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Optimizing Digital Marketing in Strengthening Tourist Destination Marketing: A Conceptual Study in the Tourism Sector of Jambi Province

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Abstract: Digital transformation has shifted the marketing paradigm of tourist destinations through the utilization of various digital platforms capable of reaching tourists more broadly and interactively. Nevertheless, the implementation of digital marketing in the tourism sector in Jambi Province still faces challenges in optimizing its impact on strengthening destination marketing. On the other hand, most previous studies tend to examine the effect of digital marketing on brand awareness, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), or visit intention partially, while studies that integrate these three aspects within a single conceptual framework in the context of regional tourist destinations remain relatively limited. This study aims to develop a conceptual model for optimizing digital marketing in strengthening tourist destination marketing through enhancing brand awareness, e-WOM, and visit intention in the tourism sector of Jambi Province. The research employs a qualitative approach using a conceptual review method through systematic literature study of relevant scholarly articles, books, and publications on digital marketing and tourist destination marketing. The findings indicate that an integrated digital marketing strategy has the potential to build destination brand awareness, encourage the dissemination of positive information through e-WOM, and increase tourist visit intention. These three constructs are interrelated and form a mechanism that strengthens the effectiveness of tourist destination marketing. The novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual model that integrates brand awareness, e-WOM, and visit intention as primary mechanisms in optimizing digital marketing within the context of the tourism sector in Jambi Province, thereby serving as a foundation for empirical research as well as for formulating digital-based destination marketing strategies.

Keyword: Digital Marketing, Brand Awareness Destinasi, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Visit Intention.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the global tourism industry landscape. The development of information technology, social media, search engines, online travel platforms, and mobile devices has shifted tourist behavior from conventional patterns of information seeking toward decision-making processes dominated by digital interactions. Digital marketing is no longer viewed merely as a promotional medium, but has evolved into a strategic instrument for building relationships with tourists, enhancing destination visibility, and creating digital experiences capable of influencing perceptions and travel decisions.

Various studies show that the utilization of digital media enables tourist destinations to reach a wider market at relatively efficient costs, while also increasing customer engagement through visual content, social media, user-generated content, and two-way communication between destination managers and potential tourists (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Sigala, 2018). In line with this, UN Tourism affirms that digitalization has become one of the main pillars in enhancing destination competitiveness, as it is capable of strengthening promotion, expanding market access, and encouraging the sustainability of the tourism sector in the digital economy era. This condition indicates that the success of a destination is no longer determined solely by the beauty of its tourist attractions, but also by the destination's ability to manage an effective and adaptive digital marketing ecosystem that responds to changes in tourist behavior (Putri et al., 2025).

In the Indonesian context, digital marketing has become one of the priority strategies in the development of national tourist destinations, including at the regional government level. Changes in tourist behavior, which are increasingly dependent on digital information, have made the use of social media, websites, online travel platforms, and digital content an essential part of the information search process and travel decision-making (Gretzel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021). The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, continues to encourage the digital transformation of the tourism sector by strengthening technology-based promotion, developing the creative economy ecosystem, and enhancing the capacity of tourism actors in utilizing digital channels as marketing media (Kemenparekraf RI, 2023). Nevertheless, the implementation of digital marketing strategies at the regional level still shows variations in effectiveness, particularly in terms of consistency in content management, digital audience engagement, and the ability to convert digital exposure into tourist visitation decisions (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Sigala, 2018).

Jambi Province is one of the regions with considerable tourism potential through its natural, cultural, and historical destinations such as the Merangin Geopark, the Muaro Jambi Temple Complex, and other ecotourism areas. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency of Jambi Province, the regional tourism sector has shown growth in tourist travel activity; however, strengthening promotional strategies and enhancing destination attractiveness remain challenges in facing competition among tourist regions in Indonesia (BPS Provinsi Jambi, 2024). Therefore, optimizing digital marketing has become a strategic issue for Jambi Province to increase destination visibility, build positive tourist perceptions, and strengthen the competitive position of regional tourist destinations within the digital tourism ecosystem.

Although the utilization of digital marketing is increasingly developing in the tourism sector, the relationship between digital marketing activities and the formation of destination brand awareness still indicates room for further research development. Previous studies have shown that the presence of digital technology, particularly social media and internet-based platforms, is able to enhance a destination's ability to build visibility, expand communication reach, and strengthen tourist perceptions of a destination (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Gretzel et al., 2020).

