

Post-Pandemic Society: Case Study of Gunungkidul Regency in Digital Tourism Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the government's role and the digitalization process in the Gunungkidul tourism sector and its impact on the surrounding community after the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a qualitative research method with case study approach, data is collected through literature studies of relevant articles, documents, and scientific works to then carry out an in-depth interpretation analysis. The results of the study show that the Gunungkidul government's digitization program which consists of the #IniGunungKidul - The Ultimate Hidden Gem campaign, the regional digitalization acceleration program through a digital economic ecosystem, and training for business actors has achieved excellent success. Throughout 2022, there has been an increasing trend of Gunungkidul tourists and in the same year, the poverty rate for the Gunungkidul has decreased by 2% compared to the previous year. It can be concluded that the government's consistency in implementing digitization of tourism can restore the Gunungkidul economy and at the same time creating a new, technologically literate post-pandemic society.

KEYWORDS

Post-pandemic society; digital tourism; gunungkidul.

INTRODUCTION

Gunungkidul Regency, with the capital Wonosari, is one of the regencies located in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Situated in the southeastern part of the Special Region, Gunungkidul covers 1,485.36 km², or approximately 46.63% of the total territory of Yogyakarta. Tropical weather and karst hills dominate the landscape of the Gunungkidul Regency, notably in its southern area. As a region of karst hills, Gunungkidul is endowed with a multitude of natural resources, including numerous natural caves and underground rivers that flow from upstream to downstream (Pemerintah Kabupaten Gunungkidul, n.d.). To encourage the growth and development of Gunungkidul Regency, the local administration developed the regency's topographical potential as a tourism destination. Gunungkidul is home to a variety of tourist attractions, such as waterfalls, caverns, tourist settlements, mountains, beaches, and handicrafts. Indrayanti Beach, Nglanggeran Ancient Volcano, Pindul Cave, and Sri Gethuk Waterfall are the most popular tourist attractions in Gunungkidul. Given the natural beauty of Gunungkidul, many visitors find themselves drawn to the region's diverse tourism attractions (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Gunungkidul, 2023b). However, when COVID-19 spread throughout Indonesia, Gunungkidul Regency frequently encountered a decline in revenues as a result of the central government's decision to impose a lockdown policy.

Since 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic brought on by the coronavirus has been spreading and has affected a large number of nations. In order to stop the coronavirus from

disseminating, some nations adopted containment measures regulations, including travel restrictions and lockdowns (Suksmonohadi & Indira, 2020). Here, Indonesia was no different. The consequences of Indonesia's containment policies are being experienced not only by civil community, but also by business owners and enterprises who engages themselves in service-related activities. Among the service industries most impacted by these containment measures is the rapidly expanding tourist and recreation sector (Abbas et al., 2021; Korinth, 2022; Rahman et al., 2021). The Central Statistics Agency reports that from January through December 2020, there were only 4.09 million foreign tourists that visited Indonesia overall. Compared to the 16.11 million visits made by international tourists a year before, this number represents a 75% decrease (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). The significant decline in the number of tourists was due to containment measures implemented in Indonesia, such as Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), Implementation of Restrictions on Community Activities (PPKM), and the closure of several airports and seaports. Therefore, it is impossible to avoid the adverse effect of a huge derivation in tourism industry.

Major tourist attractions, including Gunungkidul, have seen an overall decline in the number of visitors. Gunungkidul beach tourism sector only contributed a mere 10% levy to the Government's Locally-Generated Revenue with an average quarterly fee of 4% - 5% (Wulandari & Priyastiwati, 2022). Along with beach tourism in Gunungkidul, COVID-19 containment measures implementation also had an effect on Pindul Cave, a popular tourist destination that had to be temporarily closed due to a lack of visitors (Pradana & Mahendra, 2021). The closing of several tourist sites in Gunungkidul substantially influenced the welfare of the surrounding population, as seen by the loss of livelihood for managers and merchants who sell near tourist attractions. Seeing the decline in tourism revenue that directly contributes to the financial condition of the community, the local administration is searching for additional ways to promote Gunungkidul tourism, specifically through digital tourism.

