

A Cross Cultural Communication in Spiritual Tourism

Proceeding the 1st Dharma Duta Faculty International Seminar on Communication, Tourism, Culture, Law and Social Science 2017

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Abstract

Spiritual tourism is a cross-cultural communication between communicators with foreign tourists who come from various cultural backgrounds. The communication which happened between provider of spiritual tourism and foreign tourists is managed unserious, but bring enough foreign tourists to Bali. The uniqueness of this communication raises research problems such as methods, processes, and communication models conducted by spiritual tourism actors. These research problems searched the answer of research which performed at Ashram Ratu Bagus, Muncan, Karangasem. The research performed in one year during 2016. This research is conducted qualitatively, by data collection technique by literature study, observation and interview. Data of this study were analyzed qualitatively. The study found that direct communication method is an effective method in marketing spiritual tourism. The communication process is successful because it is able to decode the concept of *wanara petak* to shaking. Based on the methods and communication process undertaken, it could be concluded that one-step and two step communications into effective communication model to get feedback from foreign tourists.

Keywords: Spiritual Tourism, Communication Method, Communication Model, Feedback

1. Introduction

Bali became a popular spiritual tourism destination since the 2000s, when Novel "Eat Pray Love" published. As a spiritual tourism destination, spiritual practitioners in Bali (gurus) should communicate with foreign tourists who derive from various culture backgrounds. The communication to people in difference culture backgrounds, called cross cultural communication. In the cross cultural communication, every destination has a different model, as done by the tourism providers in Bali and the other areas.

The communication is the process of delivering messages from the sender to the receiver. The success of a communication happened when the feedback from recipient is as it expected by the sender of messages. Some obstacles may occur as a reason from feedbacks which aren't appropriate to the expectations of message sender. The barriers can be language, media and the others. Therefore, communications have several levels such as message senders, messages, media, opinion leader and message recipients (Bungin, 2015: 50). These levels must be passed well in order to get the feedbacks as it is the sender expectations.

In the spiritual tourism marketing in Bali, the role of media and opinion leader are hardly managed properly. Message senders (spiritual gurus) tend to communicate with foreign tourists directly, but the message is then chained by mouth to mouth, so the spiritual figure (gurus) can build a network abroad particularly in country where the gurus have trusted disciples. Ashram Ratu Bagus for example only convey messages to his trusted disciples (Sutarya, 2016). The abroad disciples are then send a message from mouth to mouth or from friends to friends, so it gets the feedback from foreign tourists which is a visiting to the Ratu Bagus Ashram at Muncan, Karangasem.

The message delivery from the Ratu Bagus Ashram didn't use the media and opinion leaders, but the message gets the expected feedbacks. This is the uniqueness of multicultural communication, because cross cultural communication usually use media and opinion leaders. The uniqueness of this communications model raises some research problems such as the method of communication, communication process, and communication model of spiritual tourism in Bali. This research performed at Ratu Bagus Ashram on Muncan in Karangasem, Bali. This research is a qualitative research, by data collection technique by literature study, observation, and interview. The data analysis is done qualitatively. This study was conducted one year which performed in 2016, from January - December.

This research is a new study especially in spiritual tourism cases. Previous studies, were the branding of tourism destinations (Bungin, 2015: 37-41). Verifying a communication through branding by measuring feedbacks from foreign tourists on branding is an interesting research for further study on previous studies in tourism study, but had never done yet. Research in Bali, has never done for a cross cultural communication in tourism especially in spiritual tourism cases. Therefore, this study is a new study on tourism studies particularly at spiritual tourism studies.

II. Discussion

In studying to the methods, processes, and models of cross-cultural communication, its need to recognize about the method of communications. Pendit and Sudarta (2004: 63-66) mentioned that methods of communication are direct and indirect communication. The direct communication is face to face communication, it is done between communicator and communicant directly or face to face by each other meeting. Indirect communication is communication which uses media, such as website, mass media, and the others. The communication process is the process of delivering messages from the communicator to the communicant, which consist ideas, encoding, transmission, receiver, decoding and action. The communication models are forms of communication consist of one-step communication model, two-step communication, multi step communication, and web communication (Bungin, 2015: 47-53). Theories about methods, processes, and models of communication are used to assess cross cultural communication who performed by spiritual tourism provider with foreign tourists. In the past, communication was done by using traditional tools such as *kentongan* (Liliweri, 2014: 498). This tool is usually used in communications who performed by communicators and communicants who are one tribe, so that they already understand the sign each other particularly

signs of *kentongan* sound. In the modern era, traditional communications are inadequate, because communication is done with different ethnicities that have different signs, so it requires a communication tool that can be understood by all persons who derive from the others nationality. This modern communication process becomes interesting things to be studied, because the communication process is very complex. It is more interesting in the case of spiritual tourism, because there is a complex communication between communicators and communicants who have different cultural backgrounds in spiritual tourism.

