

# Hypercapitalism and Product Commodification through Digital-based Marketing Communications in Komodo National Park

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This research aims to analyze the value of hypercapitalism and product commodification through marketing communication strategies in one of Indonesia's flagship eco-tourism named Komodo National Park.

**Research methods:** The approach used in this study is to review the literature review and conduct in-depth interviews with tourism players in Komodo National Park (KNP).

**Results and discussion:** The results showed that KNP eco-tourism is still ongoing as the renewal and development of information technology affect digital marketing in the tourism sector.

**Implication:** It is hoped that all parties and stakeholders involved in KNP eco-tourism can assume that the main motivation for development is not only profit by sacrificing marine ecosystems and destroying existing habitats.

**Keywords:** hypercapitalism, commodification, digital marketing, eco-tourism, Komodo National Park.

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's economic development of them comes from the Tourism sector. Before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2018, this sector became the number one contributor to the country's foreign exchange. Tourism has a wide scope. Indonesia's heterogeneous regional conditions can be utilized for accelerating equitable development through one of the endogenous elements. The regional approach used is eco-tourism (Kasmiasi, 2016). The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) states that eco-tourism is a tourist travel activity that seeks to conserve natural resources and the environment. The development of eco-tourism indirectly affects society on ecological, social, and economic aspects.

One of the eco-tourisms that is the mainstay of Indonesia is Komodo National Park (KNP). KNP is located on Komodo Island, Rinca, Padar, and Banta in Komodo District in Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Based on the Decree of the Minister of Forestry Number: 306/Kpts-II/1992 dated February 29, 1992, the total area of the KNP hall is 173,300 Ha. This place is used to protect rare ancient animals in Indonesia, namely Komodo dragons. KNP has natural reservations that protect various other animals. This place has very enchanting natural scenery. KNP began to be formed on March 6, 1980, to

protect Komodo dragons and their habitat. KNP was once designated as a World Heritage Site and Man and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO and became one of the world's wonders.

Tourism marketing in a tourism area requires attractive tourist destinations. KNP has a position to be considered the uniqueness of the objects offered and their natural beauty. Attractive destinations have been an important marketing model for a long time. Marketing tourist destinations should optimize the impact of tourism and achieve strategic goals for all stakeholders (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019). The development of digital technology triggers great pressure in changing marketing strategies and patterns. This technology has created a variety of integrated media. For example, through imaginary data, which is data in the social world where the data can intervene in the relationship between people and other people, the relationship between people and their organization, or the relationship between the nation-state, the media, and its material environment (Beer, 2018).

Human activity, in this case, is understood as labor in the political economy and has been included in the logic of commodity production. The commodification of human activity is exemplified in terms of the knowledge economy. The development of the concept of commodification includes the commodification of the individual aspect itself, no longer in the scope of the commodification of social, material, and labor. In this case, language-mediated communication technology, namely the internet, has been used as an embodiment of commodification. One of the individual aspects here is how people (tourists) use social media in their visits to eco-tourism objects and change the public's social perception. Commodification in tourism is known as touristification, which is an effort to make people and tourist destinations a tourism product (Sari, 2005). Almost all aspects of human life have turned into traditional commodities (Nissim-Sabat, 2011).

Values are the main motivation and the most important aspect of human activity. Value, in this case, is the perception of what is valued. There is a huge impact on the changing pace of the various media systems today because of the different social environments in which everything is interconnected today. The boundaries between the inside and outside, including culture and tourism, will tend to be blurred and inseparable (Picard, 2003). Perception representation activities that directly affect social behavior can be interpreted as social perceptions. The perceptual input is translated into behavioral output to see the appropriate impressions. In this process, people will tend to do what other people see and do (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001). The change in the concept of value is also triggered by the development of information technology, which requires everything to be digital.

The growth of digitalization has become an opportunity for local governments to change the way business is done and improve the economy. One way is to support eco-tourism marketing communication campaigns and show that capitalism's products need to be communicated as a business within the framework of marketing activities. The product referred to here is humans and the relationship between humans themselves so that the main purpose of human activity is production in exchange rates. Media can develop content as a commodification to bring added economic value (Rusadi, 2012). Marketing communication in distributing materials is an important aspect because it

communicates the existence of an eco-tourism business so that it is expected to increase the number of tourist visits.

