

## **Tourism Communication: Garuda Indonesia Airline in Improving Its Brand As A Tourism Transportation Service Provider**

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### **Abstract**

The development of the tourism sector intersects with other business sectors as it supports the tourism industry. Modern tourism management is a concept that defines tourism as a modern business product consisting of tourist destinations, the creative economy, transportation, hotels, recreation areas, and arts and cultural attractions, packaged in attractive tour packages for potential tourists. Modern tourism destinations are complex and capital-intensive, requiring business management and promotional activities. So, how does Garuda Indonesia enhance its brand as a tourism transportation service provider? This study aims to examine Tourism Communication: Garuda Indonesia's Brand Enhancement as a Tourism Transportation Service Provider using the concept of tourism transportation communication, which is part of tourism communication studies. The closest discipline to tourism communication is marketing communication. This study will use a case study with a qualitative approach. Data collection was conducted through interviews, documentation, and observation. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The results of this study indicate that Garuda Indonesia is a tourism transportation service provider. The results show that the factors that determine passengers' choice of flying with Garuda are safety, price (in relation to facilities, service, and affordability), social (face-to-face, virtual, and relationships), comfort (physical and employees), membership (points, lounge, and redemption), and punctuality. Meanwhile, the motives for passengers choosing to fly with Garuda are achievement (punctuality and points), experience (comparison and aircraft), parental recognition, responsibility (family and work), and pleasure (service, physical, and travel).

**Keywords:** Tourism Communication, Transportation Communications, and Services.

### **Introduction**

The development of the tourism sector intersects with other business sectors, supporting the tourism industry. Modern tourism management is a concept that defines tourism as a modern business product comprising tourist destinations, the creative

economy, transportation, hotels, recreation areas, and arts and cultural attractions, packaged in attractive packages for potential tourists. Tourism transportatins destinations are complex and capital-intensive, requiring business management and promotional activities.

In this regard, the role of communication is crucial in the tourism sector, an industry that is currently a key focus for the government, particularly in Indonesia, particularly in its tourism elements. Communication plays a crucial role not only in tourism marketing components but also in all elements of tourism, requiring communication, including personal communication, mass communication, persuasive communication, and other forms of communication, including the use of digital media to convey messages from all tourism elements (Bungin, 2015:88).

Garuda Indonesia truly possesses a powerful symbolic presence to become the face of Indonesian tourism. The name "Garuda" itself represents national identity, while its full-service airline, with its Indonesian Hospitality concept, should position the airline as the primary gateway to the Indonesian tourism experience. However, in practice, Garuda Indonesia's efforts to enhance its brand within the tourism context have faced several fundamental problems.

The first problem lies in its overly exclusive brand image. Garuda Indonesia has long been positioned as a premium airline with relatively high prices. While this positioning builds an impression of quality and prestige, it also alienates Garuda from the tourism market, which is primarily comprised of domestic and mid-range travelers. As a result, Garuda is often perceived as an airline for business, official, or official travel, rather than as an airline that connects with the tourism experience. This premium image, unbalanced by a narrative, makes Garuda's tourism brand less relevant to mass travelers.

The second problem relates to brand communications that are not aligned with national tourism promotions. Indonesian tourism campaigns, such as Wonderful Indonesia, emphasize emotion, experience, culture, and the beauty of destinations. Meanwhile, Garuda Indonesia's communications tend to be formal, corporate, and focused on the airline's technical services. As a result, Garuda hasn't emerged as a strong tourism ambassador inviting tourists to "fly towards experience," but rather as merely an air transportation provider.

Another problem is the inconsistency of the service experience. The Garuda brand was built on the promise of superior service and authentic Indonesian compassion. However, in recent years, the customer experience hasn't always lived up to this promise, particularly on domestic routes and during periods of corporate restructuring. Delays, service reductions, and route limitations have destabilized public perception of Garuda's quality. In the tourism context, this inconsistency is particularly significant, as the travel experience is often the first step in the overall travel experience.

Furthermore, the reputational crisis and financial issues have also been major obstacles to strengthening Garuda Indonesia's tourism brand. News about debt, restructuring, and fleet reductions have created a negative public image. For tourists, especially international travelers, operational issues and airlines are crucial factors in determining their choice. When public trust weakens, it becomes difficult for Garuda to emerge as a symbol of comfortable and safe travel.