In the context of destination marketing, brand awareness is a fundamental aspect because tourists tend to consider destinations that are already familiar and have a positive representation in their memory when conducting travel information searches (Keller, 2013). A

study conducted by Hays et al. (2013) shows that social media has become an important instrument for tourism organizations in enhancing destination brand recognition through faster and more interactive information dissemination.

Furthermore, research by Xiang and Gretzel (2010) revealed that the digital ecosystem has transformed the tourist information search process, where the presence of digital content and user engagement have become important factors in shaping initial perceptions of a destination. However, most previous studies have still focused on destinations that already have high popularity levels and strong digital infrastructure support, such as major tourist cities or international destinations. This condition indicates a limitation in studies examining how digital marketing can be optimized to build brand awareness in developing regional destinations, including tourist destinations in Jambi Province, which have great potential yet still require strengthening their digital presence.

In addition to building destination brand awareness, digital marketing also plays an important role in encouraging the formation of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which is the activity of sharing experiences, recommendations, and evaluations by tourists through digital media. In the modern tourism environment, e-WOM has become one of the sources of information with high credibility because it originates from the experiences of other users, rather than merely persuasive communication from destination managers (Filieri & McLeay, 2014).

Previous studies have shown that digital interactions through social media are able to encourage tourists to generate and share content about their travel experiences, thereby indirectly contributing to destination promotion (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Furthermore, Jalilvand et al. (2012) found that e-WOM has a significant influence on the formation of destination image and tourist travel intentions. However, research on the relationship between digital marketing and e-WOM still tends to view e-WOM as a consequence of tourist satisfaction or travel experience quality, while studies explaining how digital marketing strategies are directly designed to create a digital communication ecosystem that encourages tourists to become destination advocates remain relatively limited.

Some recent studies have indeed shown that digital activities, social media content, and online communication are able to increase tourist engagement and encourage visitation decisions (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Azzahra et al., 2025), but most of these studies still employ partial empirical approaches on specific destinations. Therefore, a conceptual study is needed that integrates digital marketing as a primary strategy in building brand awareness while simultaneously creating positive e-WOM as a mechanism for strengthening tourist destination marketing, particularly in the context of regional destinations such as Jambi Province.

Research on digital marketing in the tourism sector has shown that the utilization of digital technology, social media, and online platforms is able to strengthen destination marketing communication through increased visibility, tourist engagement, and the formation of positive perceptions of the destination (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). However, most previous studies have still examined the effect of digital marketing on destination marketing aspects partially, such as destination image, brand awareness, or tourist visitation decisions, thus they have not extensively explained the integrative mechanism of how digital marketing strategies are able to build destination marketing strength through enhancing brand awareness, creating electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and shaping visit intention (Pike & Page, 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

Therefore, this study offers a conceptual contribution through the development of an integrative framework that positions digital marketing as a primary strategy in strengthening tourist destination marketing through three main mechanisms, namely enhancing destination brand awareness, strengthening digital communication among tourists, and stimulating visit intention. This approach aligns with the perspective of value co-creation, which positions tourists as active actors in creating and disseminating destination value through digital

interactions (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Rihova et al., 2015), particularly in the context of regional tourist destinations such as Jambi Province, which still require strengthening their digital presence.

Based on the aforementioned phenomena and research gaps, this study aims to develop a conceptual study on optimizing digital marketing in strengthening tourist destination marketing through the integration of the concepts of destination brand awareness, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and visit intention. This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution by expanding the understanding of digital marketing mechanisms in the context of regional tourist destinations, as well as to offer practical contributions for tourism managers and stakeholders in Jambi Province in designing more effective, interactive, and tourist-engagement-oriented digital-based marketing strategies.

METHOD

This study employs a conceptual literature review approach aimed at identifying, evaluating, and integrating various theoretical perspectives and previous empirical research findings related to the role of digital marketing in strengthening tourist destination marketing. The conceptual review approach was chosen because this study does not focus on empirically testing relationships between variables, but rather aims to develop a conceptual understanding of the mechanisms by which digital marketing strategies can enhance destination brand awareness, encourage the formation of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and increase tourist visit intention. According to Snyder (2019), literature review is a research method capable of generating new understanding through the process of synthesizing various previous research findings, thereby enabling the identification of research gaps and the development of new conceptual models.

