

## **VISUAL EXPERIENTIAL IN DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION FOR RURAL TOURISM PROMOTION OF BA'KELALAN, SARAWAK**

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This paper aims to share some research information based on the visual experiences during the field trip to Ba'Kelalan, Sarawak. Ba'Kelalan is a traditional village of the Lun Bawang community and is well-known as an eco-tourism area in Sarawak. All the experiences were documented using the digital documentation tools and have been recorded with reference to the formalistic artistic methods; in ensuring the visual effects have the best quality and high artistic value. The results will be discussed based on the implemented process and the impact of digital document preparation through experiential learning theory. Next, this article will provide new ideas and visual insights that can help data enhancement, especially in the promotion of the rural tourism sector.

**Keywords:** Visual Experiential, Digital Documentation, Rural Tourism, Ba'Kelalan, Lun Bawan

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been a competition for many countries around the globe and variety of initiatives are being used in promoting their own uniqueness or cultures that will contribute to the local economic growth. According to Sarawak Tourism Board (2020), Sarawak has recorded growth on numbers of visitor to the state in 2019, about 4.6 million compared to the year of 2018 recorded 4.4 million visitors. As Sarawak currently is experiencing construction and development of infrastructure including for tourism, proven that it is one of the focuses that are being implemented to provide a better experience for visitors. However, achieving for the development of rural tourism is a challenge itself and more of necessity efforts in promotion as for the growth of the local economy (Mir, 2018).

It has been debated that tourism is having its own challenges specially to maintain the continuity of the liveness in the sector (Mechinda et al., 2010; Omerzel, 2006; Tubey & Tubey, 2014), and as well Ba'Kelalan is facing the pressure since it is also the attractions in Sarawak, Malaysia. The genre of rural tourism is a form of experience-oriented, the sources of the attractions are mostly from natural environment, displaying the lifestyle of local people and participating within the community (Khound, 2013). Such experiences are always being offered by the local and the sources of the attractions from the surrounding itself. To highlight such attractions, some action or appropriate approach should be considered in ensuring the promotion is working, for example photography, poster or video promotion that are created with art formalistic and consisted visual experiential in digital documentation that will help to enhance the rural tourism literation (Edensor, 2018, Edmonston, 1983; Kolb, 2014;). Besides, the place entitled as rural tourism is usually the place often known as 'countryside' (Aref & Gill, 2009; Liu, 2006; Khound, 2013).

Ba'Kelalan also is one of the rural areas in Sarawak, still having internet stability issue or tele-communication barriers as these places are far from the main city or town. As the case of Ba'Kelalan, a rural place that is known for its own eco-tourism, instability of online connectivity is a challenge especially as the mean to utilize digital platform in promoting their services. Ba'Kelalan are populated by the Lun Bawang community for generations and known for their agriculture activities such as paddy planting, as well salt-making production. The highland also provides various tourist sources of activities that involves nature, adventurous experience, and historical sites. The researchers took the initiative to conduct documentation at the site by experiencing the environment and as well participated in the tourist activities which is the significant in visual arts (Carneiro, Lima, & Silva, 2015; Edmonston, 1983).

## 2. PROMOTION OF BA'KELALAN BASED ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Most tourists that travel into Malaysia are known for their interest in cultural or heritage-based, and for the preserved natures or resources (Liu, 200; Carneiro, Lima, & Silva, 2015). The feature in rural tourism also involves the rural life, art, culture, and local heritage, which also includes interaction between the visitors with the local, as well with seasonal occasion or event that manifest the local's identity has been the main reason for the attractions (Aref & Gill, 2009; Khound, 2013). The community in Ba'Kelalan also offers similar features for their tourists, which is experiencing of the Lun Bawang's lifestyle and their heritage.

