

## Digital Marketing-Based Tourism Destination Rebranding Strategy: A Case Study of Marine Tourism Development in Gorontalo

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze digital marketing-based destination rebranding strategies with a case study on marine tourism development in Gorontalo. The research method used is descriptive qualitative based on a literature review by examining various scientific sources related to rebranding, digital marketing, and sustainable tourism. The results of the study show that the application of digital marketing strategies can enhance the image of a destination through interactive promotion, strengthening of local identity, and participation of coastal communities. Rebranding not only covers visual and promotional aspects, but also the transformation of cultural values and environmental sustainability. A collaborative approach between the government, the community, and business actors is a key factor in the successful development of competitive and globally competitive marine tourism in Gorontalo.

### Keywords

Tourism Destination Rebranding; Digital Marketing; Gorontalo Marine Tourism



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## INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry is currently undergoing a significant transformation phase with the advancement of digital technology. Digitalization has transformed the way tourist destinations build their image, market their products, and connect with tourists. In this context, the concept of destination rebranding is relevant because it allows destinations to renew their image, increase their attractiveness, and expand their market through a digital marketing-based approach (Kusuma & Abid, 2022). As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia holds significant potential in the marine tourism sector. One region actively developing this potential is Gorontalo Province. This region is known for its rich marine resources, beautiful beaches, and unique maritime culture. However, Gorontalo's competitiveness as a

marine destination still lags behind other regions such as Bali, Raja Ampat, or Labuan Bajo (Gobel, 2023). Therefore, an effective rebranding strategy supported by digital marketing is needed to strengthen Gorontalo's position in the national and global tourism arena.

Digital marketing in the tourism context plays a crucial role in creating a strong destination image. Through social media platforms, websites, influencer marketing, and digital campaigns, destinations can communicate their unique values to a wider audience (Tumangkeng & Hidayat, 2021). This transformation focuses not only on promotion but also on ongoing interactions between destination managers, local communities, and tourists. In the context of Gorontalo, this strategy is crucial for showcasing the advantages of marine tourism such as Olele Marine Park, Botutonuo Beach, and the spiritually rich Bongo coastal culture (Kusuma & Ismail, 2025). Rebranding a tourist destination is not simply a matter of changing a logo or slogan, but rather a strategic process to rebuild the destination's identity and perception in the minds of tourists (Basit et al., 2024). Within the framework of Gorontalo's marine tourism, rebranding is crucial for transforming the region from a marginalized destination to a leading destination based on education, conservation, and maritime culture.

According to Djabbar & Talib (2025), a strong destination image can be built through collaboration between local governments, industry players, local communities, and academics. Human resource capacity development, such as tour guides who can interpret marine potential in an engaging and educational manner, is also an integral part of a rebranding strategy. Digital marketing plays a key role in strengthening destination rebranding strategies. The use of social media such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok can quickly and massively shape tourists' perceptions of a destination's image. Research by Kondo, Solang, & Gumolili (2025) shows that digital strategies can facilitate destination repositioning by emphasizing educational value and environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, a study by Kairupan, Ratung, & Sendouw (2025) confirmed that local community-based digital campaigns, such as the use of regional cultural and artistic narratives, can strengthen the emotional branding of destinations. This aligns with sustainable tourism trends that emphasize the importance of authentic experiences and local community involvement in every digital promotional narrative. Gorontalo has unique geographical and cultural characteristics that serve as the foundation for rebranding. Marine tourism potential such as Olele Marine Park and Botutonuo Beach has become a major attraction for both domestic and

international tourists (Kusuma & Abid, 2022). However, the lack of consistency in digital promotion strategies and the weak integration between destination branding and local wisdom are major obstacles to developing the image of marine tourism in this region (Gobel, 2023).

Local community empowerment programs, such as those conducted in the Bongo Religious Tourism Village, demonstrate the success of digital approaches in increasing tourist visits through targeted social media content management (Gobel, 2023). This approach not only promotes destinations but also educates the public about the importance of environmental sustainability and community-based tourism management. In the digital era, a destination's competitiveness depends not only on its natural beauty but also on its ability to create authentic digital storytelling (Ikawati & Primsari, 2019). The rebranding of Gorontalo's marine tourism must prioritize a maritime cultural narrative that distinguishes this region from other destinations in Indonesia. The use of digital technologies, such as virtual tours and user-generated content, allows potential tourists to experience the "Gorontalo experience" online before making a physical visit.