The literature collection process was conducted through a search for relevant scholarly articles from various academic databases, particularly reputable international journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, as well as several other supporting sources relevant to the research context. The literature reviewed includes articles on digital marketing, social media marketing, destination marketing, destination branding, electronic word of mouth, and tourist behavioral intention. The selection of literature was based on several criteria, namely (1) articles discussing the concept or implementation of digital marketing in the tourism sector, (2) having relevance to the research variables, and (3) providing theoretical and empirical contributions to the understanding of tourist behavior in the digital environment. This literature selection approach refers to the principles of integrative literature review, which allows researchers to combine various research perspectives to build a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Torraco, 2016).

The literature analysis was conducted through a thematic analysis process by grouping previous research findings based on conceptual relationships among variables. The analysis stages include: (1) identification of key concepts regarding the role of digital marketing in tourist destination marketing; (2) analysis of the relationship between digital marketing activities and the formation of brand awareness; (3) examination of the role of digital communication in encouraging electronic word of mouth; and (4) integration of findings to explain how these three aspects contribute to increasing tourist visit intention. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is an effective approach for identifying patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships from various literature sources systematically.

Based on the results of the literature synthesis, this study then develops a conceptual framework that explains the strategic role of digital marketing as the primary driver in strengthening tourist destination marketing. The conceptual framework developed positions destination brand awareness and e-WOM as digital marketing mechanisms capable of influencing tourist visit intention. This approach aligns with the view of Jaakkola (2020) that

conceptual research plays an important role in developing theory through the integration of existing concepts to generate new perspectives on a marketing phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a marketing strategy that utilizes digital technology and the internet to create, communicate, and deliver value to consumers through various digital platforms. The development of information technology has shifted the marketing paradigm from one-way communication to more interactive, personalized, and customer-experience-based communication. In this context, digital marketing not only functions as a promotional medium, but also as a means of building long-term relationships with consumers through the utilization of social media, websites, digital applications, search engines, and various other online communication platforms (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Dwivedi et al., 2021). In the tourism sector, digital marketing has become an important instrument in destination marketing because it is able to increase destination visibility, expand promotional reach, facilitate interaction between destination managers and tourists, and encourage the formation of digital experiences before, during, and after tourist visits (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Sigala, 2018).

Nevertheless, studies on digital marketing indicate that this construct is multidimensional, so there is no single universally applicable measurement model. Dwivedi et al. (2021) explain that the effectiveness of digital marketing is influenced by an organization's ability to manage digital content, utilize various digital communication channels, and build user engagement (customer engagement). Hays et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of utilizing social media as an interactive communication tool in destination marketing, while Xiang and Gretzel (2010) show that ease of access to digital information is an important factor in the tourist information search process. On the other hand, Sigala (2018) explains that the success of digital marketing in the tourism sector is greatly influenced by a destination's ability to create digital interactions and experiences that encourage active tourist participation. Based on the synthesis of various literatures, this study conceptualizes digital marketing into four main dimensions, namely digital content, interactivity, accessibility, and customer engagement, which are considered capable of comprehensively representing digital marketing activities in tourist destinations.

Table 1. Synthesis of Digital Marketing Dimensions

Dimensions	Description	Indicator
Digital Content	The destination's ability to present informative, engaging, relevant and consistent digital content to introduce the destination to tourists. (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Hays et al., 2013).	1. Informative content. 2. Visually appealing content. 3. Content relevant to travelers' needs. 4. Consistent content updates.
Interactivity	The ability of digital media to facilitate two-way communication between destination managers and tourists thus creating closer relationships. (Sigala, 2018; Hays et al., 2013).	1. Response to tourist inquiries. 2. Intensity of two-way communication. 3. Interaction through comments or messages. 4. Speed of user response.
Accessibility	Convenience for tourists in obtaining destination information through various digital platforms quickly, easily, and at any time (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).	1. Information is easily accessible. 2. Information is easy to find. 3. Information is comprehensive. 4. Digital media navigation is easy to use.
Customer Engagement	The level of tourist involvement in interacting and participating in the destination's digital marketing activities (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Sigala, 2018).	1. Giving likes or reactions. 2. Giving comments. 3. Sharing content.

Dimensions	Description	Indicator
		4. Participating in discussions or user-generated content.

Source: Synthesized from Buhalis & Law (2008), Xiang & Gretzel (2010), Hays et al. (2013), Sigala (2018), and Dwivedi et al. (2021).

