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Branding about Indonesia through cross-cultural communication

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Abstract One of the most discussed issues currently is the competition of people among nations. Cross-cultural communication is becoming more and more apparent in countries in various aspects of life. This study aimed to provide an overview of how branding on Indonesia could be done through cross-cultural communication. The study examined cross-cultural communication between lecturers of Bina Nusantara University (Binus University) in Indonesia and lecturers from the Appalachian State University (ASU) the United States, as part of their research into Asian countries. The American lecturers interacted with lecturers from Binus University, Jakarta, as well as with the community in several regions of Indonesia. The study used a qualitative approach with descriptive method. This research was a case study with open interviews and observation of data collection techniques. The results showed that the interaction between Indonesian and American lecturers had built positive branding for Indonesia as reflected in posts on the American lecturers' social media accounts which they did on their initiative after they visited Indonesia**.**

Keywords: branding; cross-cultural communication; Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Bina Nusantara University (Binus University) has a good relationship with various universities throughout the world. It is seen as an implementation of cooperation with various parties. "A world-class university in continuous pursuit of innovation and enterprise" is the motto of Binus University. The Binus University strategic plan of 2010-2020 aims to improve the graduates' competitiveness in the global era so they can be well absorbed to the working force to become multinational or national entrepreneurs. With an overall rating of four QS stars, BINUS achieved the maximum five stars rating in the categories of inclusiveness, teaching, employability and social responsibility. It also ranks among the top 500 universities in the QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2020 and 600 universities in the QS WUR by Subject Ranking for Computer Science education. BINUS is top 1 private university in Indonesia included in the QS World University Rankings 2020 (*QS*, 2020).

In July 2019, one of Binus University partners, Appalachian State University (ASU) from the United States came to Indonesia. A group of ASU lecturers and students visited Binus University. One of their activities was with the Binus University research group called the Research Interest Group (RIG). The activities were done in an exciting way through games. Research Interest Group cross-cultural communication (RIG CrossComm) group explained and demonstrated four of the most popular traditional games in Indonesia and the entirety of Appalachian State University delegation consisting of drama professors, music teacher, history teachers, and students played the games. The games presented by RIG CrossComm were *HomPimPa, Sasalimpetan, Jamuran,* and *Congklak*. The games were chosen because they have numerous meaning and philosophy, and full of Cross-Cultural content from which everybody may learn to understand the way of life and thinking from another culture.

The *HomPimPa* game conveys a very dynamic life, in which one could be on the top of the world, but in an instant, one could also fall deep down. The *Sasalimpetan* game represents leading a pack. The *Jamuran* game illustrates the willingness to learn to be led and be very calm in waiting for our turn. Meanwhile, the *Congklak* game signifies making strategy to win in every situation and condition in life. The excitement was unstoppable when the delegations of Appalachian State University presented their traditional game, which was called '*Double This Double That*.' This game means building a connection with another person and being empathetic. Traditional games teach the importance of understanding in cross-cultural communication for the future. Non-digital games show signs of resourcefulness, and engagements, as well as being an effective way of fostering cultural awareness and facilitating inclusive discussions on cultural topics (Nyman Gomez & Berg Marklund, 2018).

RIG CrossComm is a research group formed by Binus University in the cross-cultural communication area. This group consists of researchers with various scientific backgrounds, such as marketing communication, cultural Communication, clinical psychology, digital media, IT, SI, educational technology, English literature, and environmental. The research method commonly used at the RIG CrossComm are experimental methods and participant observation with the subject being branding, digital media, family, cultural communication, and information technology as communication media. The researches are mostly interpretive, survey, and online media based on big data technology.

Meanwhile, Appalachian State University (Appalachian State University) is a university committed to developing and allocating resources for the diverse campus culture. Appalachian State University values diversity as an expression of human equality and difference, places great importance on the environment and prepares a conducive learning atmosphere to develop knowledge, respect, acceptance, understanding, and global awareness. Creating a diverse campus is an ongoing practise at Appalachian State University. Historically, the region is predominately Caucasians. However, its demographics have broadened with the changes in the South-eastern US and the world and become more interconnected. The university was among the nation's leaders in attracting international students and have worked to bring attention and respect to previously marginalised groups. Appalachian formally focused attention on diversity in 1994, 2003, and 2007 with surveys, action plans and benchmark for improvements. In 2013, they continued their focus with the formation of the Chancellor's Commission on Diversity. 'Diversity' has a broad definition; thus, Appalachian State University recognise and value all human expression. Appalachian State University is committed to developing and allocating resources to the fundamental task of creating a diverse campus culture. Appalachian State University values diversity as the expression of human similarities and differences, as well as the importance of a living and learning environment conducive to knowledge, respect, acceptance, understanding and global awareness (*Diversity.Appstate.Edu.*, 2017).