According to the study by Cheuk et al. (2017), in the case of Ba'Kelalan, the rural tourism businesses are not active in their business promotion and only few did utilize digital platforms such as social media, like Facebook, but rarely being updated (Andreopoulou et al., 2014; Król, 2018). Cheuk et al. (2017) also mentioned that most information was obtained by the visitors are through the blogs or websites that are mostly owned by the previous visitors who shared their experiences during their stays at Ba'Kelalan. Nevertheless, some visitors made direct contact to the homestay owners or the local tourist guides. The researchers also encountered similar experience to retrieve some information regarding Ba'Kelalan, through recommendations by the experienced visitors and the information obtained directly from the host.

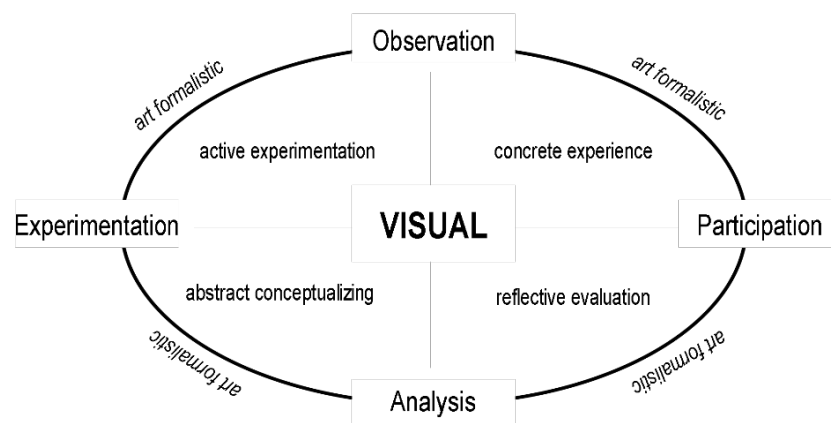
Meanwhile, vlog (video log or video blog) in social media also the common ways on these days to find related information regarding tourist spots (Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Salim & Mat Som, 2018), and as the blogs or websites usually, information and attractions also being shared by the visitors through the highlight of their experiences as well (Ge, 2019; Król, & Zdonek, 2020). Such medium also works as a dummy or reference for the future visitors, to expose the uniqueness and travel exploration (Salim & Mat Som, 2018). The visibility of Ba'Kelalan is also exposed through the projects conducted by universities or organization since the highland is also known as a place of research interests especially in the domain of cultural heritage, biodiversity, and as well as historical events. Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Highlands of Borneo (FORMADAT) with the World Wildlife Fund -Malaysia (WWF) used to conduct Ecotourism workshop to enhance the visibility of Ba'Kelalan as well (WWF, 2013).

Generally, Ba'Kelalan is mostly known based on the 'experienced-promotion' by the outsiders and the researchers understands that intensive promotion is not naturally significant among the community due to some barriers. The researchers also identified most visuals on official tourism websites, or any commercialized medias are often

staged or posed and did not clearly advertise the concept of rural-experience (Carneiro, Lima, & Silva, 2015; Zachry, Spinuzzi & Hart-Davidson, 2007). Visual should be the vital component that need to be part in promoting, considering the influence of art formalistic could enhance the representation since visual is the most comprehensive medium in marketing (Maying, 2019; Xiao, Fang & Lin, 2020). Ravar (2011) also mentioned promotion or marketing activities as well is essential as the mean to improve possibility growth of rural tourism in a longer period, to utilise visual is certainly a tactical in tourism business (Mihailović & Moric, 2012)

### 3. METHODOLOGIES



Initiating an effective promotion for Ba'Kelalan, the researchers performed visual experiential in digital documentation as the methodology to capture or record related visuals of the place. The implemented method was adopted from Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT) that are focusing on concrete experience, reflective evaluation, abstract conceptualizing, and active experimentation. Through the conscience of art formalistic, the experiential learning being assimilated as the improvised approach for this research (Aman Leong, 2019; Maying, 2019). As shown on Figure 1, the cycle concept of visual experiential was introduced to highlight the process or approach to enhance the liberation of visual promotion. Visual experiential are the approaches that function as the compliment towards the existing digital documentation tools to document related subject matter or interest object (Kolb, 2014; Maying, 2019). Meanwhile, digital documentation are the tools like video cameras or digital camera to enhance the work of documentation, provides the possibility in extending the information as well potential in awareness during the process or interpretation (Edensor, 2018).