This study tries to present the major research questions: How is hypercapitalism through digital-based marketing communications in Komodo National Park eco-tourism? it is possible to see (1) the form of hypercapitalism of Komodo National Park eco-tourism products (2) Identify the meaning of marketing communication through the digital media of Komodo National Park (3) Identify the challenges faced in the commodification of eco-tourism in Komodo National Park.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research method uses a qualitative approach. The research used was a literature review and conducted in-depth interviews with tourism actors in Komodo National Park. The literature review is a written summary of journal articles, books, or other documents that describe the past and current state of information related to the topic of study being studied. The participants in the in-depth interview are the owners of the 17000 wonders travel agency.

Five steps are taken in conducting a literature review, namely: (1) Identify key terms; (2) Locate literature about a topic; (3) Critically evaluate and select the literature; (4) Organize the literature, and (5) Write a literature review (Creswell, 2009). The research location is in one of the eco-tourism areas in Komodo National Park, East Nusa Tenggara, in the period between December 2021 to February 2022. However, data from tourists in Jakarta who have visited Komodo National Park eco-tourism are used as tourist data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Hypercapitalism of the Commodification of Eco-tourism Products in Komodo National Park**

Commodification refers to the transformation of use-value into exchange rates. In the study of communication, two main dimensions are essential. First, the communication process and technology contribute to the commodification process in the overall economy. Second, the commodification of work in society by penetrating the communication process and institutions so that the progress and contradictions of the process affect communication as a social practice (Mosco, 2009). *Commodities* are anything available for sale to the market, and commodification is a process associated with capitalism, namely objects, qualities, and signs. Commodification makes something other than a commodity into a commodity that can trade for profit. The main characteristic of capitalism is commodification, where all goods and services, including land and labor, become commodities. Commodification is a fundamental feature of capitalism that almost turns all goods and services, including land and labor.

Capitalism is a socio-economic system based on private property rights, including private ownership of resources or capital with economic decisions made through market mechanisms. Hypercapitalism is a term used in the ongoing critique of political economy to illustrate a new form of capitalistic organization characterized by the speed and intensity of global flows that include the exchange of material and immaterial, people and information. This capitalism has fragmented social life and permeated all aspects of human experience. At the

expense of traditional values, hypercapitalism is extreme capitalism (Vujnovic, 2012).

The emphasis on the commodification of increasingly intimate and ephemeral aspects of human experience is expressed openly in the language of current policy on the new economy. In the journal *Hypercapitalism: language, new media, and social perceptions of value* which use as the primary reference in this research, Graham (2002) describe logical relationships that stretch from new media to value perceptions to macro and micro-social changes, including a change in perception of what value is and where that 'value' lies. Macro and micro-sociological relationships and their values emerge as new media objects: economic value determine by the quantity and quality of people's relationships, the product of the mediated exchange of meanings. According to most policy and business discourses, the new economy functions with new technologies. It requires new forms and sources of value, new social relations, new forms of labor, and new commodities (Graham, 2002).

There was a shift, and a new paradigm for tourism was born where currently tourism activities direct to special interest tourism. This paradigm reduces the negative impacts that arise on the socio-cultural community and natural degradation, decreased biodiversity, and critical land—tourism development by developing quality tourism products (quality tourism). Eco-tourism is one of the products of quality tourism where the emphasis is on three things: ecological or natural sustainability, community economy, and socio-culture (Budiarta & Suja, 2014). Protection of the interests of residents in tourist destinations is also an aspect that needs to be identified as one of the four critical thematic areas in addition to preserving the ecology of the destination country, the carbon footprint of tourist mobility, and behavioral attitudes towards sustainability (Khanra et al., 2021).