The Appalachian State University Group and the RIG CrossComm interacted with and discussed Intercultural Communication. Appalachian State University group learned the Indonesian language and visited various regions in Sumba, Nias, and Bali.

This research is unique because cross-cultural communication was more than just a cultural event. The interaction between cultures can be a form of branding when the visitors goes back to their home country. The role of branding and marketing resources in the higher education sector continues to develop. The main objective is to explore the steps that must be taken to meet the needs of students effectively without grouping them into one group of 'international students' (Paula & Fragouli, 2018).

This study emphasised cultural communication and branding based on Chaffey & Chadwick (2016). They believed that Intercultural Communication or Cross-cultural communication is a scientific field whose object of interest is the interaction between individuals and groups from different cultures. It examines the influence of culture on people's identity, action, feelings, thoughts, and way of speaking and listening. Intercultural Communication may be defined as a communicative process involving individuals from reference cultures which are sufficiently different from being perceived as such, with specific personal and contextual barriers having to be overcome in order to achieve effective Communication (Aneas & Sandín, 2009).

A cross-cultural communication research was conducted in Rwanda on the employee interaction with the international subsidiaries; both from the origin country and the host country. The research revealed that each posed its challenges, especially for those related to human resource management issues. It signified the existence of national cultural differences from those who work in subsidiaries (Ruzagiriza, 2017). Cross-cultural communication in this research was associated with Jackson's research which addressed cross-cultural communications as a capability approach developed to provide specific treatment of cultural and structural improvement (Jackson, 2005).

Branding a culture through an entrepreneurial perspective would create a new business. The steps were: (1) to brand every major Indonesian culture, (2) to begin building Indonesia nation's brand towards "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" or "Unity in Diversity," (3) To foster Indonesia's creative and cultural entrepreneurs, and (4) to market a branded culture using new wave marketing to the youth, women, and netizen. Aside from promoting and preserving cultural identity and diversity, a good cultural brand will go beyond copyright, thus preventing plagiarism and unhealthy competition (Michael Nathaniel K, n.d.).

Branding must be able to create responses and feedbacks. Evidence from responses and feedback, according to Chaffey & Chadwick (2016), contained various elements, such as customer engagement, permission marketing and content marketing. Customer engagement is repeated interactions that involve emotional, psychological, and physical customer related to the brand. The keyword of this element is repeated interactions. Permission marketing is when customers are interested in marketing activities carried out by the company. The keyword of this element is customer involvement. Content marketing is marketing content in print or digital media such as text, audio, or video posted on the web, blogs, and other social media.

Branding aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers (*Toppr.Com*, 2020). However, university branding is unique because it has to follow the regulation mentioned by Abbas (2017). HKU (The University of Hong Kong) has undergone 'internationalisation', resulted in it being a global top-

ranked university in the world. The University of Hong Kong Worldwide Exchange Programme is one of the effective key university strategies that focus on collaborative international university partnership. All these factors contribute to HKU's internationalisation (Lai, 2018). While both nation branding and institutional higher education branding have been largely discussed in the literature, there is a paucity of research on national higher education brands as an emerging phenomenon (Lomer et al., 2018).

When managing brands, it has long been a challenge to convey consistent brand images across cultures while adapting to the expectation of local consumers. The multiculturalism growth and global culture emergence brought new challenges for brand management. Culture still matter, and the changing landscape of culture influences branding practices in several ways. It is vital to recognise the cultural meaning and symbolism of brands for the multicultural community and to develop branding strategies that suit local and global markets (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2017).

Higher education institutions are also part of the nation's branding process, and most importantly, several universities throughout the world are becoming brands for the nation. Besides, having a powerful brand can provide the exportation of the country's positive image towards to world. As Implied previously, hosting international students and providing them with a safe and fruitful higher education life would ultimately enable the host country's positive image to be exported by those international students (Akilli, 2018). It is evident that branding is necessary for higher education to keep positioning and attract foreign or local students (Alam et al., 2019).

Another research uncovered how the social media of top football players personal brands performance was related to their market performance. The study examined relationships between social media performance reflected in the number of mentions and the sentiment of such mentions related to the personal brand value in the period (Kucharska, 2018). Social media are characterised as spaces of storytelling where power is ingrained in the social network flowing towards the active storytellers (Lund et al., 2018). To understand how brands create value, shape culture and exercise power, we do not need more sophisticated accounts but the optimisation of human effect and attention (Carah & Angus, 2018). Due to the increasing development of digitalisation and the usage of social media for human interactions, we need to re-examine our orthodox notions or theorisations of intercultural communication and redefine the existing notions or develop new notions for a better description and explanation of the emerging global virtual language and culture (WU & LI, 2018).

