.

Cultural Narrative in Online Media as A Promotional Strategy in Selling Batik Lasem

Various way in this day to do online promotion and information exchange can also occur in the online world. Through online, the audience could be wider than conventional promotion. Therefore, batik entrepreneurs will put more effort into creating digital content as a promotional "innovation" [25][26]. The content narrates the value of Lasem's batik, and one of the Lasem batik craftsmen who did it is the Kidang Mas in Babagan Village, Lasem.

"Kalau ada pembeli yang bertanya tentang motif batik, saya dengan senang hati bercerita. Menurut saya, membeli batik tidak hanya di beli, tetapi juga memahami yang di beli. Bercerita itu bisa memperkaya nilai jual batiknya"

Translation:

"If there are buyers who ask about batik motifs, I will gladly tell them. In my opinion, buying batik is not only bought, but also understands what is bought. Telling stories can enrich the selling value of batik"

(Rudi Siswanto, 2019)

The statement above is the interview with Rudi Siswanto, the owner of the Lasem batik workshop which has lasted for 6 generations, namely Kidang Mas. Rudi and his wife, Vina have implemented a batik narrative strategy related to the meaning and the process of making it. This is to educate as well as to attract buyers. Before the pandemic hit, the narration was carried out directly with potential buyers (see Fig 5), but when the pandemic hit the narration was carried out through Kidang Mas - Instagram social media content, online seminars or online discussion events and the effort was successful (see Fig 6 & 7).



Figure 5. Batik's Cultural Narration to The Buyers before Pandemic in 2019.

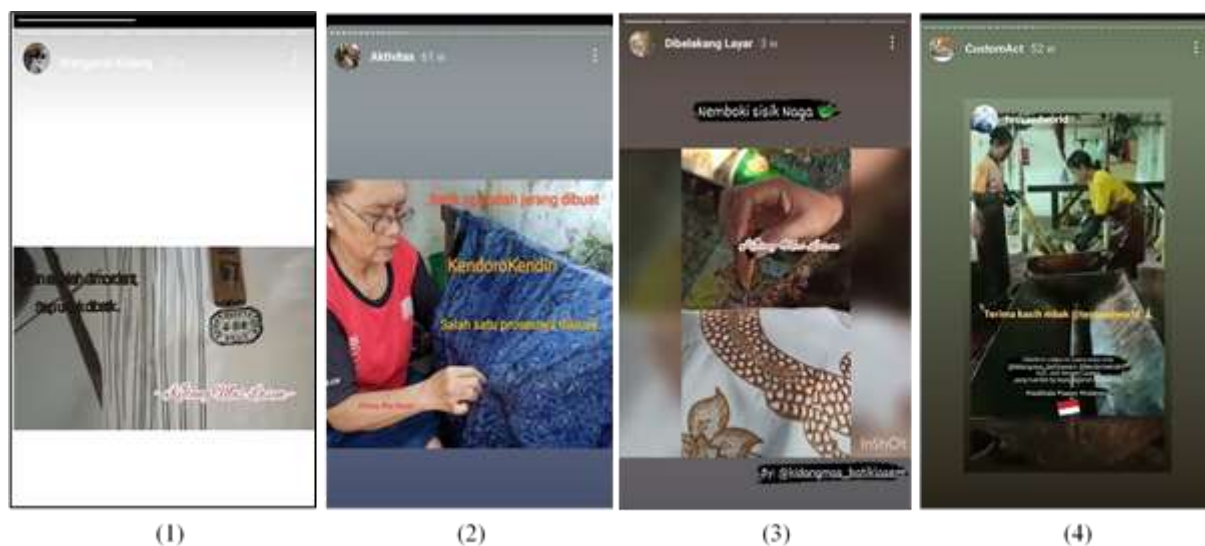


Figure 6. Narrative of the Batik Making Process with its Cultural Values through Stories on Instagram @kidangmas_batiklasem: (1) Introducing the Stamp of Kidang Mas; (2) Narrate the process of batik-making: *Kendro Kendri* motif; (3) Narrate the *Nemboki* as one of batik-making process; (4) Narrate the traditional colouring process.

In 2020, production stopped and a decline in sales of written batik occurred in Kidang Mas. It takes time to digest what happened at that time but revived so that batik sales can continue. That desire is in line with one of the concepts of entrepreneurial orientation actions - Autonomy, which shows the desire to be able to make progress and develop [18].