Brand Awareness

Destination brand awareness is the ability of tourists to recognize (brand recognition) and recall (brand recall) a tourist destination when they are faced with a need or desire to travel. From a marketing perspective, brand awareness is one of the main components of brand equity that indicates the extent to which a brand is able to occupy a position in consumer memory (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). The higher the level of tourist awareness of a destination, the greater the likelihood that the destination will be considered in the travel decision-making process. Therefore, brand awareness is not only related to the level of recognition of a destination's name, but also reflects the destination's ability to build a strong presence in the minds of tourists through various marketing communication activities (Keller, 2013).

In the context of tourism, the concept of brand awareness evolves into destination brand awareness, namely the level of tourists' ability to recognize, recall, and associate a tourist destination through its identity, characteristics, or information received from various marketing media. Pike and Page (2014) explain that brand awareness is a fundamental foundation in building destination brand strength because tourists tend to choose destinations they are already familiar with compared to destinations that do not have adequate exposure. In line with this, Kladou and Kehagias (2014) state that increasing brand awareness is an initial step in building destination brand equity, because awareness of a destination will influence the formation of perceptions, evaluations, and ultimately tourists' visit intentions. In the digital era, destination brand awareness is increasingly influenced by marketing activities through social media, websites, and various digital platforms that enable destinations to gain broader exposure while simultaneously strengthening their presence in tourists' memory (Hays et al., 2013; Pike & Page, 2014).

Although the concept of brand awareness has been extensively developed in marketing literature, its measurement in the context of tourist destinations generally refers to the dimensions put forward by Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993), then adapted in destination branding research. Based on the synthesis of various literatures, this study conceptualizes destination brand awareness into four main dimensions, namely brand recognition, brand recall, top of mind awareness, and brand familiarity. These four dimensions are considered capable of representing the level of tourist awareness of a destination, ranging from the ability to recognize it to making the destination the primary choice when planning a trip.

Table 2. Synthesis of Destination Brand Awareness Dimensions

Dimensions	Description	Indicator
Brand Recognition	The ability of tourists to recognize a destination when they see the name, logo, slogan, photo, or visual identity of the destination (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993).	1. Recognize the destination name. 2. Recognize the destination logo or identity. 3. Recognize the destination's characteristics. 4. Easily distinguish the destination from other destinations.
Brand Recall	The ability of tourists to recall the name of a destination without assistance when thinking about the tourist destination (Keller, 1993; Pike & Page, 2014).	1. Easily remember the name of the destination. 2. The destination comes to mind when searching for tourist destinations. 3. Remember information about the destination.
Top of Mind Awareness	The degree to which a destination is the first choice that comes to a tourist's mind when thinking about a particular tourist destination (Aaker, 1996).	1. The destination is the primary choice. 2. The destination is the first thing that comes to mind.

Dimensions	Description	Indicator
Brand Familiarity	The level of closeness and understanding of tourists towards the characteristics and uniqueness of the destination through the experiences and information received. (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Pike & Page, 2014).	3. The destination is better known than other destinations. 1. Understand the characteristics of the destination. 2. Know the main attractions of the destination. 3. Feel familiar with the destination.

Source: Synthesized from Aaker (1996), Keller (1993; 2013), Pike & Page (2014), Kladou & Kehagias (2014).

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) is a form of informal communication among consumers conducted through internet-based media regarding experiences, evaluations, or opinions about a product, service, or tourist destination. Unlike traditional word of mouth which takes place directly interpersonally, e-WOM utilizes various digital platforms such as social media, travel review sites, blogs, discussion forums, and content-sharing applications, allowing information to reach a wider audience, last longer, and be easily accessed by prospective consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Litvin et al., 2008). In a marketing context, e-WOM is viewed as one of the most credible sources of information because it originates from consumers' real experiences, thereby being able to influence the perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making processes of prospective consumers (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

In the tourism sector, e-WOM has an increasingly strategic role because tourist decisions are generally based on information obtained prior to traveling. Tourists tend to read reviews, view recommendations, and pay attention to other tourists' experiences shared through digital media before deciding on a destination to visit. This information becomes an important reference in reducing uncertainty and increasing trust in a destination (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Furthermore, Ismagilova et al. (2020) affirm that e-WOM not only plays a role in shaping perceptions of a destination, but is also capable of enhancing destination image, strengthening brand awareness, and encouraging visit intention through the voluntary dissemination of positive information by tourists. Therefore, e-WOM has become one of the essential elements in tourist destination digital marketing strategies.

