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Construction of Social Media Utilization in Coastal Communities in Belawan District, Medan City

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology, particularly social media, can now be considered a platform for people to exchange ideas, information, lifestyles, relationships, and more. Furthermore, it has brought significant changes to various aspects of community life, including in coastal areas. Social media serves not only as a means of communication but also as a crucial platform for various social, economic, and cultural activities. Belawan District, a coastal area in Medan City, has unique societal characteristics, with the majority of its population relying on the fishing, trade, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) sectors for their livelihoods. In coastal communities, social media itself has been utilized by coastal communities as a tool for interaction, information to promote businesses. Fishermen, dealers, and local groups have begun to adapt social media as a strategy to expand their networks and increase income. However, this will be difficult to implement, even though the use of social media is increasing, various challenges remain, such as limited internet access, low digital literacy, and the potential for negative impacts such as the spread of hoaxes and less educational content that can lead to decadence among children in coastal areas. The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand how social media can be constructed and utilized effectively in the lives of coastal communities to address the various problems they face. This study aims to examine how the construction of social media use among coastal communities in Belawan District, including the factors that influence its use, the impacts it causes, and opportunities that can be utilized to improve their welfare. The research method used in solving this problem is a qualitative research method.
Keywords: Construction, Utilization of Social Media, Community, Coastal,

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a necessity for society. Anything conveyed through social media should not be trusted. It could be hoax news, slander, bullying, or rebellion, all of which fall within the realm of social media, where they are displayed and shown to the general public. In this study, the construction of social media users is aimed at coastal communities with low digital literacy regarding fake news and misleading information, which can cause panic, social division, or even poor decision-making. Coastal areas can be said to be the most vulnerable areas in many ways, including delinquency and crime, both low and high. However, in the context of coastal communities, the existence of social media presents its own challenges. Coastal communities, which are highly dependent on natural resources such as fisheries, agriculture, and tourism, face complex challenges. People whose livelihoods are directly related to coastal resources such as fisheries, tourism, and industry are particularly vulnerable to marine issues. These challenges include climate change, environmental degradation, and limited access to resources and information. Furthermore, low digital literacy, inequality in access to technology, and the potential for the spread of invalid information are barriers to optimally utilizing social media.

Properly focused digital literacy can help reduce disparities and provide the insights and skills needed for success in the digital age. The explanation above can actually serve as a reference for coastal communities regarding the construction of social media utilization in their lives. As is known, coastal communities in the Belawan area of Medan are known to depend on the maritime sector, such as fishing, commercial and maritime services. However, challenges such as limited access to information, low digital literacy, and local socioeconomic dynamics can influence how social media is used. On the other hand, social media can be a very useful tool for enhancing the existence of community wells, both economically, socially, and culturally. Meanwhile, a lack of understanding and access to the digital divide can lead to increased information consumption among coastal communities. Research on social media use among coastal communities is relevant because it can provide insight into user patterns, benefits, and emerging challenges. By understanding the social construction of social media use in the Belawan coastal community, this research provides a clearer understanding of how this technology plays a role in their lives and how it can be optimized for use.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have shown that social media plays a crucial role in the lives of coastal communities, particularly as a means of communication, information access, and economic marketing. For example, research in Pasikuta Village, Marobo District, found that coastal communities utilize platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook to obtain information on weather conditions, market opportunities, and to market their catch and other local products. Social media also serves as a means of education, social interaction, and entertainment for coastal community members. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure and low digital literacy can hinder its effective use. Similar findings were also seen in another study that examined social media as a tool for building solidarity and organizing collective action within the fishing community on Lae-Lae Island. In this context, Instagram and WhatsApp were used not only to share information but also to establish a collective identity and mobilize support for social and environmental issues. Another study from the world of coastal tourism revealed how social media has become an effective promotional tool for coastal tourism destinations, which indirectly impacts the economic well-being of coastal communities through increased tourist visits and digital marketing.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used to solve this problem is qualitative research. Several stages will be implemented in the field to support this research method, including:

1. Ethnographic Approach: Directly observing the coastal communities of Belawan District using social media in their daily lives.
2. In-depth Interviews: This is conducted with the aim of encouraging greater transparency and detailed responses from the community during interviews. These interviews will be conducted with community members, local figures, or active social media users to obtain in-depth perspectives and provide targeted answers.

