TOURISM DESTINATION PROMOTION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA : A CONTENT STUDY OF DMO GORONTALO

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ABSTRACT

The promotion of tourism destinations via social media has significantly increased in the contemporary tourism industry. This paradigm shift is driven by advancements in information technology and the growing utilization of social media platforms. However, in Gorontalo region, particularly in Tomini Bay area, social media has not been fully leveraged by the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) to market the region's potential tourist attractions. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the promotional content of tourism destinations in Tomini Bay area by the DMO on social media platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram, as well as to understand tourists' perceptions and responses to these promotional strategies. The research employs a mixed-method approach through content analysis and online surveys. The findings provide in-depth insights into the promotional strategies employed by DMO's Gorontalo, tourists' responses to these strategies, and recommendations for enhancing effective tourism promotion strategies. The study reveals that social media has not been utilized consistently and optimally by DMO Gorontalo which impacting the achievement of its tourism promotion objectives. To improve the effectiveness of tourism promotion strategies, several aspects need to be addressed, including: (1) consistency and frequency of promotional content uploads; (2) diversification of promotional content; and (3) optimization of user-generated content.

Keywords : DMO; Social Media; Promotion; Tourism

ABSTRAK

Promosi destinasi pariwisata melalui media sosial meningkat secara signifikan dalam industri pariwisata saat ini. Perubahan paradigma dalam promosi pariwisata didorong oleh kemajuan teknologi informasi dan pemanfaatan media sosial yang semakin berkembang. Namun di wilayah Gorontalo, khususnya di kawasan Teluk Tomini, media sosial belum dimanfaatkan secara optimal oleh Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) untuk memasarkan destinasi wisata potensial di wilayah tersebut. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi konten promosi destinasi pariwisata di kawasan Teluk Tomini oleh DMO Gorontalo pada platform media sosial Facebook dan Instagram serta memahami persepsi dan tanggapan wisatawan terhadap strategi promosi tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah mixed-method melalui analisis konten dan survey online. Adapun hasil penelitian ini adalah pemahaman yang mendalam tentang strategi promosi yang digunakan oleh DMO Gorontalo, tanggapan wisatawan terhadap strategi promosi tersebut, dan rekomendasi bagi DMO dalam meningkatkan strategi promosi pariwisata yang efektif. Hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa media sosial belum dimanfaatkan secara konsisten dan optimal oleh DMO Gorontalo yang berdampak pada pencapaian tujuan promosi pariwisata. Untuk meningkatkan efektivitas strategi promosi pariwisata, maka beberapa aspek yang

harus diperhatikan oleh DMO yaitu: (1) konsistensi dan frekuensi unggahan konten promosi; (2) diversifikasi konten promosi; dan (3) optimasi user-generated content.

Kata kunci : DMO; Media Sosial; Promosi; Pariwisata

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, particularly in the aftermath of Covid-19, tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. Technological advancements have significantly transformed the tourism industry (van Nuenen & Scarles, 2021). The progress in information and communication technology has expanded accessibility and influenced consumer preferences in choosing travel destinations which also leads the tourism industry to continuously adapt, particularly in innovating its destination promotion strategies. One of the most dominant marketing platforms in this evolving landscape is social media. Social media not only serve as a broad information dissemination platform but also facilitates two-way interaction between tourism service providers and prospective travelers. Social media has revolutionized the model of destination promotion by making it more interactive and capable of reaching a global audience more effectively (Chu et al., 2020).

In an era where social media has reshaped the paradigm of tourism promotion, the development of destination promotion strategies has become increasingly crucial. In the Indonesian context, the Tomini Bay area stands out as a tourist destination with potential both in terms of natural beauty and cultural appeal. This region holds great promise for attracting tourist from around the world (Tohop et al., 2024). At this stage, the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) plays a key role as the main driver in designing and implementing destination promotion strategies through various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and others (Kumar et al., 2022). The use of social media has become a critical factor in enhancing the exposure of tourist destinations (Liu et al., 2020).