The focus of this research was to portray how cross-cultural communication could become branding for Indonesia. The focus of this research was divided into two questions: first, how culture becomes an attraction for cross-cultural communication, and second, how interactions between cultures could develop the branding of a nation.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive method. Although different from other qualitative research designs, qualitative descriptive studies allow the use of other types of approaches (Neuman, 2002). In other words, the qualitative descriptive study is useful for researches based on theory because it is used for comparative analysis for data examination. In a qualitative descriptive design, almost every purposive sampling technique can be used.

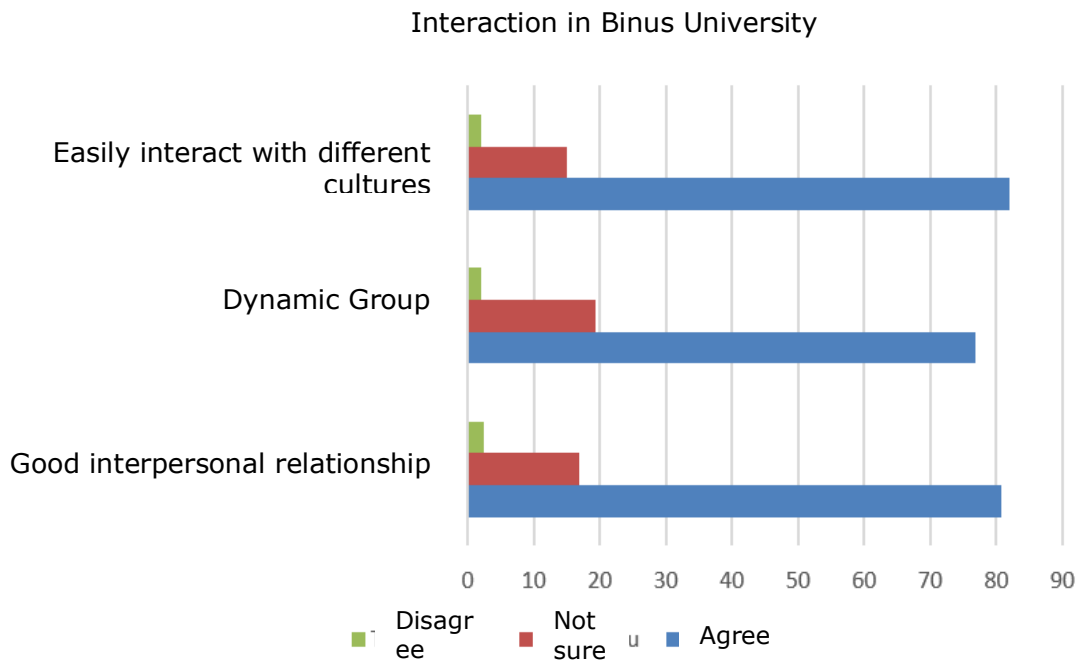
In this study, the event examined was the communication interaction between Appalachian State University lecturers and Indonesian lectures. It included face to face communication, as well as social media communication. The event was hosted by RIG CrossComm. Primary data was collected by observing or recording an event with a direct participant. Researchers were also included in the participants of the event (*Https://Courses.Lumenlearning.Com*, 2018). Researchers interviewed Appalachian State University lecturers and observed their social media activities. This research was supported by other literature, such as Nassaji (2015). It was also supported by previous quantitative research, which is the survey on 500 respondents consisting of students, employees, lecturers, and MSME Binus University partners. The current research used social media for a more comprehensive study in communication. Berger (2012) stated that the main focus of the study of the effects of social media is social life and people's behaviour in a social perspective. People try to absorb the content and context of social media as a single individual and a member of society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Culture to Attract Interaction

The primary difference was the degree of importance attached to the context of any message. In low-context cultures, the information of any message is contained in the message itself, i.e. in words used (Browaeys, M.-J., & Price, 2015). Thus, the message is explicit. In high-context cultures, most of the information is contained in the context of the message, i.e. in the relationships between the people involved and the situation where people are communicating (Bovee & Thill, 2013). Social communication in this study was classified as high context. Thus, to discuss research on branding and cross-cultural communication between Binus University lecturers and lecturers from other universities, the situation in the Binus University campus environment is described as follows:

Figure 1. Three indicators of the interaction of cross-cultural communication in Binus University.