The commodification of eco-tourism products in KNP in East Nusa Tenggara can be seen from the shift in new values and new forms of commodities. The commodification process explains how capitalism achieves its goals by realizing value (accumulating capital) through transforming use value into exchange value. Along with the increasing demand for tourists visiting locations that are still naturally beautiful, eco-tourism commodification seems unavoidable because tourists also have a desire to experience different travel experiences. The author tries to see the commodification that occurs in the eco-tourism of Komodo National Park. In this case, it is:

1. Development of infrastructure projects in the Komodo National Park area.  
KNP is one of five Super Priority Destinations (DSP) under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf). The Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing (PUPR) stated that Rinca Island, which is in the KNP area, will experience a significant design change with the pretext of promoting the people's economic welfare and developing the existing potential sustainably. In the future, this island will be built like a Jurassic Park, this island will be turned into a premium tourist destination by using an integrated area approach that prioritizes the protection and use of geological heritage in a sustainable way.  
Through the Directorate General Cipta Karya, the Ministry of PUPR has budgeted Rp 69.96 billion to organize the Rinca Island area which includes

an information center building, souvenir center, cafe, and public toilets. In addition, an area management office was built, an area for selfies (selfie spots), health facilities, open parks, lodging for researchers, construction of facilities and infrastructure for beach takers, and facilities for local tour guides or so-called rangers. A trekking area is currently provided for pedestrians and a visitor shelter designed to float or elevate so as not to interfere with Komodo traffic.

Based on the Decree of the Minister of Forestry Number 306 of 1992 concerning the Establishment of the Komodo National Park, it is explained that KNP is a natural conservation area that is intact from Komodo dragons and other ecosystems, both on land and at sea. The model of developing geopark facilities and infrastructure using concretization can destroy the area's landscape ("UNESCO Asks Indonesia to Stop Jurassic Park Project in KNP"). In addition, the construction of boreholes as part of infrastructure development also hurts the death of water sources that have been the source of livelihood for animals and plants that inhabit the area.

Infrastructure development is required to serve the interests of investors who want to invest in the KNP area. Komodo's living space was destroyed by the invasion of the tourism business carried out. West Manggarai Formapp refuses because the construction of these facilities and infrastructure is only to serve the interests of investors who want to invest in the Komodo National Park area.

2. Marine management issues around the Komodo National Park site

Based on Government Regulation No. 28 of 2011, the management of areas within national parks is based on zoning. There are at least 277 animal species which are a mix of Asian and Australian animals including Komodo dragons that must be protected because of the limited number of distributions.

The NTT Provincial Zoning Regulation legalizes the seizure of space through tourism projects in Labuan Bajo and Komodo National Parks. This results in limited space for the people of Komodo Island, the majority of whom work as fishermen of course it is considered detrimental to the local community and has an impact on fishermen's income which is decreasing due to zoning and prohibitions to catch fish in the waters of Komodo National Park.

This prohibition is to provide a sense of security and comfort for tourists to maintain the survival of the Komodo dragon as an endangered animal and for the preservation of the marine biota ecosystem. This can also be regarded as the commodification of the living space of coastal communities.

3. Soil commodification around Komodo National Park

Land that was previously owned by many residents has now turned into the hands of investors from outside the city as well as foreigners. This causes the erosion of land owned by residents. The tourism development model that is driven by large-scale investment by the government encourages the commodification of land there to be more widespread. Land prices have soared, from hundreds of millions to billions.

The commodification of land also causes changes in green and conservation areas into residential and business areas, whitening of spatial violations, and changes to infrastructure projects that facilitate commercialization.

## Digital-Based Marketing Communication on Eco-tourism of Komodo National Park

Associated with hypercapitalism is related to the meaning of media and the meaning mediated through the production process and its shift. Texts in the form of scripts and audio-visuals circulate very widely in this digital era. This process involves transferring meaning from one text to another. The discourse presented involves the transformation of meaning.

Digital marketing media will intersect with the digital market. In contrast to other forms of media that have institutional forms, in the new media everyone who has an account can view and produce content. In the context of KNP eco-tourism marketing from a political economy point of view, it is necessary to show how the meaning of value is clearly placed and formally constructed by the reality that is not different from the reality.