**Figure 1.** Cycle concept of visual experiential was inspired from Kolb's ELT

The researchers gathered all the experiences from Ba'Kelalan through the implementation of visual experiential and with the utilization of digital documentation. These methods of visual experiential consisted of the qualitative approaches such as observation, participation, analysis, and experimentation. Based on Kolb's ELT, the scope in experiential learning modified into general adaptation in research habits with the compliment of visual and art formalistic. Based on the cycle, visual experiential was conducted onto several sites at Ba'Kelalan such as Buaya Tanah, Batu Lan Upai Semaring, Buduk Nur's salt factory and few other historical places. The process of the documentation as shown in the table below (**Table 1**).

**Table 1:** The process of visual experiential in digital documentation processat Ba'Kelalan

Visual Practice	Kolb's ELT	Documentation Process
Observation	The researchers conducting observation through concrete experience which allowed the researchers to utilise visual interpretation towards subject matter. Through the observation, the researchers also conducted active experimentation in visual documentation with assimilation of art formalistic.	 <p>An observation was conducted to identify the form of Buaya Tanah, a cultural heritage site found at Ba'Kelalan</p>
Participation	Since the rural tourism closely related to experience-based tourism, participation allowed the researcher to experience the site exploration and as well to perform tourist-based experience. The researchers also able to simulate on certain experience and local lifestyle. The participation also allowed the researchers to be reflective and made an active evaluation towards the subject interest.	 <p>The researchers took part in visiting historical sites to get physical understandings of the place in order to have actual descriptions of the past events, which is related to the confrontation years of Malaysia-Indonesia</p>

Analysis	<p>Besides being reflective in observation, through visual experiential the researcher was able to be more analytical in their visual evaluation and analysing the subject interest to create informative or effective documentation.</p> <p>Application of art formalistic in analysis did allow the researcher to develop the concept in documentation based on the subject context or character, including necessary additional data collection.</p>	 <p>The researcher conducting evaluation and discussing the best concept of documentation onto a dolmen, known as Batu Lan Upai Semaring</p>
Experimentation	<p>Through the reflection and evaluation onto subject interest, the researcher also conducted active experimentation for visual documentation. The documented visuals are captured or recorded based on the concept decided and as well following to the subject's character. Experimentation is required specially to produce variety of angles and perspectives, meanwhile art formalistic were used to produce interesting composition for visual representation.</p>	 <p>Experimenting with digital documentation tools to produce the best composition of visual and this process allowed the researchers to enhance their visual data</p>

In as much, all the digital documentation executed with visual experiential has enhanced the researchers' understandings in gaining the visual data. The procedures that were shown on **Table 1** during the visual documentation has propelled the researchers to consider the etiquette in the execution of formalistic art approach. As developing firm meaning in visual representation, experience was conducted to enhance the deliverance of visual especially for purposes of promoting (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Experience also allows deeper evaluation and active investigations, helped to wider the possibility to recover extending information and provides meaningful stories through visuals as well (Aman Leong, 2019; Spencer, 2010; Mengxi & Rui, 2019).