Context can be defined as the environment in which the communication process takes place, which helps to define communication. Knowing the physical context, one can predict much of the communication to a high degree of accuracy. The choice of the environment and the context help assign the desired meaning to the words communicated. Culture is also context. Every culture has its own world view, its own way of thinking, activity, time, and human nature, its own way of perceiving self, and its own system of social organisation (Arnould & Thompson, 2007b). Each of these factors helps people assign meaning to the symbols. The context component helps identify the extent to which the source and receiver share meanings for the communicated symbols. A similar understanding of the culture in which communication takes place is critical to the success of the communication.

The three indicators in Figure 1 were parts of 12 indicators of cross-cultural communication according to the concepts used in the 2019 cross-cultural communication research. In that research, it was found that cross-cultural communication in Binus University has occurred in harmony. The most intriguing data was the interaction between Binus University and those with different cultures, 82 per cent of which were approved and strongly agreed by 500 respondents (Binus lecturers, students, MSMEs, and employees).

Based on this data, it is not surprising that cross-cultural communication in Binus University is prevalent in every activity. One of which was with the group of lecturers and students from Appalachian State University from the United States. The group came to explore

Asian cultures and chose Binus University as one of their Indonesian destinations. Besides coming to Binus University, the group also travelled to Yogyakarta, Bali, and Sumba. During their stay in Indonesia, the group spent a week at Binus University, in which they were given materials on intercultural communication, photography, Indonesian culture, and Indonesian language. The group also visited Monas, Istiqlal Mosque, and the Jakarta Cathedral Church. For one of the 13 people who came in July 2019, it was their first time in their lives to come to a Muslim place of worship (Mosque). The group was amazed at how Indonesia, whose populations have different religions, placed mosques and churches so close to each other. It should be noted that it was also their first-time visiting Asia, and Indonesia was their country of choice among other Asian countries.

When asked about why they chose to visit Indonesia among other countries in the Asian continent, the group stated that Indonesia has a great cultural wealth compared to other Asian countries. Among the forms of culture that they want to experience in Indonesia were food, arts, cultural heritage, and customs, as well as Indonesian nature. The group were informed that Indonesia has a diverse culture that is different from other Asian cultures. Therefore, Indonesia became the choice for them to visit and was considered as research material for their scientific articles.

One Appalachian State University lecturer, Chris Watson wrote about their activities at Binus University. He wrote about traditional games which is a unique Indonesian culture. Chris and his colleagues played *congklak* as one of the children's games in Indonesia that illustrates the philosophy of Indonesian culture for being frugal and diligent. On this occasion, the Binus University lecturer explained to the Appalachian State University lecturer group that the *congklak* game is played by two players. The primary rule of the game is that everyone has to move according to the number of holes in *congklak*. The legend said that if the player could patiently follow the rules, then their days would be fine. Other lessons include gratitude being a new fortune, honesty, and perseverance. The player must wait patiently and not disturb another player.

Figure 2. Culture has the attraction of Cross-cultural communication

Different from the cross-cultural communications research conducted in Rwanda, the Binus University case was the interaction between lecturers who shares the same interests in the field of education. The two interacting groups have similar interests. The similarity of interest becomes an evaluation in handling human resource management problems caused by cultural differences (Ruzagiriza, 2017).

This cross-cultural communications research is also related to Jackson's research on cross-cultural communications in the structural (Binus University and Appalachian State University institutions) leading to social. Lecturer groups who interacted with each other as social groups no longer carry the structural identities of Binus University and Appalachian State University. They were individuals who tried to understand their cultural differences through interactions; they understood each other. However, Jackson believed that interaction starts from the individual to social and then to structural (Jackson, 2005). In contrast, the interaction between Binus University and Appalachian State University lecturers started from structural, which led to social and ended at the individual level. It has been shown that the conditions of universities influence the effectiveness of multicultural education more than mere nationality (Hladik & Jadama, 2016).

Interaction between cultures promotes Indonesian branding

From the interaction between Binus University and Appalachian State University lecturer, it was apparent Indonesia (as a brand) has appeared several times in Appalachian State University lecturer

cyberspace, as a response and feedback. Pieces of evidence and feedback from respondent were analysed through:

Customer Engagement (CE)

CE is the repeated interactions involving the customer's emotional, psychological, and physical related to the brand. The keyword for this element is repeated interactions. In this case, Customer Engagement was observed between Appalachian State University lecturers and Binus University lecturers. Conversations on social media continued to take place in posts made by Jennifer J. Anderson, one of Appalachian State University's lecturers whose social media was included in the research data. On the Facebook status caption, Jennifer showed an emotional closeness between herself and Indonesia.

