

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Studies

Tourism plays a crucial role in the economic progress of Indonesia. It acts as a primary catalyst for national economic advancement and creates job opportunities, while also greatly enhancing regional revenue and showcasing local culture on an international level (Lestari, Huda, Subarkah & Restama, 2025). According to Husna (2022), tourism is one of the potential sectors that can be developed by regions to develop an area with the help of the government, community, and private sector. Indonesia as a country with rich values of cultural and spiritual heritage has great opportunities in developing various forms of thematic tourism, including religious tourism. Indonesia is known as a country that has a very rich diversity of religions, cultures and tribes. As explained by Sugianto (2023), cultural diversity is a concept that reflects differences and wealth in value systems, norms, languages, customs, and artistic expressions in a society. In the era of modernization and globalization, the potential for friction between religious groups is often a real threat to the integrity of the nation. Therefore, efforts to promote the value of tolerance, including through creative media such as film, are becoming increasingly relevant and urgent. This situation highlights the immediate requirement for innovative media that serves to not just advertise tourist locations but also plays a significant role in enhancing social unity within communities of various faiths. The lack of a visual promotional tool that can depict several religious tourism sites in Semarang within one cohesive story deepens the importance of this study. This research seeks to address that need by creating a short film focused on the theme of interfaith friendship, using the promotion of religious tourism as a means to share the principles of kindness, respect for one another, and harmonious living with a wider audience.

Greater Semarang is one of the areas that has great potential in the development of religious tourism. Various places of worship from different religions stand and become symbols of harmony between religious people. As mentioned by Afif and Pigawati (2015), the city of Semarang is an area that has

cultural acculturation between various ethnic groups, such as Chinese, Buddhist and Javanese. Thus, many places of worship and cultural relics from these ethnic groups can be used as potential tourist attractions in Greater Semarang. Various places of worship from different religions stand side by side and become a symbol of harmony between people. Some religious tourist attractions in Semarang include the Avalokitesvara Pagoda with its stunning high tower building, combining elements of historical and religious tourism, then there is Maria Kerep Ambarawa Cave which is actually not a tourist spot, but a place of Catholic pilgrimage is one of the places that is considered holy and important for Catholics in Indonesia. Then there is also the Assafinatun Najah Mosque or better known as the Ship Mosque. This mosque has a ship-like building shape, making it one of the icons of religious tourism in the city of Semarang (Hadi, 2025). And there is also a container-shaped mosque, the Achmed bin Adenan Mosque, which complements the wealth of religious tourist destinations in Greater Semarang.

In this digital age, information about a theme or culture can be conveyed through audiovisual media. One of the most popular audiovisual forms today is the short film. According to Elvaretta and Ahmad (2021), a short film is an audiovisual work that combines moving images and sound within a relatively short duration, yet still possesses a coherent narrative structure and is accessible to a wide range of audiences. Short films are also an effective medium in conveying educational messages because audiovisual media that integrates visual and audio elements simultaneously has been proven to significantly increase the emotional engagement and comprehension of the audience, making it a powerful tool for delivering social and cultural messages to a wider community (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). Short films can be used as a medium for promoting tourist destinations, including religious tourism destinations. According to Rahmatullah (2019) as quoted in Satrio (2025), short videos are one way that is quite popular with social media users today. In addition to being considered easier, short videos are considered attractive because they can provide information, education and entertainment at one time. The persuasive power of a short video can be a motivation to use a product, activity, and

make it very simple to do, and trigger to continue to do so through notifications, friend requests, and status updates.

A significant gap in the existing literature was identified through a review of previous studies, particularly Pamungkas (2023), which examined the creation of a short film as a promotional medium for a Hindu worship site in Semarang City, namely Pura Agung Giri Natha. The study demonstrated that a short film with a storytelling concept is an effective and suitable approach to promote a religious tourism site in the digital era, and the short film produced received a very high level of agreement across aspects of content, audiovisual quality, and linguistics. However, while Pamungkas (2023) successfully produced a short film promoting a Hindu worship site, no comparable study has yet explored the promotion of religious tourism destinations representing the three other major faiths coexisting in Semarang, namely Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. The deliberate exclusion of Hindu religious sites from the scope of this study is not a matter of oversight, but rather a conscious academic decision, given that Pamungkas (2023) has already addressed that gap. This is particularly problematic given that Islam is the predominant religion in Semarang and across Indonesia more broadly, yet the potential of Islamic and other religious sites as tourism destinations remains underexplored in terms of creative media promotion. Moreover, the spirit of interfaith tolerance a value deeply embedded in Indonesian society has not been fully explored through the lens of short film production in the context of Semarang's religious tourism. Therefore, the present researcher identifies a clear and pressing problem: the lack of an integrated narrative-based audiovisual promotional medium for religious tourism destinations representing Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism in Semarang, the low level of public awareness among university students toward these destinations despite their significant historical and spiritual value and the underutilization of short film as a creative medium for simultaneously promoting religious tourism and disseminating the values of interfaith tolerance and compassion in the Indonesian context This research directly addresses that problem through the production of a short film entitled "*Welas Asih Di Tengah Perbedaan*" (Compassion Amidst Differences).