Digital tourism refers to the use of a tool for information and communication or an IT solution that can assist the needs of travelers while enhancing the ability of organizations and enterprises in the tourism sector to compete (Happ & Ivancsó-Horváth, 2018; Laksana et al., 2022; Murti et al., 2022). The Gunungkidul administration is attempting to promote tourism as well as the deployment of digital tourism by using the hashtag #IniGunungKidul - The Hidden Gem as the primary campaign to highlight Gunungkidul's tourist potential. It is envisaged by implementing tourism digitalization, this plan will raise the income of those who rely on the tourism industry, particularly the residents of Gunungkidul. It is also noted that Gunungkidul's tourism industry had largely impacted the locals' ability to support themselves financially through employment opportunities, the establishment of MSMEs at tourist attractions, and the management of these locations prior to the pandemic (Aryani et al., 2017; Nafisah & Sukarniati, 2015).

Post-pandemic, the government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta seeks to integrate tourism digitization with tourism promotion efforts through the SMART Tourism program and the Information System for Access, Amenity and Tourism Attractions (SIAAAP) to manage sustainable tourism while increasing the participation of tourism industry players in the use of information technology that will increase their business income (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Through this program, it is expected that other regions located in Yogyakarta can increase efforts to promote regional excellence through digitalization as well. Some of the efforts to digitize tourism in Gunungkidul after the pandemic were carried out with the help of the surrounding community as the main actor of digitization, in the form of utilizing digital marketing through social media and websites for the promotion of Telaga

Jonge tourism (Andi Candra et al., 2022), implementing virtual tourism for the climbers of Mount Nglanggeran Ancient Volcano (Sekarsih & Mustopa, 2022), while media literacy, regional mapping, and digital branding of Langse Caves tourism has been considered as an effective promotional strategy (Pudrianisa, 2021). The integration of tourism promotion efforts with the technology and information sector after the pandemic has sparked research interest in collecting data on public sentiment about tourism destinations, where only 1% of comments on Gunungkidul were unfavorable, which is a remarkably good response for a region where tourism is a major industry (Larasati et al., 2022). In a comprehensive study of Gunungkidul potential tourists, Wijaya et al (2022) found that Gunungkidul's tourism spots are primarily visited by young female visitors, students, and employees aged 11 to 25. Most of them arrive in groups to travel in the manner preferred by young people, such as for leisure or traveling with a bunch of friends. Thus, with several support factors from the government and the surrounding community, tourism digitalization in Gunungkidul can be a very effective program in increasing community income. Especially, in the new normal era after the COVID-19 pandemic, emerge a new conception of a post-pandemic society that is technologically savvy and experiences socio-cultural transition in several domains, one of which is the creative industry (Widyatwati, 2022).

In this post-pandemic transition era, it will not be a surprise that digital technologies will hugely impact social organizations, normative, and social forces towards an extend where it can alter how individuals act, behave, and think regarding technology (Dalimunthe et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2020). This is because competence in mastering technology is an aspect that is needed by the community to deal with various changes in conditions and uncertainties in the post-pandemic period. Gunungkidul was once a regency that fully adhered to the traditional way of doing business. However, when COVID-19 spread to Gunungkidul and affected the livelihood of the locals, it forced them to master the newest technology to survive the effect of pandemic. This condition could create a new civilization that is highly skilled in technology mastery, which then in this research would be further defined as a post-pandemic society of Gunungkidul. Eventually to form this society will require the assistance of the government and willingness from the society themselves, particularly in developing digital tourism. However, the author of this research has not found any paper that explains the Gunungkidul government's efforts in implementing tourism digitalization and its success in improving the post-pandemic society of Gunungkidul. Therefore, in this article, the author would like to comprehensively discuss the condition of tourism in Gunungkidul before, during, and after the pandemic as well as the form of digital tourism transformation that impacted the before-pandemic as well as the post-pandemic society of Gunungkidul.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in the article entitled "Post-Pandemic Society: Case Study of Gunungkidul Community in Digital Tourism Transformation" is qualitative research with a case study approach. Qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding the meaning of an individual, group, or event ascribed to a social or humanitarian problem (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, a variety of empirical materials are used and gathered, including case studies, personal narratives, biographies, interviews, artifacts, texts, and cultural productions that are observable, interactive, historical, and visually rich. These materials are subsequently investigated deeply by the researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Meanwhile, the case study approach is a strategy used in qualitative research where researchers use a case to examine the phenomenon of events, activities, and individuals in

more depth. The case chosen to be used as a research study material is certainly limited by a certain period so that researchers can collect information data in accordance with the predetermined period (Creswell, 2013). To ensure the novelty of the research, the data for content analysis were newly published documents, articles, and scientific papers throughout 2016-2023.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gunungkidul Before the Pandemic

The tourism industry in Gunungkidul was growing annually prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. According to Table 1, it can be seen that there were 3.236.931 tourists overall in 2017, and this number decreased in 2018. This is certainly caused by several things, one of which is the means of tourism promotion that is less attractive and less accessible to the wider community. Unattractive promotions will certainly reduce the interest of tourists to visit an area, especially when that particular area is not a well-known city that everyone would pay a visit for various kinds of business. If we take a closer look at the table, the decline can also be caused by the reluctance of local people to visit the same area a second time. Therefore, Gunungkidul must be able to find the potential of its region in other forms, and then pursue an online marketing to reach various potential tourists.