3. Discourse Analysis: Further examining the construction of social media use in coastal communities and how social media shapes communication and interaction patterns.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research on the construction of social media use among coastal communities in Belawan District, Medan City, shows that social media has become an important part of the social, economic, and cultural life of coastal communities. Based on observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, several key findings were identified, as follows:

1. The Construction of the Meaning of Social Media for Coastal Communities: Coastal communities in Belawan view social media as a practical, fast, and easily accessible means of communication. Social media is not only viewed as a means of entertainment, but also as a space for sharing information, strengthening social relationships, and expanding communication networks, both within and outside the coastal community.
2. Utilization of Social Media in Social and Cultural Aspects. Social media is used to maintain kinship ties, disseminate information about social and religious activities, and strengthen community solidarity. Information about mutual cooperation activities, traditional events, and religious activities is widely disseminated through platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook.
3. Utilization of Social Media in Economic Aspects. Economically, coastal communities utilize social media as a means of promoting and marketing their seafood and small, home-based businesses. Social media helps businesses expand their market reach, expedite transactions, and increase revenue, although its use is still rudimentary and not yet professionally managed.
4. The Role of Social Media as an Information Source. Social media serves as a primary source of information for coastal communities, particularly regarding weather, fish prices, job opportunities, and government policy information. However, limited digital literacy prevents some communities from critically filtering information, potentially exposing them to inaccurate information.
5. Barriers to Social Media Utilization. This study also found barriers to social media utilization, including limited internet access, low digital literacy skills, and economic factors that limit the ownership of technological devices. These barriers impact the optimal use of social media to improve the welfare of coastal communities.
6. Impact of Social Media Utilization. The use of social media has positive impacts in the form of increased access to information, strengthened social relations, and new economic opportunities. However, on the other hand, there are negative impacts such as the spread of unverified information and the potential for social conflict due to misunderstandings in online communication.

The results of the research on the construction of social media utilization in coastal communities in Belawan District, Medan City, show that social media has been constructed by coastal communities as an important means of communication in everyday life. Social media is used not only as a medium for entertainment, but also as a tool for building social relations, disseminating information on social and religious activities, and as a means of supporting economic activities, especially in the promotion and marketing of marine catches and small community businesses. In addition, social media plays a role as a source of information related to weather, fish prices, and government policies that impact the lives of coastal communities. However, the use of social media still faces obstacles in the form of limited digital literacy, internet network access, and community economic capabilities, so that its utilization is not optimal. Overall, social media has a positive impact in expanding access to information and economic opportunities, but also has the potential to cause negative impacts in the form of the dissemination of unverified information if not balanced with adequate digital literacy skills.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and data analysis, it can be concluded that the use of social media in coastal communities in Belawan District, Medan City, is constructed as a communication space with social, economic, and cultural functions. Social media is not only interpreted as a means of entertainment, but also as a tool for building social interactions, expanding communication networks, and conveying information related to the daily lives of coastal communities. Socially, social media plays a role in strengthening relationships between individuals and groups, both within the family, fishing communities, and the surrounding community. Through social media platforms, people can share experiences, strengthen solidarity, and build a collective identity as a coastal community. From an economic perspective, the use of social media is constructed as a means of supporting economic activities, particularly in promoting seafood, small businesses, and local services. Although not yet optimally utilized, social media has opened up opportunities for increased income and broader market access for some coastal communities. However, this study also found limitations in the use of social media, such as low digital literacy, limited access to technology, and social media use that is still consumptive. This shows that the construction of social media utilization in the Belawan coastal community is still at the adaptation stage and requires ongoing assistance and education so that its utilization is more productive and effective.

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