Another problem arises from the lack of innovation in digital communications and a lifestyle branding approach. Today's travelers, especially the younger generation, are more interested in stories, visuals, and creative collaborations that convey the travel experience. Garuda's still predominantly institutional communication makes the brand less "vibrant" in the eyes of young travelers, less appealing than other airlines that are more aggressively building an image of adventure, freedom, and experiential travel.

Garuda Indonesia also faces the problem of weak integration with the tourism ecosystem. Collaborations with destinations, tourism events, cultural festivals, and integrated travel packages have not been consistently maximized. As a result, Garuda stands as a separate entity, rather than an integral part of the travel experience itself. In modern tourism, airlines should be the gateway to the destination narrative, not simply a means of transportation.

Garuda Indonesia's challenge in enhancing its brand in tourism lies not in a lack of potential, but in the integration of its premium image, brand communication, customer experience, and tourism integration. Until Garuda fully positions itself as part of the Indonesian tourism experience, its brand will struggle to become firmly embedded in the national and global tourism imagination.

The air transportation industry in Indonesia continues to experience significant growth and contributes significantly to the domestic tourism industry. This growth must be balanced with the provision and availability of facilities and infrastructure. Business operations in the aviation industry are influenced by two environmental factors: (1) airline controllable aspects and (2) beyond airline control (INACA, 2019:12). These operational environmental factors should be communicated well, clearly, and accurately, considering that airline operators are regulated companies that rely heavily on public trust. This ensures that airline users and tourists (as stakeholders in tourism) understand and believe that air transportation is a safe, comfortable, and reliable mode of transportation for domestic tourism in Indonesia.

In 2020, the global aviation industry faced a crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as declared by the World Health Organization (WHO). The initial impact was felt most acutely by the tourism and transportation sectors, particularly air transportation. Indonesia's national airlines also had to navigate the COVID-19 turbulence to maintain business continuity amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic.

The tourism sector has continued to expand and diversify over the past three decades. According to a 2019 report from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the number of international tourist arrivals has shown rapid growth. In 2000, there were 674 million international tourists, increasing to 1,400 million in 2019.

The Indonesian aviation industry has distinct advantages compared to other Southeast Asian countries due to its archipelagic nature. Indonesia's archipelagic geography makes the national aviation industry a crucial means of transportation. Garuda Indonesia, Tbk., as one of the national airline operators and owner of the "Garuda Indonesia" brand in the aviation industry, must adapt quickly to the changing new environment by adjusting flight procedures and services for business travelers and tourists, placing greater emphasis on safety, health, and comfort. Therefore, a strategy is needed to enhance Garuda Indonesia's brand as an airline service provider. The focus of this research is "How Does Tourism Communication: Garuda Indonesia Enhance Its Brand as a Tourism Transportation Service Provider?"

## **Tourism Communication**

The field of communication science continues to develop rapidly in Indonesia, and tourism communication is one of the foundations for numerous studies. Studies on communication and tourism have now developed and become integrated into tourism communication. Indonesia's increasingly prominent tourism sector requires communication activities to convey tourism messages, such as tourist destinations, transportation modes, accommodations, tourism promotions, and tourism resources. Tourism communication is a communication activity that conveys tourism messages to tourists and all tourism stakeholders. Communication can take the form of persuasive communication, mass communication, interpersonal communication, or group communication. The tourism messages communicated relate to tourism elements, namely: destinations, transportation, tourism marketing, and tourism resources (Bungin, 2015:88). Tourism communication practices can utilize a strategic marketing communication approach and maximize the use of communication technology (Bungin, 2015:93).

## **Tourism Transportation Communication**

Transportation communication is the activity of conveying tourism transportation communication messages through communication channels (social media and other literacy media) to tourists. These transportation communication messages can include transportation information, means and types of transportation, transportation safety and security, alternative transportation, connectivity, and so on (Bungin, 2015:95).

## **Brand**

A unique skill of professional and experienced marketers is their ability to create, maintain, protect, and enhance brands for both existing and future marketing. Marketers consider branding to be an art and the most important part of marketing. A brand is a product or service whose dimensions differentiate it in some way from other products or services designed to satisfy the same need. These differences can be functional, rational, or tangible, related to the brand's product performance. They can also be more symbolic, emotional, or intangible, related to what the brand represents.

Essentially, a brand is the use of a name, logo, trademark, and slogan to distinguish companies and individuals from one another in terms of what they offer. Consistent use of a brand, symbol, or logo makes the brand immediately recognizable to consumers so that everything related to it remains in their memory.