Through marketing communication messages contained knowledge that must be shared with the target audience through the media. The presence of digitalization can be associated with the formation of a capitalist reconstruction that creates capitalism without capitalism as the ownership structure of the capitalist economy which is conveyed through marketing communication messages. Means in marketing communications must be able to accommodate use values and exchange values so that the value of the commodities produced can be accepted rationally and emotionally.

The internet has a very strong impact on tourism, especially in the marketing of KNP eco-tourism. A consumer's first experience with a tourist place, hotel, or Internet agency has a very strong impact. Seeing the beauty of the panorama through what is posted by tourists who have visited, makes people more familiar with and have an interest in visiting. Tourists often turn to technology to search for their tourist destinations. Figure 1 are picture of several platforms that tourists can use to find information and assist in marketing related to KNP eco-tourism.

Various platforms can be used as a means of digital-based marketing (et al., 2020). In Figure 1, several tourism ecosystems are presented, all of which can be accessed online.



Figure 1. Platform Digital  
[Source: Data Processed, 2022]

- a. Social media  
In using social media, such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and so on, users can easily share, convey ideas, communicate, and create various content freely without the limitations of space and time. Indirectly, sometimes social media is also a means to influence other users to take tourism actions or visit certain areas such as the KNP area which has beautiful panoramas.
- b. Online travel agent  
This company will interact continuously with existing partners including accommodation and transportation service providers. Information technology also plays an important role in the distribution of tour packages provided by several tour operators. Coordination and exchange of information through technology allows the coordination of activities and problem solving and the wishes of tourists can be conveyed properly.
- c. Accommodation  
Means of providing lodging services are available and can be ordered online through the existing site. Tourists can stay at a hotel in Labuan Bajo or choose to stay on a ship (Live on Board). Food and beverage service is also available well.
- d. Transportation  
Currently, online transportation media are available to make it easier for tourists to travel to tourist attractions. Transportation from air, land, and sea to KNP eco-tourism is quite complete. It is noted that one of the online transportation media Grab has also launched services in Kupang and Labuan Bajo.
- e. Community forum  
The tourism business will be more easily recognized from one person to another through community forums and references from tourists who have visited certain places. In addition, search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Baidu also facilitate tourism promotion. Search engines contribute to providing the information required by tourists.

The concept of digital-based marketing communication must be understood by tourism destination managers. In marketing, it is necessary to design other marketing mixes such as the product side, distribution channels, and customer costs, then tourist destinations need to communicate it as a value package offered to tourists.

The marketing of Komodo Island eco-tourism at the international level continues. Labuan Bajo is expected to be able to compete with the achievements of regions in Indonesia that have already developed their tourism. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a marketing communication planning concept that gives added value to an in-depth plan by evaluating the strategic roles of various communication sciences and combining them to produce maximum accuracy, consistency, and communication effect through the integration of messages.

This is greatly facilitated by the presence of the digitalization era. The presence of new media has quite an impact on trends. Information can be mixed and inaccurate because anyone can convey information. Tourist flexibility and

service delivery processes are affected by the revolution in internet usage. More and more open information can be accessed by tourists and sometimes creates certain demands for tourists.

### Challenges in the Commodification of Eco-tourism in Komodo National Park

Like a sidebar of a currency, the presence of the number of tourists certainly has a very positive influence on the economic cycle of the KNP area and the surrounding area and even contributes greatly to the country's foreign exchange considering that KNP is visited by many foreign tourists and has an increasing trend from year to year (Figure 2). The negative impact that arises is the occurrence of major exploration and commodification of eco-tourism products as described in section 1.