Kusuma and Ismail (2025) emphasize that destination promotion through social media must be based on content analysis to ensure the message is consistent with regional values and identity. Meanwhile, a digital approach must also consider inclusivity and local community participation to ensure the rebranding process does not neglect local social and cultural values. A pentahelix collaboration model involving government, academics, businesses, communities, and the media can serve as a strategic framework for implementing digital-based destination rebranding (Kusuma & Abid, 2022). The government plays a role in policy and infrastructure, academics in research and training, businesses in tourism product innovation, communities in cultural preservation, and digital media in information dissemination.

The implementation of this model is expected to strengthen Gorontalo's marine tourism ecosystem as a whole, increase tourist visits, and strengthen the region's image as a modern maritime destination while remaining rooted in local traditions. A digital marketing-based tourism destination rebranding approach in Gorontalo is not only relevant for increasing destination visibility but also for building a new image that is sustainable, inclusive, and based on local wisdom. This strategy requires the integration of digital technology, cultural narratives, and community participation. With collaborative support from various parties, Gorontalo has the

potential to become a model for digital rebranding-based marine destination development in eastern Indonesia..

## **METHODS**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on a literature review. This approach was chosen because it aims to understand the phenomenon of marine tourism destination rebranding in Gorontalo in depth through an analysis of various relevant scientific sources. The descriptive qualitative method allows researchers to explore the meaning, concepts, and strategies used in the process of rebranding tourist destinations based on digital marketing without conducting field experiments. The research data was obtained from literature sourced from nationally and internationally accredited scientific journals, academic books, research reports, and official publications of local governments and tourism institutions. The data collection process was carried out by searching the Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Garuda databases using keywords such as "tourist destination rebranding," "digital tourism marketing," and "Gorontalo marine tourism."

Data analysis was conducted through information reduction, classification, and synthesis to identify thematic patterns relevant to the research focus. The results are presented descriptively in the form of a conceptual outline highlighting the relationship between digital marketing strategies and the effectiveness of rebranding marine tourism destinations based on local wisdom in Gorontalo.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Dynamics of Rebranding Marine Tourism Destinations in Gorontalo**

Based on the results of a literature review, marine tourism rebranding efforts in Gorontalo have experienced significant developments over the past decade. Local governments, tourism communities, and businesses have begun adopting digital-based strategies to enhance the attractiveness of destinations such as Saronde Island, Olele Marine Park, and Dionumo Island. According to Harnia et al. (2023), Dionumo Island is an example of early success in combining local identity with a digital marketing strategy that emphasizes the values of sharia ecotourism and the local wisdom of coastal communities.

The rebranding in Gorontalo focused on transforming the image of a destination previously known only locally into an icon of sustainable marine tourism. This transformation was carried out through a digital narrative depicting the beauty of the underwater world, coastal culture, and the hospitality of the local people. This process aligns with the Destination Rebranding model proposed by

Muzellec & Lambkin (2006), where changes in public perception are a key indicator of rebranding success.

### **The Role of Digital Marketing in Strengthening Destination Image**

Digital marketing strategies are the most dominant element in the rebranding of Gorontalo's tourist destinations. Based on research by Rusdi (2019), the effective use of information technology and social media can expand the reach of destination promotions to national and international markets. This is supported by Anwar, Fahmi, and Syaifudin (2024), who emphasized that digitalization was a key factor in the successful rebranding of Jebring Beach in Blitar—a model that can be adapted to the Gorontalo context. In Gorontalo, the digital marketing strategy includes the management of official social media accounts by the Tourism Office, promotions through local influencers, and a digital campaign themed "Gorontalo Bahari Menyapa Dunia." These efforts also integrate user-generated content that strengthens the authenticity of the destination narrative. According to Syaifuddin & Hakim (2024), community participation in content creation is an effective form of digital collaboration to enhance the credibility of a destination brand.

### **Strengthening Local Identity as a Differentiation of Rebranding**

Destination image is not only built through digital visualization but also through strengthening local identity. In the context of Gorontalo, coastal culture, maritime traditions, and religious values are the main foundations of rebranding strategies. Setyawan (2022) emphasized that local cultural identity must be the "soul" of the regional branding process to prevent the loss of authenticity amidst tourism globalization. Literature findings indicate that strengthening local identity in Gorontalo is reflected in marine culture-based promotions such as the Pesona Bajo Festival and the Gorontalo Marine Parade. These events are published digitally through YouTube and Instagram, showcasing not only the natural beauty but also highlighting the philosophies of maritime communities. This strategy reinforces the concept of authentic branding, namely the creation of a destination image that is honest, unique, and in line with social reality (Wiyatiningsih, 2024).