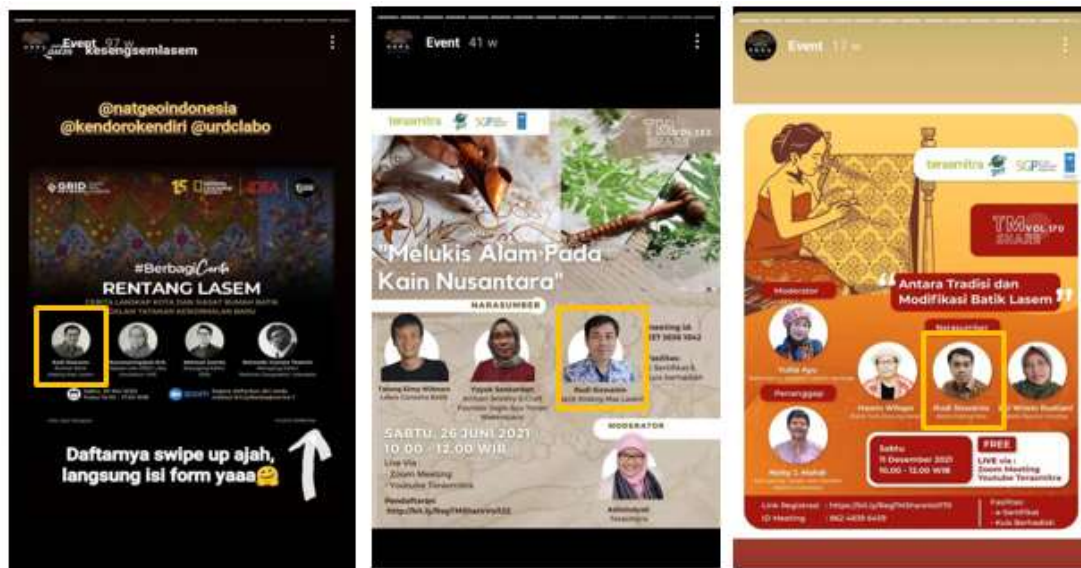


Figure 7. The Owner of Batik Kidang Mas joined Various Online Seminar/Talks/Presentation as Part as Digital Promotion in Selling Batik.

Through historical and cultural narratives of batik, a piece of batik called *Empat Negeri* originating from the fourth generation fascinate the buyer's attention and requested a duplicate of the motif, which is valued at 10 million rupiahs. Usually, with the same motif, the price only ranges from 1 to 5 million rupiahs. People can appreciate the classic batik process more, honor the motifs, value an idea based on its history and culture, and reward the price of batik itself as proof of appreciation (Vina, interview, December 2019). In addition, cultural narratives are also carried out by Lasem batik buyers. This fact proves that there is a successful strategy because it creates positive interactions and mutual appreciation between sellers and buyers. The economic benefits are obtained by the seller and satisfaction is gained by the buyer (see Fig. 8).

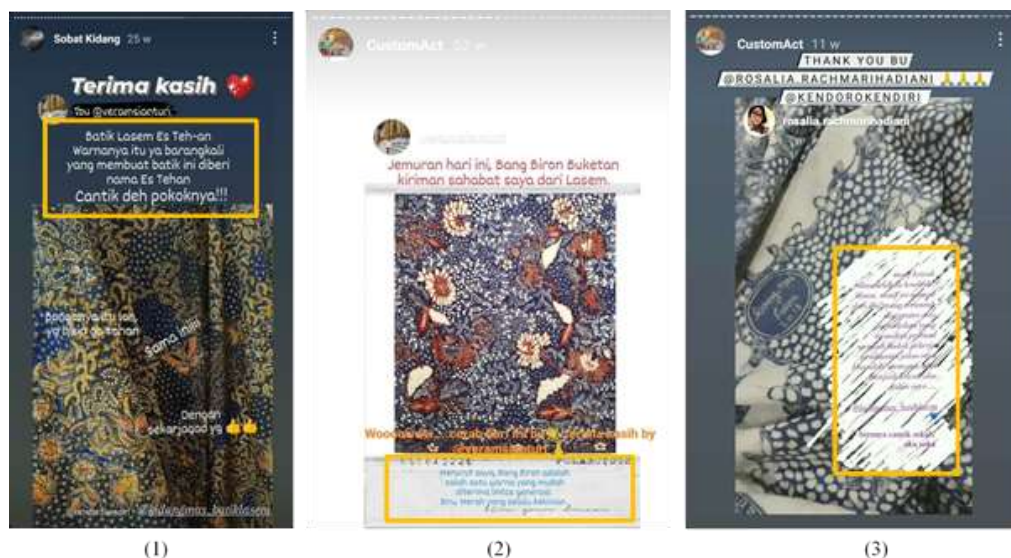


Figure 8. The Cultural Narrative by The Buyer as A Response to A Product Satisfaction: (1) Narrate about the colour of the Lasem batik motif “*Es Te-an*”; (2) Narrate about the colours that are often used in Lasem batik “*Bang Biron*” (Blue-Red); (3) Narrate a brief history of Lasem's typical batik motif “*watu Kricak*” (broken stone).

Based on the explanation above, the narrative gives a certain feeling to batik buyers. It also gives an attachment to the batik.

“A narrative is possible to touch the feeling through the eyes and ear, thus the essence can be grasped” [27]

Referring to the statement above by Pallasmaa said that the narrative approach can touch feelings through the eyes and ear so that its value we can accept and understand.

4. Conclusion

The actors in the tourism sector, in this case, are Lasem batik tulis entrepreneurs and artisans that did not necessarily give up amid the Covid-19 pandemic. There are so many creative strategies related to promotions that are encountered during the pandemic. Cultural narrative as a promotional strategy has contributed significantly to the increase in batik sales in Lasem during the pandemic. Cultural narrative as a promotional strategy has contributed significantly to the increase in batik sales in Lasem during the pandemic. Batik narration can increase the selling price of batik, and the buyers don't mind buying at a high price. They not only buy the product but also buy the “soul” of the product, namely the story in it. Telling stories about the history, motifs, and processes of batik can also attract buyers. Buyers feel they have a bond with the purchased batik, they are enthusiastic about retelling the value contained in it, and they have pride in owning the product. Narrative analysis displays stories as knowledge and conveys people's experiences in-depth, in words. The cultural narrative in this study possible to become one of contribution in promotion strategy in selling products.

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