This is particularly noteworthy given that Islam is the predominant religion in Semarang and across Indonesia more broadly. Indonesia is widely recognized as a country with rich religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, which contributes significantly to the development of tourism activities (Narulita, Aulia, Wajdi & Khumaeroh, 2017). However, the potential of Islamic and other religious sites as tourism destinations remains underexplored through creative audiovisual promotional media. According to Battour and Ismail (2016), religious tourism offers not only spiritual experiences but also cultural and historical values that can attract visitors from various backgrounds. Despite this potential, many religious tourism destinations in Semarang have not yet received optimal promotion through narrative-based digital media. Furthermore, the value of interfaith tolerance has rarely been integrated into tourism promotion through short film production. Timothy and Olsen (2006) state that religious tourism can encourage intercultural understanding and strengthen social harmony among different communities. Therefore, the researcher was motivated to produce a short film entitled “*Welas Asih Di Tengah Perbedaan*” (Compassion Amidst Differences) as a creative effort to promote religious tourism destinations representing Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism in Semarang while simultaneously conveying messages of compassion, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. The selection of religious tourism destinations featured in the short film “*Welas Asih di Tengah Perbedaan*” was based on their ability to represent the religious diversity and tourism potential of the Greater Semarang area. The researcher selected Pagoda Avalokitesvara, Masjid Assafinatun Najah, Masjid Achmad Bin Adenan, and Goa Maria Kerep Ambarawa because each destination possesses distinctive historical, architectural, cultural, and spiritual values that make them attractive religious tourism sites (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

Previous research by Prasadajudio (2016) also highlights the importance of promoting religious tourism destinations in Semarang through audiovisual media to increase public interest and awareness. The choice of these four locations was further supported by an initial informal discussion conducted with university students living in Semarang. Most participants admitted that they had little or no

knowledge of these destinations despite their historical and spiritual significance. This finding indicates that awareness of these attractions among younger generations remains relatively low, thereby highlighting the need for more innovative promotional strategies. Therefore, the selected destinations were chosen based on their architectural uniqueness, their function as both places of worship and tourist attractions, and their representation of different religious communities within Semarang's multicultural environment. Furthermore, the selection of these destinations aligns with the central theme of the film, namely compassion amidst differences. By presenting Buddhist, Islamic, and Catholic religious sites within a single narrative, the film seeks to demonstrate that individuals from different religious backgrounds can coexist harmoniously while respecting one another. Timothy and Olsen (2006) explain that religious tourism can function as a medium for fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse communities. In addition, short films are considered effective communication media because they combine visual storytelling and emotional engagement within a concise format (Dyner, 2025). Therefore, tourism promotion and the promotion of social harmony are not treated as separate objectives but rather as complementary aspects of a unified creative concept that aims to introduce Semarang's religious tourism destinations while promoting values of compassion and inclusivity.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Based on the background of the study, the following problem statements are formulated:

1. How is the process of pre-production the short film "*Welas Asih Di Tengah Perbedaan*" as a promotional tool for religious tourism in Semarang?
2. How is the response and feedback from stakeholders, audiences and relevant parties to the "*Welas Asih Di Tengah Perbedaan*" promotional Video as a tourism promotion tool in enhancing its appeal to tourists?

1.3. Research Objectives

This research aims to address the following objectives:

1. To understand the process of designing the short film "*Welas Asih Di Tengah Perbedaan*" as a promotional tool for religious tourism in Semarang.

2. To examine and evaluate the perceptions, responses, and feedback of stakeholders, audiences, and other relevant parties regarding “*Welas Asih Di Tengah Perbedaan*” promotional video in enhancing the appeal of Religious Tourist Attraction as a tourism destination.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research is expected to be able to make a real contribution to the development of interdisciplinary studies that link media studies, cultural communication, and religious tourism. Through this approach, the results of this study can be used as an academic reference in an effort to develop educational media based on cultural and spiritual values. Moreover, this research is also a place to develop an understanding of how audio-visual media, especially short films, can be used as an effective communication instrument in conveying social messages to the wider community. This research is expected to provide practical benefits for various parties. For researchers, this research is a means to develop skills in the short film production process, from the planning to evaluation stages, as well as understanding the use of audio-visual media as an effective communication tool. For the community, this research is expected to increase awareness of the values of compassion, tolerance and coexistence amid diversity. In addition, for the managers of religious tourist destinations such as Avalokitesvara Pagoda, Maria Kerep Ambarawa Cave, Assafinatun Najah Mosque and Achmad Bin Adenan Mosque, this study can be an alternative creative promotional strategy to increase tourist attraction and visitation. For academics, this research can also be used as a reference material in the development of studies in the field of film, communication, and promotion of tourism based on creative media.

1.5 Output

This research resulted in a short film entitled “*Welas Asih Di Tengah Perbedaan*” with a duration of 29 minutes and 30 seconds, disseminated through the YouTube platform at the Applied Foreign Language YouTube channel as the main medium of distribution. Developed through the Borg and Gall (1983) Research and Development model across eight stages, the film features four religious tourism destinations in Semarang and its surroundings, namely Pagoda

Avalokitesvara, Masjid Assafinatun Najah, Masjid Achmad Bin Adenan, and Goa Maria Kerep Ambarawa, each presented across three dimensions of information: architectural beauty, religious activities, and historical background. Centered on the theme of compassion amidst differences and delivered through an interfaith friendship narrative, the film targets local and international students residing in Semarang and aims to simultaneously promote religious tourism destinations and convey the values of tolerance and interfaith harmony to a wider audience.