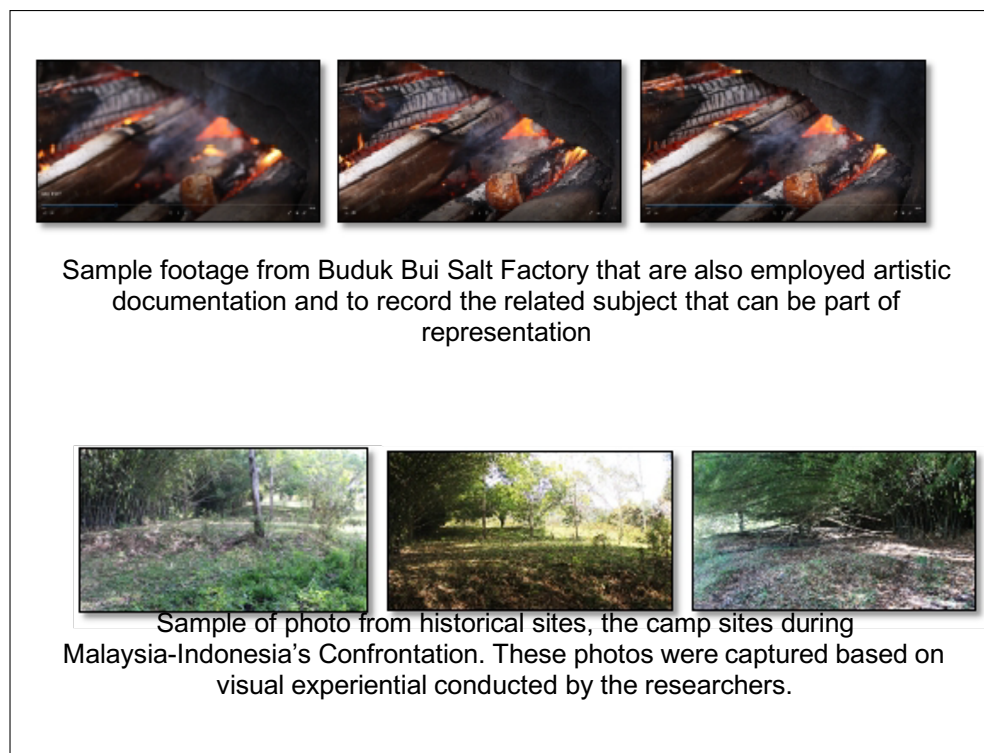
#### 4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

Ba'Kelalan is a place that is offering rural tourism and the characteristics of rural tourism are dominantly experienced-based tourism which is suitable for the implementation of visual experiential approach. In every site, attractions, or lifestyles in Ba'Kelalan, the researchers used suitable approaches based on the direct space experience or engagement with subject of interest. As discussed in the methodologies, visual experiential is conducted for a better understanding and critically in disseminating information (Pennington et al., 2015; Maying et al., 2019). The purpose of conducting visual experiential in digital documentation are meant to enhance the visual representation especially in rural tourism promotion through the researchers' direct experience (Carneiro, Lima, & Silva, 2015). To have a definite approach or practical way for rural tourism promotion is important which most of the consequences benefiting for local employment, economy retention, lower migration rate, to establish more local products and encouraging preservation of local cultural heritage (Trukhachev, 2015).



**Figure 1:** Selected compilation of rural experience's representation around Ba'Kelalan

Through the conducted procedures of visual experiential, has allowed the documented visuals to be more sensible to represent rural experience (Mihailović & Moric, 2012). As shown on **Figure 1**, describing some of the constructed visuals from Ba’Kelalan, most visuals are collected based on the original setting or un-stage. Based the conducted visual practices as gown on **Table 1**, allowed the researchers to more critical or meticulous in constructing visuals during documentation process. Besides that, having art formalistic and artistic approaches also, helps to improvise visuals documentation which to produce a quality visualization. The effective approaches of visual experiential in digital documentation also making excellent liberation or interpretation of real event or description on rural tourism such as like Ba’Kelalan itself (Pennington et al., 2015). Augmentation of lifestyle or culture should be accurate or representative, and with the assimilation of art formalistic will allowed the visuals to ‘speak’ on behalf, specially as the mean for promotion. Since the utilization of social media platfoms are often being used due to the friendly accessibility, employment of creative or artistic visuals should be prioritized. Providing impactful visuals not only enhanced the promotion, but also to benefit the local aspect such as rural economy, development and sustaining cultural heritage (Andreopoulou, 2014 et al.; Ivona, 2021).