Table 1. Number of Domestic and Foreign Tourists in Gunungkidul Before the Pandemic

Year	Tourists		Totals
	Domestic	Overseas	
2017	3.236.931	21.082	3.258.013
2018	3.017.336	22.759	3.040.095

CBT, or community-based tourism, was used as the primary technique for promoting tourist spots in Gunungkidul during 2017–2018. Local communities in Nglanggeran village, Gunungkidul that consists of merchant groups, women in Family Welfare Development (PKK), and homestay groups actively contribute to the advancement of local tourism by implementing the idea of ecotourism, creating distinctive culinary varieties, and conducting online advertising through websites and Instagram (Jamalina & Wardani, 2017). Along with the local community's involvement, the Ministry of Tourism also provides tourism management training to the people in Nglanggeran Village in order for the area's potential tourism to be realized and enhanced (Wahyuni, 2018). Although the CBT plan has been put in place, there are still a number of issues with it, including a lack of English-speaking human resources, poor tourist amenities, and a lack of promotion of the tourist attractions in or around Nglanggeran Village through various channels (Jamalina & Wardani, 2017).

Based on the difficulties encountered in Gunungkidul's tourism sector prior to the pandemic, it is possible to conclude that tourism digitalization activities were not carried out optimally. Tourism promotion, which was exclusively done through the website and Instagram, can be improved by utilizing other social media platforms such as Twitter and Youtube, as well as adding English elements to the website to attract foreign travelers.

Digitalization is important in tourism promotion strategy because advances in information technology in globalization era can be used directly by business actors to promote their tourist destinations, allowing domestic communities and foreign tourists to easily access information about tourist attractions in a certain area. Moreover, the number of internet users expanded significantly between 2016 and 2018, rising from 43% to 49% of the global population in 2018 (*Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population)*, n.d.).

The effect of the global increase in internet users has provided a highly potential marketing subjects, where promotional efforts carried out through e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) or comments and posts on social media, as well as the creation of tourism content marketing, will yield more effective results when compared to traditional promotional efforts in the tourism sector, generally known as "word-of-mouth" promotion (Binh Nguyen et al., 2023). In fact, e-WOM promotion through digital media can pique travelers' interest in returning to previously visited tourist destinations (Ariyanti et al., 2022). Therefore, attempts to promote Gunungkidul as a tourist destination should focus on developing the important and prospective features of digitalization in the tourism sector.

Gunungkidul During the Pandemic

In 2020, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has emerged as a new disease that is considered deadly. As a further response, various countries, including Indonesia, have implemented lockdown and containment measures as a form of suppressing the rate of increase in positive COVID-19 patients. This certainly has an impact on tourism conditions, where access for foreign and local travelers to tourist destinations is closed, causing significant losses for business actors.

According to the latest data from the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the number of tourists visiting Indonesia in 2021 fell to 4,052 million, a 25% decrease from the number of visitors in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), while the state's tourism-related revenue fell by 20.7 billion Rupiah (Pradana & Mahendra, 2021). The residents of Gunungkidul are also affected by COVID-19's effects on the local economy because there has been a decline in tourism as a result of containment measures implementation that was caused by cancellation for tourism visits as well as the temporary closure of several tourist attractions. Naturally, this also had an impact on Gunungkidul's community income and regional taxes. The Gunungkidul Tourism Office lowered their Locally-Generated Revenue (PAD) objective for 2020 from 29 billion Rupiah to 18 billion Rupiah, but only managed to reach about 11 billion Rupiah in its execution (KABAR24 BISNIS, 2020).