Various studies show that e-WOM is a multidimensional construct that can be measured through the characteristics of the information conveyed as well as the intensity of its dissemination. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explain that the effectiveness of e-WOM is influenced by the quality of the information shared and the users' motivation in sharing their experiences. Cheung and Thadani (2012) add that information credibility and the extent of message dissemination are the main factors determining the influence of e-WOM on consumer behavior. Meanwhile, research by Filieri and McLeay (2014) shows that the relevance of the information received by tourists also determines the effectiveness of e-WOM in influencing travel decisions. Based on the synthesis of various literatures, this study conceptualizes e-WOM into four main dimensions, namely information quality, information credibility, information usefulness, and information dissemination, which are considered capable of representing electronic consumer-to-consumer communication in the context of tourist destination marketing.

Table 3. Synthesis of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) Dimensions

Dimensions	Description	Indicator
Information Quality	The level of quality of information conveyed through digital media, including completeness, clarity, relevance and currency of information	1. Complete information. 2. Clear and easy-to-understand information. 3. Relevant information.

Dimensions	Description	Indicator
	regarding tourist destinations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Filieri & McLeay, 2014).	4. Up-to-date information.
Information Credibility	The level of trust tourists have in information or reviews provided by other users on digital media (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri & McLeay, 2014).	1. The information is reliable. 2. The review is considered honest. 3. The source of the information is reliable.
Information Usefulness	The level of usefulness of digital information in helping tourists understand destinations and make travel decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Ismagilova et al., 2020).	1. Helps you obtain destination information. 2. Helps you compare destinations. 3. Helps you make travel decisions.
Information Dissemination	The level of dissemination of information or tourism experiences through various digital media to other users (Litvin et al., 2008; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).	1. Willingness to share travel experiences. 2. Providing online reviews. 3. Recommending destinations through digital media. 4. Sharing destination content with other users.

Source: Synthesized from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Litvin et al. (2008), Cheung & Thadani (2012), Filieri & McLeay (2014), Munar & Jacobsen (2014), and Ismagilova et al. (2020).

Visit Intention

Visit intention is an individual's inclination or desire to visit a tourist destination in the future as a result of the evaluation process of the information, perceptions, and experiences they possess. This concept is rooted in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which explains that intention is the main predictor influencing a person's actual behavior. In the tourism context, visit intention describes the level of tourists' readiness to choose, plan, and undertake a visit to a destination after considering various factors, such as destination image, information received, other tourists' experiences, and destination marketing activities (Ajzen, 1991; Lam & Hsu, 2006).

In the development of tourism literature, visit intention is viewed as one of the important indicators of the success of destination marketing strategies. Chen and Tsai (2007) explain that visit intention is influenced by tourists' evaluations of a destination, including destination image, perceived quality, satisfaction, and perceived value. Furthermore, various studies show that the development of digital media has expanded the factors influencing visit intention, including digital marketing, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and destination brand awareness, which are able to form positive perceptions before tourists undertake their travels (Chen et al., 2014; Atzeni et al., 2022). Thus, visit intention not only reflects the desire to visit, but also indicates the level of tourists' confidence in making a destination their travel choice.

Various studies reveal that visit intention is a multidimensional construct that reflects tourists' behavioral tendencies prior to making a visit. Lam and Hsu (2006) emphasize that visit intention is reflected in tourists' desire to choose a destination as well as their readiness to actualize the visit. Chen and Tsai (2007) add that this intention is also demonstrated through tourists' willingness to recommend and reconsider the destination as a travel choice. Based on the synthesis of various literatures, this study conceptualizes visit intention into four main dimensions, namely visit desire, visit planning, visit preference, and recommendation intention, which are considered capable of describing tourists' behavioral tendencies toward a tourist destination more comprehensively.