## **Method**

This research uses the constructivism paradigm, a paradigm that views reality as a result of human construction or formation. Reality is dual, malleable, and constitutes a whole. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study analysis method because it is considered appropriate in investigating contemporary phenomena that occur in real life. This is in accordance with Yin's (2014) definition, which states that a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly visible and where multiple sources of evidence are utilized. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study analysis method because it is considered appropriate for investigating contemporary phenomena occurring in real life. This aligns with Yin's (2014) definition, which states that a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and where multiple sources of evidence are utilized.

The interviewees to obtain the data needed for this research were key informants and supporting sources from PT Garuda Indonesia, Tbk., namely: (1) VP Corporate Communication; (2) VP Inflight Service & Ground Service; (3) VP Cabin Crew; (4) Senior Manager Brand & Marketing Communication; and (5) Senior Manager Inflight Standardization & Development.

In this research, the researcher conducted non-participatory observation, where the researcher only observed without participating in the activities being studied. In qualitative research, this type of interview is useful for building rapport (trust between the informant and the researcher). In-depth interviews are one of the interview models used in this study. Furthermore, the researcher employed a staged interview method. This staged interview method is conducted in stages according to the interview schedule agreed upon by the informant. As stated by (Bungin, Qualitative Research: Communication, Economics, Public Policy and Other Social Sciences, 2007), the main

characteristic of staged interviews is that they are conducted gradually, and the interviewer does not need to be involved in the informant's social life.

In this study, the researcher will collect materials in the form of documents and archives. In addition, public documents such as media reports and the researcher's diary (research notes) will also be used. Documentation complements the use of observation and interview methods in qualitative research, serving to strengthen data obtained in the field. The results of the documentation will later be attached to the research report, which aligns with the research focus.

Data analysis is a series of activities involving compiling and organizing data to draw conclusions based on the data collected in the field. This study employed the Miles and Huberman data analysis technique, commonly known as the interactive model. Qualitative data analysis is conducted interactively and continuously until data saturation is reached (Sugiyono, 2011). Data saturation is defined as the absence of new data or information. Analysis steps include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, all conducted simultaneously.

## **Discussion**

### **Garuda Indonesia's Service Industry and Airline**

Garuda Indonesia operates a fleet of 142 aircraft, 136 of which are leased and 6 are owned by Garuda Indonesia. Garuda Indonesia's fleet consists of Boeing 777-300, Boeing 737-800, Boeing 737-8 Max, Airbus A330-200, Airbus A330-300, Airbus A330-900, CRJ-1000 NextGen, and ATR 72-600. Of the various aircraft types operated by Garuda Indonesia, the Boeing 737-800 fleet experienced the sharpest decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, Garuda Indonesia had 73 737-800 aircraft. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Garuda Indonesia remained in operation with 27 aircraft. Another aircraft that experienced a significant reduction was the CRJ-1000NG regional aircraft fleet, down from 18 to just three in operation. This full-service airline concept boasts superior service quality and targets a market segment of middle- to upper-class passengers who are highly concerned with flight safety and service quality. Garuda Indonesia does not need to compete head-to-head with other airlines, particularly in pricing, because some of these airlines are designed to operate as low-cost carriers with significantly lower operating costs. Therefore, Garuda

Indonesia must focus solely on safety and service quality, confident that its customers will continue to choose to fly with Garuda Indonesia aircraft.

Garuda Indonesia has achieved several international recognitions, including "The World's Best Economy Class" from TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards, "Five-Star Airline" since 2014, "Top 10 World's Best Airline" from Skytrax 2017, and "The World's Best Cabin Crew" for five consecutive years since 2014. Furthermore, in 2017, Garuda Indonesia also achieved a "5-Star" designation from the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), a non-profit association for improving the passenger experience based in New York, USA (GA website).

Research has found that Garuda Indonesia's communications are still dominated by a corporate and informative approach. Communication messages emphasize the technical aspects of flight services, schedules, facilities, and safety standards. Meanwhile, communications highlighting tourism values such as travel experiences, local culture, and unique destinations are still limited and unstructured sustainably. In the context of tourism communications, this approach results in Garuda's messaging being less effective in building emotional connections with tourists. The airline has not fully positioned itself as part of the travel narrative, but rather as a mere travel support tool. Garuda Indonesia positions itself as a full-service airline, thus orienting its competition toward emphasizing value-added services. Furthermore, Garuda Indonesia no longer competes nationally but has become a global player. As a full-service airline, Garuda implements the value proposition concept, which is a way for Garuda Indonesia to provide passengers with more than the price they pay. This service serves as a guideline for Garuda Indonesia's service. known as the Garuda Indonesia Experience (GIE). The Garuda Indonesia Experience (GIE) is a service concept that presents the best aspects of Indonesia to customers.