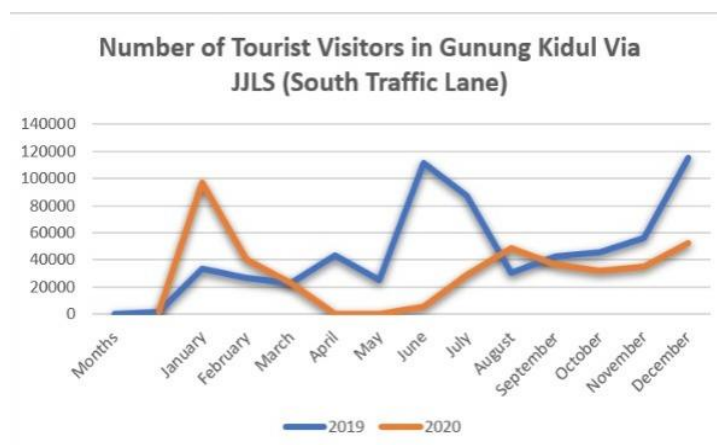


Figure 1. Gunungkidul Tourist Visits in 2019-2020

We are now moving to another comprehensive analysis on Gunungkidul tourism during pandemic. Based on Figure 1, it can be seen that the number of visitors to Gunungkidul tourism objects through the South Traffic Lane (JLS) post, which is the main road to head to tourism destinations in Gunungkidul, during January and February 2020 had

experienced a significant increase from 2019 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Gunungkidul, n.d.). Further analysis showed that the total number of visitors in 2019 was 641,292 while during the pandemic it decreased around 37.62% from the previous year.

The community's poverty rate, which has risen as a result of the pandemic, is linearly correlated with the drop in Gunungkidul's tourism income. Sri Suhartanto, the head of the regional development planning agency, claims that Gunungkidul's poverty rate has gone up by 17%, exactly proportional to the rise in the number of low-income families (Christyaningsih, 2021).

Tourism digitalization initiatives started to launch during the pandemic, but their significance and consistency were still relatively lacking. Still, third parties, including community service organizations from various colleges and other non-governmental organizations handle the majority of digitization activities. Some of the digitalization initiatives take the form of instruction and support for the use of websites that promote MSMEs and tourist attractions (Ayuningtyas et al., 2020) and online workshops to improve the qualities and creativity of local MSMEs. In some online workshops, the local community was invited to *go digital* in selling knitting bags through several online marketplaces and conducting e-marketing using Whatsapp and Instagram (Sekarsih & Mustopa, 2020).

Post-Pandemic Gunungkidul

Throughout 2021-2022, the Gunungkidul Regency government is working on digitizing tourism and creating a digital economy ecosystem as a strategy to increase the income of its local communities. Post-pandemic, the regional government organized tourism promotion through the *#IniGunungKidul - The Ultimate Hidden Gem* campaign that ran from August to December 2022 (Tempo.co, 2022). The campaign has three pillars:

1. Investment, this pillar contains the development and achievements of Gunungkidul regional development which is expected to attract investors to invest in the creation of a developed tourism ecosystem;
2. Creative economic development through micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), this pillar aims to increase tourists' awareness of MSMEs in Gunungkidul, as well as encourage MSME players to enter the digital market;
3. Tourism, where this pillar aims to introduce attractive destinations in Gunungkidul that have not been explored by tourists.

Through the three pillars of the campaign *#IniGunungKidul - The Ultimate Hidden Gem*, the Gunungkidul government is making efforts to digitize tourism and MSMEs which are expected to increase the income of the surrounding community. Promotion is also intensively carried out through various channels, such as the creation of the *inigungkidul.com* website page, the *inigungkidul_id* Instagram page, and efforts to increase tourism trends through other hashtags such as *#ayokegunungkidul*, *#inibaruliburan*, and *#inibarupantai* on the Tiktok application which displays photos of Gunungkidul tourist destinations. Reported by Kompas, Suryananta as the Regent of Gunungkidul acknowledged the tourism digitalization efforts carried out by the Gunungkidul government, both through digital branding and digitalization of local community MSMEs (Kompas.com, 2022).

In addition to the digitalization campaign through *#IniGunungKidul - The Ultimate Hidden Gem*, Gunungkidul's tourism promotion efforts are also carried out with an attempt to strengthen institutional capacity and also the management of tourist villages in Gunungkidul using a new acquired agenda to develop the P2DD Program, or commonly known as Acceleration and Expansion of Regional Digitalization Program (BKAD

Kabupaten Gunungkidul, 2022). In this program, TP2DD (Regional Digitalization Acceleration and Expansion Team) and ETPD (Electronification of Local Government Transactions) were launched. TP2DD is a coordination forum between relevant agencies and stakeholders to promote new ideas, accelerate and expand the implementation of ETPD, and encourage the unification of digital economy and finance to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and integrated financial governance. The government's digitalization program is then supported by other programs, namely PAS BANGET (South Coast Builds Digital Ecosystem) which is implemented through e-ticketing of tourism levies, digitalization of tourist attraction visitors at the retribution post using QRIS (Quick Response Code Indonesian Standard), digitalization of tourism businesses at Sadranan Beach using QRIS, Ngingrong Digital Market, Jonge Digital Market, and Argowijil Digital Market (*Smart Branding*, 2023). Not only digital markets, the Gunungkidul government also launched an e-parking system, which is the ease of paying for parking using QRIS to attract tourists from big cities who prefer the ease of payment through e-wallets while avoiding illegal parking that has the potential to disrupt the safety and comfort of tourist destinations (Sorot Gunungkidul, 2022).