Table 4. Synthesis of Visit Intention Dimensions

Dimensions	Description	Indicator
Visit Desire	The level of desire or interest of tourists to visit tourist destinations in the future (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2007).	1. Have a desire to visit the destination. 2. Are interested in visiting. 3. Have the intention to travel to the destination.
Visit Planning	Tourist readiness in planning a visit to a tourist destination as a form of realizing the intention to visit (Ajzen, 1991; Lam & Hsu, 2006).	1. Planning to visit the destination. 2. Scheduling the visit. 3. Preparing for the trip to the destination.
Visit Preference	The level of tourist preference in choosing a destination compared to other alternative destinations (Chen & Tsai, 2007).	1. The destination is the primary choice. 2. Choosing the destination over other destinations. 3. Considering the destination as a tourist destination.
Recommendation Intention	The willingness of tourists to recommend a destination to others as a form of confidence in the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Tsai, 2016).	1. Willing to recommend the destination. 2. Encourage others to visit. 3. Provide positive recommendations about the destination.

Source: Synthesized from Ajzen (1991), Lam & Hsu (2006), Chen & Tsai (2007), and Tsai (2016).

Discussion

Optimizing Digital Marketing to Strengthen Tourism Destination Marketing by Increasing Brand Awareness

The development of digital technology has shifted the paradigm of tourist destination marketing from conventional approaches to marketing that is more interactive, adaptive, and oriented toward tourist experiences. In the perspective of modern marketing, digital marketing is no longer viewed merely as a promotional medium, but as a strategic instrument for building relationships with tourists through the provision of relevant information, two-way communication, and the delivery of destination experiences digitally (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Dwivedi et al., 2021). In the tourism context, optimizing digital marketing enables destination managers to expand the reach of information, increase destination exposure, and create sustainable interactions with tourists through social media, websites, and various other digital platforms. Through this process, destinations have a greater opportunity to embed their identity and characteristics in tourists' memory, thereby forming stronger brand awareness (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Pike & Page, 2014).

Theoretically, the relationship between digital marketing and brand awareness can be explained through the concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) put forward by Keller (1993). This theory explains that brand awareness is the main foundation in the formation of brand equity because consumers tend to consider brands they are already familiar with when making decisions. In the context of tourist destinations, digital marketing activities through the dissemination of visual content, promotional videos, destination stories, and travel information consistently will increase the frequency of brand exposure, thereby strengthening tourists' ability to recognize (brand recognition) and recall (brand recall) a destination (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1996). Thus, the more optimal the digital marketing strategy implemented, the greater the opportunity for the destination to become the top-of-mind choice when tourists plan their trips.

Empirical findings from various studies support this argument. Hays et al. (2013) showed that the use of social media by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) contributes to increasing destination visibility and expanding the reach of marketing communications to potential tourists. Furthermore, Dedeoğlu et al. (2020) proved that social media sharing activities have a positive effect on destination brand awareness, which in turn enhances tourists' perceptions of destination quality. Research by Rimadías et al. (2021) also found that social

media marketing has a significant effect on the formation of brand awareness in the Indonesian tourism sector through increased consumer brand engagement. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of digital marketing is not only determined by the intensity of promotion, but also by the destination's ability to create content that is engaging, interactive, and easily shared by users, thereby expanding the reach of brand communication.

From a conceptual perspective, optimizing digital marketing will be increasingly effective when supported by four main dimensions, namely digital content, interactivity, accessibility, and customer engagement. Informative and engaging digital content will increase tourist attention to the destination, while interactive communication is able to build closer relationships between destination managers and tourists. Ease of access to information through various digital platforms also makes it easier for tourists to obtain information about the destination, while high levels of user engagement through likes, comments, sharing, and user-generated content will organically expand the dissemination of destination identity. The integration of these four dimensions makes digital marketing a strategic mechanism that not only increases destination exposure, but also strengthens the destination brand's position in tourists' memory. Therefore, in the context of Jambi Province, optimizing digital marketing is an important strategy to increase the recognition of regional tourist destinations so that they can compete with other destinations that already have a stronger digital presence.

Optimizing Digital Marketing to Strengthen Tourism Destination Marketing Through Increasing Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

In the development of digital-based tourist destination marketing, the success of a destination is not only determined by its ability to convey information to tourists, but also by its capacity to create active tourist participation in disseminating their experiences through digital media. Digital marketing provides various interactive spaces that allow tourists not only to act as information receivers, but also as information creators through activities such as sharing experiences, reviews, photos, videos, and recommendations online. This phenomenon makes electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) one of the strategic mechanisms in tourist destination marketing, because information originating from user experiences is often perceived as more credible compared to marketing communications fully controlled by organizations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Litvin et al., 2008).