Spiritual tourism is some of tourists activities conducted to spiritual activities such as healing, quest, visiting spiritual events, pilgrimages, meditations, and searching of spiritual experiences (Norman, 2012). In this research, spiritual activities limited as some activities of tourists which conducted to ashram activities with some purposes such as healings and experiences, particularly shaking activities at Ratu Bagus Ashram. So in this research, just covered some activities which conducted shaking activities at Ratu Bagus Ashram.

2.1. Communication Method

Communication in different cultural background can be observed from the communication of Ratu Bagus Ashram with foreign tourists. This cross cultural communication process usually uses media such as mass media and the web. In this communication, experts need to convert the message format into an easily understood message. This method of communication is called indirect communication. Indirect communication method usually uses Public Relations, Advertisers, Sales Promotions and Internet in tourism marketing (Cooper, 2012: 312).

The Ratu Bagus Ashram didn't use the indirect method. Ashram owner and manager use direct communication method with foreign tourists. Direct communication was originally done by Ratu Bagus in 1993, when Ratu Bagus perform direct communication with the Italian tourists on Muncan, Karangasem. This direct communication gave a special impression for the Italian tourists, so this foreign tourist spreads the results of communication to other people in Europe. The result of communication is an invitation to Ratu Bagus to come to Europe. Since the arrival of Ratu Bagus to Europe, foreign tourists started to visit the Ratu Bagus Ashram in 1994 (Sutarya, 2016: 85).

This data indicates that the method of communication is done by Ratu Bagus is a direct method of communication. This direct communication requires a meeting which should be done by Ratu Bagus and tourists. The meeting is done by Ratu Bagus with foreign tourists or done through the trusted disciples of Ratu Bagus. Anahita (56 years) from Spain for example is one of the students who have become shaking trainer of Ratu Bagus. She said that she gathers Spaniards to practice shaking at public space in Spain. They are invited the other people to practice shaking. After the other people feel the benefits of shaking, they express their self that they want to visit the Ashram Ratu Bagus to meet Ratu Bagus as a inspiring teacher.

Visiting of tourists indicate the success of communication because tourists feel the real benefits of Ratu Bagus teachings which is tranquility. Direct benefits bring feedback to study deepen knowledge in Bali, by visiting to the Ratu Bagus Ashram. Therefore, the spiritual teacher (guru)

touch performed directly, becomes a magnet to visit Ratu Bagus Ashram. In the tourism study, it called pull factors of tourist. These disciples usually visit in groups to ashram. At the Ratu Bagus Ashram, they discuss about the success of shaking in healing physically and mentally.

2.2. Communication Process

The direct method of cross cultural communication process usually encounters physical obstacles in annoying sounds, personal barriers, and semantic barriers in language symbols (Pendit and Sudarta, 2004: 67), but Ratu Bagus can perform the direct communication well. Thus, the communication process becomes very interesting to be studied. In theory, the communication process is an idea, news delivery, means of delivery, acceptance, transfer of language, and action. The idea of the Ratu Bagus Ashram is to invite foreign tourists to practice spiritual activities at his ashram, that it will be connecting them to beyond energy. The delivery of the message is done directly through teacher. It means that he used direct meetings with receiver. The process of word transfer and action which become interesting issues, so why do tourists understand the communication who delivered by Ratu Bagus.

The spiritual culture of Ratu Bagus is the Bali spiritual culture, which transfer a natural energy called *wanara petak* to the other persons (Sutarya, 2016). This spiritual culture is difficult to communicate to foreign tourists who derive from difference cultural background, but Ratu Bagus could convey messages so it give an appropriate actions, which are feedback to visit the Ratu Bagus Ashram. The key of the success is the correct decoding in delivery a massage.

Decoding in this communication process is to change *wanara petak* word to shaking which is spiritual movement that uses vibrations in the body. Shaking is the universal language which understood by all people, so that foreign tourists could understand *wanara petak* meaning. The Ratu Bagus Ashram also performs decoding on praying by uses Gayatri Mantram which is well known all over the world especially by Hindu followers. The decoding become an action for visiting to the Ratu Bagus Ashram. It is a benefit of communication as mentioned before.

Arthur mari (34 years) from Belgium said the word shaking give him very interesting attention, because shaking has been known before. However, shaking techniques are difference in one monastery to the other monastery. By shaking word, he joined to practice shaking or *wanara petak* activities. After practicing, he felt the benefits such as behavior change from unbenefit activities to benefit activities. The benefits of shaking push him to visit Ratu Bagus Ashram. This indicates that decoding *wanara petak* to shaking is attracting foreign tourists to visit Ratu Bagus Ashram. After joining, foreign tourists get the benefits of training so that he visit to Bali, especially at Ratu Bagus Ashram. This indicates the successful of decoding process.

Ratu Bagus is also a master of Hindu philosophy, so he could connect shaking to yoga philosophy. In fact he mention, shaking is yoga because yoga is a way to connect to beyond energy. Shaking is also a way to connect to beyond energy, so shaking and yoga have the same meaning. Yoga is a language that is easy to understand in the world especially in community who know about Hinduism, because yoga is very famous in the world. By using yoga word, Ratu Bagus decode *wanara petak* to easy word which is be understood by foreign tourists. This decoding process produces an attractive spiritual tourist destination for foreign tourists.