In the current era, it is possible to conduct marketing and branding through social networking sites on every continent. Social networking has become a dominant new type of marketing which provides a new ability to think globally, though acting locally, using hyper-targeting as "the ability on social networking sites to target ads on particular criteria" (Browaeys, M.-J., & Price, 2015).

Even though Jennifer had returned to her home country, her emotions were still attached to Indonesia. She still looked for spices for Indonesian cuisine and willingly stated it on social media. It seemed that Jennifer was very involved with Indonesia. At this stage, cross-cultural communication has succeeded in creating engagement with individual cross-cultural communications actor. Jennifer seemed to be more engaged in Indonesian food rather than to Indonesian games.

Jennifer posted on her Facebook that she seemed to miss Indonesia, including Indonesian food as part of Indonesian culture. She deliberately looked for Indonesian spices as proof that her heart was already attached to Indonesia.

Figure 3. A Social Media Post from an ASU Lecturer

Permission Marketing (PM)

Permission Marketing is marketing activities carried out by a company that involves customers. This statement is in line with the research done by Blackwell et al. (2001). Appalachian State University's lecturers proved to be voluntarily involved in marketing activities about Indonesia.

One of ASU lecturers, Chad Scuermeyer, wrote about how he felt when he visited Indonesia and wanted to share his experience with his community. He tried to convey a message in Indonesian as evidence of the PM and his desire to return to Indonesia. His action indicated the success of branding through cross-cultural communications. Cross-cultural communications succeeded in becoming a branding tool for Indonesia.

Figure 4. Appalachian State University Lecturer statement as proof of Permission Marketing

The picture he uploaded on social media depicted Chad playing a gamelan instrument in Bali. As a music teacher, Chad enjoyed playing gamelan. Even when he was boarding the plane to leave Indonesia, he expressed how Indonesia had left him in awe. His statement expressed his fondness of the Indonesian people, the beautiful scenery, and the temples he visited in Indonesia. He felt that his experience was a useful one, so he wanted to share it with his students. He even already felt that he would miss Indonesia. He posted a picture with the words "I love Indonesia," which was a tangible form of Permission Marketing.

Content Marketing

Content that contains marketing elements on social media and is carried out by consumers (tourists who come to Indonesia) can be a powerful tool for branding. Consumers voluntarily become part of sincere marketing communication activities that were written by the consumers themselves. For example, Chad Scuermeyer, one of the lecturers who interacted with Binus University lecturers in July 2019 and posted on his social media.

Chad, as an artist, sincerely expressed his love for Indonesia on his social media. Once again, it was then proven that cross-cultural communications had succeeded in creating branding for Indonesia.

Figure 5. Marketing Content Expression after Cross-cultural communication

The Indonesian tourism website is an important information tool for potential tourists and has become a branding for Indonesian tourism in international communities. It can even be an unforgettable experience for website users because of the similarity of cultural backgrounds and experiences from close friends. Appalachian State University lecturers had a positive experience. When they shared their experience in social media and being read by their friends, it could become a brand recognition of Indonesia. Besides, the activities were more interesting since it involved active participants.

This brand recognition is similar to the brand communication process by Carroll (2009). When participants were engaged during the learning process, the process would become exciting, and the learning process would go well. When people are engaged, they are motivated. Thus, they would learn fast and well. According to Santrock in Willyarto et al. (2017), motivation is why individuals behave, think and have feelings in a way that they do, with emphasis on the activation and direction of behaviour. When people are motivated, they will do an action and demonstrate active behaviour. Therefore, the activities done

by the American lecturers were enjoyable since everyone participated in the activity and were motivated to do so.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, the researchers concluded that cross-cultural communication between Binus University lecturers and lecturers from Appalachian State University passed through the interaction stage from the structural level to the social level and ended at the individual level. This interaction has also succeeded in creating positive experiences about the Indonesian state through the Americans' social media. Increased focus on social listening campaigns is needed to improve the results already obtained. For this reason, it might be better to serve several public relations campaigns in the future by ensuring more authentic and relevant communication (Tombleson & Wolf, 2017). This study is expected to be a contribution to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora regarding how tourist behaviour affects the image of Indonesia. The implications of this research are expected to be a model of interaction in cross-cultural communication that can affect Indonesia's economic growth and make better changes in Indonesia's social structure. This research can be continued with various universities from other countries. Therefore, the findings of this study need to be tested on cultural groups from other countries who have diverse expertise and interests.

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