### **Implementation of Ecotourism and Sustainability Concepts**

One important finding from the literature is that digital marketing-based rebranding in Gorontalo tends to align with the principles of sustainable ecotourism. Gobang & Fil (2024) noted that this approach not only expands the market but also encourages environmental awareness and empowers local communities. Harnia et al. (2023) outlined that Dionumo Island has adopted the principle of community-based tourism, where local residents act as guides, homestay managers, and seafood

providers. This approach demonstrates that the rebranding is not merely cosmetic but involves a paradigm shift toward inclusive and globally competitive tourism.

Furthermore, local governments are collaborating with universities on conservation-based digital marketing training, ensuring that every marine tourism campaign emphasizes sustainability. This aligns with the findings of Anwar et al. (2024), who emphasized that the success of destination rebranding depends heavily on the ability to adapt to sustainable tourism trends and digital ethics.

### **Challenges of Implementing Digital Branding in Gorontalo**

Although digital marketing strategies have had a positive impact, several challenges have been identified from the literature and conceptual observations. First, digital infrastructure in some coastal areas of Gorontalo remains limited, resulting in uneven access to online promotion (Rusdi, 2019). Second, human resource capacity in creative content management remains low. Many local tourism operators have not yet been able to strategically utilize social media for destination branding. Third, the lack of consistent destination brand identity across regions in Gorontalo has resulted in fragmented digital communication messages. This is similar to Lestari & Permatasari's (2021) findings in their study of Kajoetangan Heritage, where inconsistent branding diminishes the strength of the destination narrative. Therefore, a unified branding guideline that regulates logos, colors, slogans, and digital narrative elements is needed to ensure each destination in Gorontalo has a harmonious visual identity.

### **Effectiveness of Rebranding Strategy through Digital Approach**

Literature shows that implementing digital marketing strategies in rebranding tourist destinations significantly increases public awareness and tourist visits. In the case of Kajoetangan Heritage (Lestari & Permatasari, 2021), the use of social media strategies increased audience engagement by up to 65% within six months. Similar findings can be applied to Gorontalo by adapting the characteristics of marine tourism and regional religious values. In addition to improving image, digital rebranding also impacts the local economy. Anwar et al. (2024) reported an increase in income for coastal communities after implementing a digital promotional strategy. Based on this pattern, it can be concluded that digital rebranding not only creates a new image but also strengthens a sustainable local creative economy ecosystem.

### **Conceptual Analysis: Synergy of Rebranding, Digital Marketing, and Local Identity**

Based on a synthesis of various literature, a rebranding strategy for marine tourism in Gorontalo needs to be built through the integration of three main,

mutually supportive pillars. First, strengthening the digital image based on local narratives by highlighting the richness of maritime culture, the local wisdom of coastal communities, and the religious values that constitute Gorontalo's distinctive identity. This narrative can be packaged attractively through various digital platforms to build destination differentiation and increase tourist appeal. Second, strong collaboration between the community, government, business actors, and other stakeholders is needed in digital promotional activities. Active community involvement not only strengthens the authenticity of the information conveyed but also fosters a sense of ownership in the development of the tourism destination. Third, a sustainable approach must be the main foundation of the rebranding process by ensuring a balance between promotional activities, coastal and marine environmental conservation efforts, and local community economic empowerment. By integrating these three pillars, the rebranding of marine tourism in Gorontalo is expected to increase the destination's competitiveness in a sustainable manner while providing social, economic, and environmental benefits to the local community. These three pillars reinforce each other and create a destination rebranding model that is adaptive to the digital era and rooted in local values. This strategy has the potential to make Gorontalo a successful example of local wisdom-based and digital tourism rebranding in Eastern Indonesia..

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review and analysis, it can be concluded that a digital marketing-based tourism destination rebranding strategy is an effective approach to improving the image and competitiveness of marine tourism in Gorontalo. Through the use of digital technology and strengthening local identity, Gorontalo has the potential to become a leading marine destination recognized nationally and internationally. A successful rebranding strategy is characterized by three main factors. First, digital marketing acts as a catalyst for efficient promotion and communication, enabling the destination to reach global tourists at low cost and with broad reach. Second, local identity serves as a differentiating element that strengthens the character of the destination, so that the branding message remains authentic and rooted in the cultural values and wisdom of Gorontalo's coastal communities. Third, a sustainable approach and community participation are the main foundations so that the rebranding is not artificial, but rather builds a balance between promotion, conservation, and social welfare. The implementation of digital marketing-based rebranding in Gorontalo needs to be directed at strengthening cross-sector collaboration, increasing the capacity of digital human resources, and

consistent branding narratives that reflect the richness of the marine and local culture. If implemented strategically and sustainably, Gorontalo can become a successful model for digital-based marine tourism destination transformation in Eastern Indonesia.

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