Garuda Indonesia Experience concept, Garuda Indonesia is creating a proud identity while enhancing Indonesia's image internationally. The Garuda Indonesia Experience concept is based on the five senses or "5 senses" (sight, sound, scent, taste, and touch) and encompasses 24 customer touch points: pre-journey, pre-flight, in-flight, postflight, and post-journey service. Since its launch in 2009, the Garuda Indonesia Experience has relied on Indonesian hospitality. This aligns with Garuda Indonesia's vision: to be a reliable airline, offering quality service to people around the world

through Indonesian hospitality. Garuda Indonesia carries a special mission as the flag carrier of Indonesia, promoting Indonesia to the world. This concept of Indonesian hospitality is translated into icons that rely on the five senses, reflected in, among other things, the use of typical Indonesian materials and ornaments for aircraft interiors, the fragrance of Indonesian flowers, distinctive Indonesian music, and the taste of typical Indonesian food and drinks.

During a flight with Garuda Indonesia, the service is consistently high-quality, with inflight meals. Maulana Rizki, Senior Manager of Inflight Standardization & Development, explained that Garuda Indonesia's meals are neatly packaged before being delivered to passengers. This ensures hygienic food. This demonstrates Garuda Indonesia's commitment to maintaining and enhancing Indonesian tourism through air travel. Factors influencing customers' choice of Garuda Indonesia include safety, punctuality, membership, service, social engagement, and price.

The full-service concept requires Garuda Indonesia to continuously improve safety and service quality, given that the majority of its passengers are from the upper-middle class and are highly sensitive to aircraft comfort. This airline's exceptional service is evident, both onboard and offboard. The airline has also received an official 4-Star Product and Service Quality Rating and received IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) certification, indicating that it fully meets international aviation safety standards. Garuda Indonesia is also listed as a four-star airline by Skytrax, signifying excellent performance and service. To align its services with international airlines, Garuda Indonesia provides the latest AVOD (Audio Video on Demand) entertainment system with televisions on every seat, especially on its long-haul fleet.

The research revealed that consistent experience is a crucial factor in building Garuda Indonesia brand as a tourism transportation provider. Although Garuda Indonesia maintains high service standards, the traveler experience is not always consistent, especially on domestic routes and short-haul flights. This inconsistency impacts travellers perceptions of brand reliability. In the tourism context, the air travel experience is often a traveler's first impression of a destination, so inconsistent service has the potential to weaken the overall tourism image.

Garuda Indonesia entered the ranks of five-star airlines and received awards from Skytrax, winning the title of The Best Cabin Crew in the World, the Indonesia

Tourism & Travel Award 2016/2017, the Transportation & Safety Award, and various other international awards in previous years. This makes Garuda Indonesia truly have to compete with global airlines. The following are various products and services provided by Garuda Indonesia as a full-service airline to provide quality service and a sense of safety and comfort during flights with Garuda Indonesia: Aircraft Comfortability, Improving Service Quality, Flight Routes, Joining SkyTeam, Garuda City Check-in, Phone Check-in and Web Check-in, and the GarudaMiles Loyalty Program

## Conclusion

This study aims to determine the factors that influence passengers' choice of flying with Garuda Indonesia as a tourism transportation service provider. The results indicate that the factors determining passengers' choice of flying with Garuda are safety, price (in relation to facilities, service, and affordability), social (face-to-face, virtual, and relationships), comfort (physical and staff), membership (points, lounge, and redemption), and punctuality. Meanwhile, the motives for choosing to fly with Garuda include achievement (punctuality and points), experience (comparison and aircraft), parental recognition, responsibility (family and work), and enjoyment (service, physical, and travel).

The implementation of the in-flight experience includes the five senses (taste, touch, sound, scene, sight), collectibles, complaint handling, and safety. The implementation of the post-flight experience is the arrival aspect. The implementation of the post-flight experience includes FFP, social media, segmentation, integration, complaint handling, and CRM.

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