2.3. Model Communication

By recognizing the method and process of communication, the communication model who is done by Ratu Bagus Ashram can be analyzed more completely. The method performed by the Ratu Bagus Ashram is a method of direct communication and the success of process is in the decoding process. Direct communication methods and the true decoding process can only be done by using one-step and two-step communication model, because communication uses opinion leaders, and others tends to lead decoding processes deviate the message.

In this one-step and two-step communication model, the foreigners get benefit communication directly. In a one-step communication, for example, the spiritual teacher is able to convey the appropriate message according to the expectations of foreign tourists who feel benefits immediately. By getting this direct benefit, foreign tourists interested to decide a visiting. Two-step communication is done through communication by opinion leaders who are his trusted disciples, to send messages to the others. The opinion leaders who are disciples of Ratu Bagus were initiated into a shaking trainer. This trainer became the opinion leader that produces foreign tourists come to Bali in groups, after the opinion leaders are able to show the benefits of shaking. Anahita and ArthurMari said the meeting with spiritual teachers is the most important thing in spiritual practice, because teachers are a source of inspiration. Meeting spiritual teachers often causes energy to go inside more easily. They also claimed that gathering with people who practice (ashram students) also leads to an easier process of energy transmission. This statement indicates that one-step and two-step communication are the ideal communication model for the spiritual tourism marketing.

The one-step communication is teacher and the students meeting which is expected meeting, because the teacher can share his experiences directly. Two-step communication by trusted disciples can also share their live experiences. The other communication models, for example by using the website, it is less impact for foreign tourists, because it can't give direct benefits. However, the website can provide a preliminary description of the ashram center, the form of training, and the various things required. Therefore, the Ratu Bagus Ashram also has a website, but the tourists who visit to the ashram are groups who are brought by trusted disciples like ArthurMari who are groups of tourist who practice shaking in their live.

Thus, the one-step and two-step communication model are an effective model in spiritual tourism marketing, because it requires direct touch, both from teachers and trusted students who have become teachers. Direct touch is closer in providing service to consumers. This consumer's closeness that affects these purchases which are influenced by culture, social relations, personal, family and situation factors (Sunyoto, 2013: 13). By both models of communication, the Ratu Bagus Ashram can bring these factors together so that it can bring foreign tourists to their ashram. Ratu Bagus Ashram can also influence foreign tourists to continue practice shaking, so they get the benefits of shaking. One-step and two-step communication model are a form mouth

to mouth promotion, as there is a disciples who has succeeded in becoming a mentor for new people.

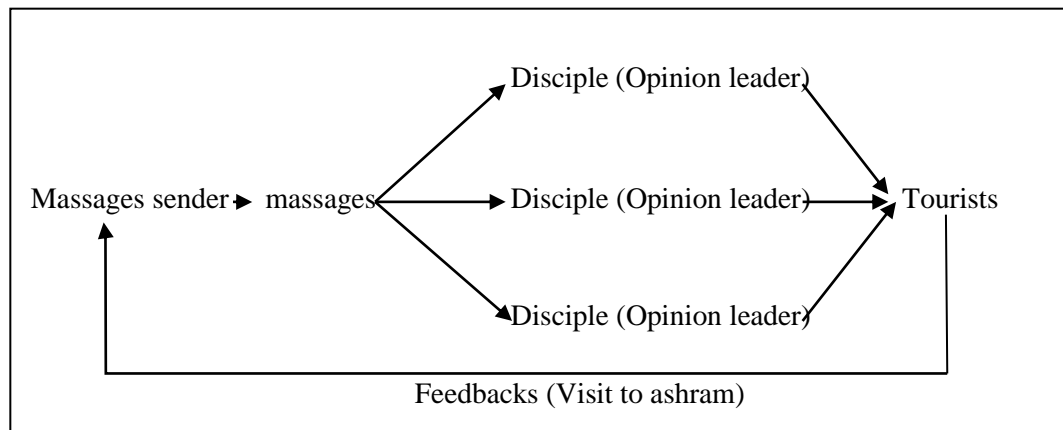


Figure 1: The Spiritual Communication Marketing Model

III. Conclusion

The method of communication is be done by Ratu Bagus Ashram in spiritual tourism marketing is the method of direct communication. Communication process is successful because of correct decoding by decoding *wanara petak* to shaking, so it is be understood by foreign tourists. The communication models are one-step and two-step communication model, relying on direct meetings between teachers and tourists or opinion leaders and foreign tourists. The leader of this opinion is the trusted disciples of Ratu Bagus. Direct communication is closer to foreign tourists, so foreign tourists can make the decision to visit Bali.

This research has provided an overview of the methods, processes, and models of communication in spiritual tourism at the Ratu Bagus Ashram. This research has not reached the centers of activities yet. Therefore, for a complement of this research, research on communication models can be done at centers of spiritual tourism, such as in hotels and elsewhere. From this research can be suggested that the providers of spiritual tourism should be creative to decoding the local cultural messages, so the message can be accepted by foreign tourists.

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