**Figure 2:** Visuals from the sites through visual experiential's documentation



Based on the experience performed during the research visit at Ba'Kelalan, the researchers identified that some attractions require critical attention and needed to be intensively visible for promotion. Through experience, the researchers received some additional information unintentionally. For example, several important historical events at Ba'Kelalan have been found unattended as a major part of Ba'Kelalan's identity (**Figure 2**). The researchers were also introduced towards two significant events related to religious miracles happening at Buduk Tudal in 1984; and another historical event during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963-1966) which the sites stay existed to these days (Hoskin, 2020; Meru, 2020; Sigar, 2020) and was visited as well by the researchers. 'Experiencing' the past events only 'manage' through the appearance of the remaining physical state, imagination- through space experience was able to be done at the sites. The rest of data was conducted through unstructured interviews with those who experienced both events (refer to **Figure 3** and **Figure 4**).



**Figure 3:**

An interview with Musa Sigar who witnessed and involved with the miracles at Buduk Tudal



**Figure 4:**

Further understanding by interview with a veteran involved in-confrontation years at Ba'Kelalan, Colonel Kim Hoskin

The results of the visual experiential during the documentation as well, witnessed the critically in producing visual for the subject of rural tourism promotion. Experiencing is the main paths to understand the surrounding and characteristic of rural tourism that are happening at Ba'Kelalan. The researchers discovered that based on the actual involvements also deepening the process in retrieving information with the creativity and comprehending the subject matter meticulously. Besides that, the researchers having the opportunity to have constructive exploration. Some part of experiential also working simulation-oriented visualization onto the information which helps the researchers to focus on the related factors such as setting-up documentation tools, organizing process and possibly orienting the representation (Maying et al., 2019; Trukhachev, 2015)

Conducting visual experiential, it is hoped to provide excellent liberation of visual representation. It is important that visual should be prioritised particularly to convey facts, information and purposely to facilitate understanding (Zachry, Spinuzzi & Hard-Davidson, 2007; Trukhachev, 2015; Yilmaz & Yilmaz, 2019). Besides that, as the mean for sustainability in tourism, alternative methods or approaches should be encouraged to evaluate the potentials in rural tourism (Ivona, 2021). Visual experiential also found to encounter any limitations at the research site at Ba'Kelalan, the researchers getting responsive, reflective, and manipulative towards the action to be taken on the site. Some digital documentation tools also are fully utilized and not limited into the fundamental function, but alternation through creative evaluation (Biggs, 2007; Roddy et al., 2019). Deliverance of meaning through visual also being able to augment the actual experience, representation of the real dimension will be assisted through the accommodation of art formalistic which is inviting the feeling and senses (Behrooz et al., 2018; Roddy et al., 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The implementation of visual experiential in digital documentation has provided an alternative of being an effective approach in the mean of rural tourism promotion about Ba'Kelalan. The approaches have displayed the practice is providing sufficient assistant in pertaining related to Ba'Kelalan's attraction which the characteristic of tourism is experienced-based. These methods not only mean to document visual effectively as well but consisting of experience through the process provide richness of content (Edensor, 2018). Besides, the application also raising the attention toward the unpopular representation to be more appearing which also may contribute to promote the place such as Ba'Kelalan.

Meanwhile, the rural tourism is involving the local community and is a vital component in rural tourism, promotion is needed in contributing to the growth of local economy (Mir, 2018; Wani & Shafi, 2013). It is important to be more attentive towards documenting and sharing the information so it will be more affective in promoting (Mihailović & Moric, 2012). It is a hope that such enhancement will provide the improvement for the community in rural tourism activities and probably in the future the practices should be applies by the business owners, participant in the industry. Ba'Kelalan possessed many attractions of rural tourism that it could offer, some potential attractions that need to be introduced and sustained. As suggested, visual experiential in digital documentation is a part of it and there are many other possibilities in promoting excellently should be considered for future research interest in rural tourism.

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