Other forms of digitalization employed in Gunungkidul's tourism promotion initiatives include educating staff members through extensive training on how to create, oversee, and maintain social media accounts for tourist homestays and tourist attractive destinations. The training is also aimed at strengthening promotion through digital media independently and creating tourism content to attract more tourists to feel more interested in visiting Gunungkidul. The training generally takes the form of digital marketing training with the aim of understanding market research through digital tools, digital branding training conducted by the Giripurwo Village government for MSME businesses, as well as training on "Digitalization of Marketing: Branding, Marketing and Sales in Tourism Villages, Homestays/Tourist Lodges, Culinary, Souvenirs, Photography" held by the Gunungkidul Regency Tourism Office and attended by local tourist managers (Aprita, 2021; LPK Hiska, 2023; Sulistiyan, 2022). The community received essential knowledge in this session regarding the creation of engaging content, digital media promotion, and the use of photography for digital marketing (Anggabenta, 2022). Through various digitization programs and training, the government's commitment and consistency in developing tourism digitization has been very vigorous and has succeeded in reaping good results, where Gunungkidul Regency was ranked 9th, one level below Denpasar city, Bali, in the final score of digitization development from all regencies and cities in Indonesia organized by Ministry of Communication and Informatics of Republic of Indonesia (The Ministry of Communication and Informatics of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

Digitilization and Gunungkidul Society

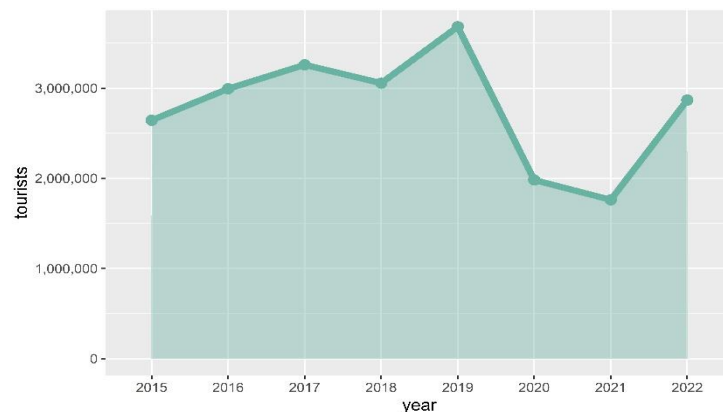


Figure 2. Gunungkidul Tourism Visits in 2015-2022

The development of digitalization in the tourism aspect of Gunungkidul itself shows positive results. Based on data from the Gunungkidul Central Bureau of Statistics and other sources, there was an increasing trend of tourists visiting Gunungkidul throughout 2022. This achievement shows that the tourism digitalization effort launched by the Gunungkidul Regency government is a successful integration program of digitalization and tourism promotion. The promotion of #IniGunungKidul - The Ultimate Hidden Gem has successfully attracted tourists to come to Gunungkidul as an option for tourism, the digital economy ecosystem through the implementation of digital markets and QRIS has also successfully attracted investors to invest in Gunungkidul's tourism sector. Figure 2 shows a very significant increase in the number of tourists visiting Gunungkidul in 2022, reaching almost three million tourists (Tugu Jogja, 2022; Yuwono, 2023). This is inversely proportional to the previous years (2020 and 2021) which were only able to attract one to two million tourists. Meanwhile, in the investment sector, there was a significant increase in investment realization, which amounted to 267.4% from the previous year (Sasongko, 2022). This achievement shows that Gunungkidul Regency is an attractive area for investors, especially because of its natural wealth and tourism potential. The economic ecosystem built by the Gunungkidul government has succeeded in attracting investors.