Theoretically, the relationship between digital marketing and e-WOM can be explained through the perspective of social influence theory and the concept of customer engagement. In the digital environment, marketing activities involving engaging content, interactive communication, and user engagement can create an emotional connection between tourists and a destination. This connection encourages tourists to voluntarily participate in sharing their experiences with other users through various digital platforms (Brodie et al., 2013). Furthermore, electronic word of mouth theory explains that information quality, source credibility, and ease of information dissemination are important factors determining the effectiveness of digital consumer-to-consumer communication (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Thus, optimizing digital marketing through the provision of relevant content, responsive interaction, and positive digital experiences can increase the likelihood of tourists generating positive e-WOM about a destination.

In the tourism context, e-WOM has an increasingly important role because the characteristics of tourism products are intangible and have a relatively high level of uncertainty before tourists undertake their travels. Tourists often use the experiences and recommendations of other tourists as the primary source of information in evaluating a destination. Litvin et al. (2008) explain that e-WOM in the tourism sector has a strong influence because it is able to reduce tourist uncertainty and increase trust in the destination. Furthermore, Filieri and McLeay (2014) found that the quality and credibility of online reviews play an important role in shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination and influencing travel decisions. This indicates that digital

marketing capable of generating user engagement not only increases the dissemination of destination information, but also creates a chain marketing effect through digital recommendations from tourists to other tourists.

Empirical evidence also shows that digital marketing activities have a positive relationship with the increase of e-WOM in the tourism sector. Research by Kim and Lee (2015) showed that tourist engagement in social media can increase their tendency to share travel experiences online. Meanwhile, Munar and Jacobsen (2014) found that tourists have certain motivations in sharing travel experiences through social media, such as the desire to share information, build social relationships, and express self-identity. Research by Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) also showed that e-WOM has a significant influence on tourist trust and travel intention because information originating from other users is considered more authentic. These findings strengthen the argument that optimizing digital marketing is not only oriented toward increasing promotional reach, but also toward creating a digital ecosystem that encourages tourists to become brand advocates for a destination.

Based on the aforementioned theoretical and empirical review, it can be concluded that optimizing digital marketing has a strategic role in strengthening tourist destination marketing through the enhancement of e-WOM. Digital marketing dimensions such as digital content, interactivity, accessibility, and customer engagement act as driving factors in the formation of positive digital communication initiated by tourists. Attractive destination content can increase tourists' desire to share their experiences, good digital interaction can strengthen the relationship between the destination and tourists, while ease of information access allows the dissemination of destination messages to occur more broadly. Therefore, for tourist destinations in Jambi Province, strengthening digital marketing strategies needs to be directed not only toward promoting tourist attractions, but also toward creating digital experiences that encourage tourists to generate positive e-WOM, thereby being able to enhance the destination's competitiveness in a sustainable manner.

Optimizing Digital Marketing to Strengthen Tourism Destination Marketing by Increasing Visit Intention

Optimizing digital marketing has a strategic role in increasing tourist visit intention because it is able to provide broader, easily accessible, and interactive information about a tourist destination. Through various digital platforms, tourists can obtain an overview of destination attractions, travel experiences, supporting facilities, and recommendations from other users before making travel decisions. From the perspective of consumer behavior, information obtained through digital marketing activities can shape tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, which subsequently influence their intention to make a visit. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which explains that intention is the main factor driving the formation of a person's actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the tourism context, the more positive tourists' perceptions of a destination formed through digital communication, the higher their tendency to choose that destination as their travel destination (Lam & Hsu, 2006).

Conceptually, the relationship between digital marketing and visit intention can be explained through digital marketing's ability to build tourists' image and initial experience prior to their visit. Engaging digital content, easily accessible information, and responsive interaction can reduce tourist uncertainty while simultaneously increasing trust in the destination. Chen and Tsai (2007) explain that destination image and tourists' evaluation of a destination have an important influence on the formation of behavioral intention, including the intention to visit. Furthermore, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) showed that digital media and social media have become important sources of information in the travel information search process, where this information plays a role in shaping tourists' perceptions and decisions. Thus, digital marketing not only functions as a promotional communication tool, but also as a mechanism for shaping tourists' preferences and behavioral intentions.