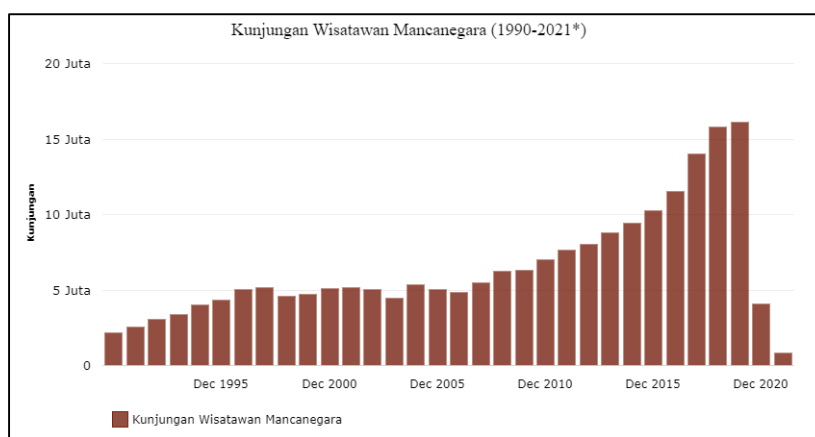


Figure 2. Number of Foreign Tourist Visits to Indonesia  
 [Source: Databooks, 2019]

Even though from 2020 to February 2022 the number of tourists dropped dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 3), the movement of tourists to visit KNP, especially domestic ones, will continue to increase and require careful management. From year-to-year data, under normal conditions, there is an increase in the number of tourists.

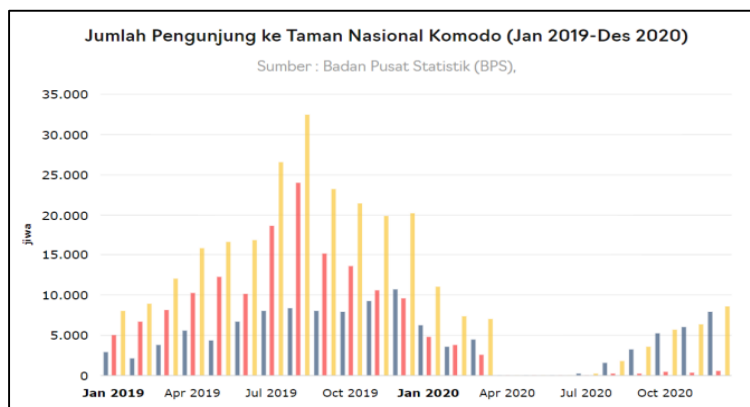


Figure 3. Number of KNP Visits in 2019 - 2020  
 [Source: Statistics Indonesia, 2022]



One way that can be done to deal with the massive number of tourists visiting eco-tourism to KNP when conditions return to normal is to control the damage caused (damage control). This is necessary to maintain KNP eco-tourism so that it can be maintained. Need to be given a separator which zones must be maintained naturally without development. Another way but very difficult to do is to carry out a de-marketing process by making tourist exclusions who come to KNP to maintain the value and eco-tourism ecosystem of KNP. Excessive tourists or so-called mass tourism can damage the value of KNP.

The economy emphasizes the commercial side and the welfare of the community or those who have large capital while KNP eco-tourism requires nature whose habitat must be preserved. There must be a balance between eco-tourism and the economy. There needs to be separated provisions and prohibitions that must be obeyed by tourists without exception.

Although it can be said that it is not easy to achieve this, in the end, it will bring benefits and good things for the ecosystem itself. The KNP ecosystem can still be well maintained if all stakeholders in the tourism world as well as the government are not greedy and keep the essence of protecting the habitat and ecosystem of the KNP.

## CONCLUSION

The recommendations that are expected to provide benefits that accurately reflect the support of care on all sides while at the same time answering the objectives of this research are as follows: (1) Commodification of KNP eco-tourism is still ongoing. The commodification should be carried out in areas outside the KNP conservation zone, such as on the mainland of Flores; (2) Digital marketing in the tourism sector is still being updated along with the development of information technology. For this reason, it is necessary to upgrade and integrate internally and externally to improve the tourism business. Forms and programs of concern for conservation and eco-tourism can also be part of the KNP eco-tourism marketing campaign; and (3) It is hoped that all parties and stakeholders involved in KNP eco-tourism can think that the main motivation for development is not profit by sacrificing marine ecosystems and destroying existing habitats. However, eco-tourism is designed for conservation, not just a place of recreation.

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