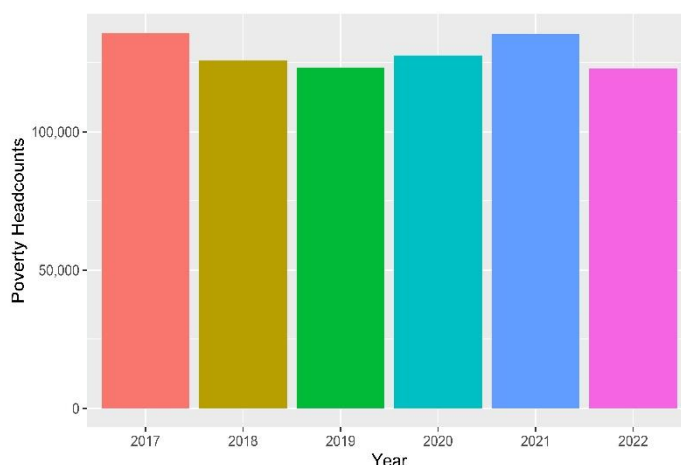


Figure 3. Poverty Headcounts of Gunungkidul local communities as of 2017-2022

The increase in the number of tourists has had a significant impact on the economy of the Gunungkidul community. In 2022, the number of those who lives in poverty in Gunungkidul declined to 122.820, lower than in 2021 when it reached its peak at 135.330 individuals (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Gunungkidul, 2023a). In terms of percentage, Gunungkidul's low-income population in 2022 decreased by 2% with a final percentage of 15.68%. This relatively smaller number is a outstanding achievement, considering that the number of people who lived in poverty were much higher in the previous year, amounted to 17.69% and in 2020 amounted to 17.07%. The increase in income and the number of tourists in Gunungkidul after the development of digitalization shows that the government's approach through digitalization to facilitate tourists and promote Gunungkidul tourism to the wider community has been successful. The digitalization carried out by the Gunungkidul local government has resulted in a flock of tourists who had chosen Gunungkidul as an attractive region that was mentioned earlier on their social media.

Table 2. Gunungkidul Society: Pre-Pandemic and Post-Pandemic

Scope	Pre-Pandemic Society	Post-Pandemic Society
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism marketing was done traditionally, using word-of-mouth. • Most transactions used cash, no option for e-wallet usage . • Traditional market was widely used as a means of selling goods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism marketing was done digitally, using well-known social medias and hashtags to increase popularity. • Several options were available for transactions, using cash or e-wallet (QRIS). • E-commerce were widely used and digital markets have been established.

Not only has it succeeded in attracting tourists, the digitalization carried out by the Gunungkidul Regency government has also changed the socio-cultural order of the community, especially in the way of how the local communities are managing their own tourism sector. Here in the table 2, we highlighted some differences that occur to Gunungkidul communities as a pre-pandemic society and as a pos-pandemic one. Before the pandemic, the promotion and management of tourist destinations was done traditionally, either by word-of-mouth, payment using cash, and the digital market had not yet been created. However, the post-pandemic situation then forced the community to switch to digital technology, which is expected to increase income and reach a wider market coverage. Facilitated by the government through various digital trainings, the Gunungkidul community has become a different community in the new normal era, where the adaptation to increasingly massive technology has formed the Gunungkidul community as a post-pandemic society that is technologically literate.

CONCLUSION

Gunungkidul is situated in the southeastern part of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. To encourage the growth and development of Gunungkidul, the local administration developed the regency's topographical potential as a tourism destination. When COVID-19 outbreak started in Indonesia, Gunungkidul administration is attempting to deploy the concept of digital tourism by using the hashtag #IniGunungKidul - The Hidden Gem as the primary campaign to highlight Gunungkidul's tourist potential. Some of the digitalization initiatives take the form of instruction and support for the use of websites that promote MSMEs and tourist attractions and online workshops to improve the qualities and creativity of local MSMEs. Through the three pillars of the campaign #IniGunungKidul - The Ultimate Hidden Gem, the Gunungkidul government is making efforts to digitize tourism and MSMEs which are expected to increase the income of the surrounding community. Other forms of digitalization employed in Gunungkidul's tourism promotion initiatives include educating staff members through extensive training on how to create, oversees, and maintain social media accounts for tourist homestays and tourist attractive destinations. The community received essential knowledge in this session regarding the creation of engaging content, digital media promotion, and the use of photography for digital marketing. Digitalization in the tourism aspect of Gunungkidul itself shows positive results, where a significant increase in the number of tourists has greatly impacted Gunungkidul society's economic condition while at the same time the local communities become the post-pandemic society that is technologically literate. Future research could examine the influence of digitalization on Gunungkidul society in other sectors besides tourism.

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