Empirical studies also show that digital marketing activities have a positive contribution to increasing visit intention. Research by Jalilvand et al. (2012) found that digital communication, particularly through electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), is able to enhance destination image and influence tourists' intention to make a visit. Furthermore, Ayeh et al. (2013) showed that trust in digital information (online trust) is an important factor influencing tourists' decisions in choosing a destination. Based on the aforementioned theoretical and empirical review, it can be understood that optimizing digital marketing through the dimensions of digital content, interactivity, accessibility, and customer engagement is able to strengthen tourist destination marketing by increasing tourists' interest, preference, and readiness to undertake a visit. Therefore, for tourist destinations in Jambi Province, strengthening digital marketing strategies is an important step to enhance destination attractiveness and encourage an increase in tourist visitation numbers.

With reference to the research objectives, the theoretical review both empirically and conceptually, as well as the discussion of the relationships among variables, the conceptual framework of this article is constructed as presented below.

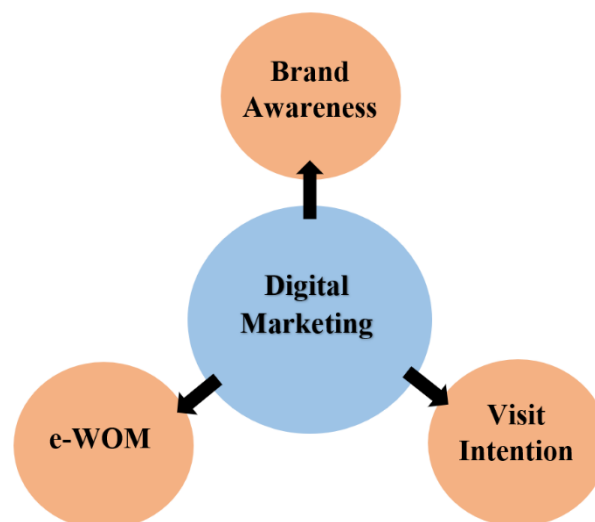


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This conceptual study concludes that optimizing digital marketing is an important strategy in strengthening marketing and enhancing the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the digital era. Digital marketing not only functions as a promotional medium, but also as a strategic instrument in building relationships between destinations and tourists through the provision of informative digital content, sustainable interaction, ease of information access, and increased tourist engagement. Through this mechanism, digital marketing is able to enhance destination brand awareness by strengthening tourists' ability to recognize, recall, and consider a destination in their travel decision-making process.

In addition to enhancing destination brand awareness, optimizing digital marketing also plays a role in encouraging the formation of positive electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Effective digital interaction is able to encourage tourists to share experiences, provide recommendations, and disseminate information about the destination through various digital platforms. Ultimately, increased brand awareness and positive e-WOM contribute to shaping better perceptions of the destination and increasing tourist visit intention. Thus, the conceptual model developed in this study affirms that digital marketing can serve as a strategic foundation for tourist destinations, including the tourism sector in Jambi Province, in building

competitiveness through strengthening digital presence, tourist engagement, and increasing visitation potential.

Research Limitations

Although this study provides a conceptual contribution in understanding the role of digital marketing in enhancing the competitiveness of tourist destinations, there are several limitations that need to be noted. First, this study is conceptual in nature (conceptual paper), so it has not conducted empirical testing of the relationships among the variables developed. Therefore, the validity of the conceptual model linking digital marketing, destination brand awareness, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and visit intention still requires verification through quantitative research or mixed-method approaches.

Second, this study focuses on the context of tourist destinations in Jambi Province, so generalization of the model to regions or destination characteristics that differ must be done cautiously. Each destination has different characteristics, resources, tourist behavior, and levels of digital technology adoption. Furthermore, this study has not considered other external factors, such as travel experience quality, destination attractiveness, digital infrastructure, and institutional support, which also have the potential to influence tourist destination competitiveness.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this conceptual study, destination managers and tourism stakeholders in Jambi Province are advised to optimize digital marketing strategies through the development of creative, informative, and consistent digital content, as well as by increasing interaction with tourists through various digital platforms. These strategies need to be directed not only toward increasing destination visibility, but also toward encouraging tourist engagement so that they actively share positive experiences through e-WOM, thereby organically expanding marketing reach.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct empirical testing of the conceptual model developed using quantitative approaches, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to examine both direct and indirect relationships among variables. Subsequent research may also consider adding other relevant variables, such as destination image, perceived value, tourist experience, trust, or customer engagement as mediating or moderating variables in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying the formation of digital-based tourist destination competitiveness.

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