Studies on digital marketing have emphasized the importance of adopting effective digital strategies in the tourism industry. In analyzing the use of digital media to promote tourism area, for instance, Tarigan et al (2023) explored the effect of social media marketing and online destination reviews on tourist' decisions to visit Tangkahan, Langkat Regency, North Sumatera. Their study revealed that social media marketing and online destination reviews had a partial and significant impact on tourists'

destinations. Similarly, research conducted in the Botutonuo Beach by Kusuma and Abid (2022) highlighted the need for digital information dissemination, particularly through websites, to promote Botutonuo Beach as a tourist destination in Gorontalo. This approach aims to broaden the reach of information about the destination to a wider target audience.

Moreover, Arkansyah, Prasetyo, and Amina (2021) conducted a similar study analyzing the use of TikTok by the Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia in promoting tourist attractions across the country. Beside serving as a promotional platform, TikTok was also used to communicate official activities related to the promotion of tourist destinations. These findings underscore that high-quality content, active interaction with users, and consistent use of digital platforms are key factors in enhancing user engagement and increasing tourists' visiting interest. However, existing research in the context of tourism promotion and digital marketing has not specifically focused on content analysis of tourism destination promotions on social media and tourists' perceptions of these promotions at the local level. Previous studies have generally centered on broader aspects of digital marketing as a promotional tool. Furthermore, much of the literature remains focused on regional and national-level DMO (Feng et al., 2004), rather than local DMOs (district or city level) that are capable of providing more detailed tourism information and influencing tourists' intention to visit. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the content analysis of tourism destination promotions on local DMO's social media.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Social Media and Tourism Promotion

Social media has significantly transformed the patterns of information creation and distribution in the modern technologyical era (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Gretzel et al., 2000; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). According to Thevenot (2007), as the popularity of social media grows, users gain increasing influence, while the role of traditional marketers and institutions gradually declines. Social media promotion strategy is characterized by participatory, conversational, and dynamic online communities (Qualman, 2012) with a primary focus on user-generated content (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Ružić & Biloš, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). These aspects are highly relevant to the tourism industry which is heavily relies on information (Wang et al., 2002). With the

convenience offered by communication technologies, both tourists and service providers in tourism industry are increasingly utilizing social media (Hays et al., 2013; Mariani, 2020; Uşaklı et al., 2017). Consequently, social media, promotional content, and electronic word of mouth have emerged as topics of interest in tourism destination marketing research (Lu et al., 2018; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

The rapid growth in social media usage has also transformed the marketing landscape, with a shift from traditional marketing methods to a more interactive and consumer-centered approach (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In tourism industry, social media provides essential information for travelers to plan their trips, influencing decision-making processes related to the selection of destinations, accommodations, restaurants, tours, and attractions (Liu et al., 2020). Personal recommendations from tourists have a significant impact on the image of tourism destinations, as tourism experiences are intangible and difficult to evaluate beforehand. Therefore, the active engagement of social media users is crucial for building loyalty, creating engaging content, and enhancing brand awareness (Buhalis, 2020). In the pre-travel stage, social media helps tourists mitigate risks, visualize the conditions of the destination, and make informed decisions (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Narangajavana et al., 2017). Tourist utilize social media not only before visiting a destination but also during and after the trip. Consequently, the variety of content shared on social media offers valuable insights for the development of tourism destinations.

Destination Marketing Organization (DMO)

Destination Matketing Organization (DMO) are entities specifically established to promote a particular destination to potential tourists (Li & Wang, 2010). The term DMO broadly refers to both public and private organization responsible for the development, maintenance, and promotion of tourist destinations (Morrison, 2013). At the public level, the Tourism Department at provincial, regency, or city level function as DMO which promote their respective geographic areas in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. Geographically, DMOs are classified into three categories: (i) national tourism authorities or organizations; (ii) regional or provincial DMOs; and (iii) local DMOs that oversee and promote tourism within smaller geographic areas, such as cities or regencies (Bieger et al., 2009). On this study, Tourism Department of six regions in Gorontalo represent the DMOs that have to

maintain an online presence through official websites and social media platforms to promote tourism destinations in their respective areas to reach both domestic and international audiences.

Over time, DMOs have emerged as a distinct paradigm in tourism marketing that emphasize the significance of destinations as key units of analysis within the tourism industry (Pike & Page, 2014). DMOs play an essential role in promoting and enhancing the image of tourism destinations. Their primary function is to attract visitors through the development and implementation of marketing strategies that showcase the uniqueness of each destination. Beyond tourism promotion, DMOs are also involved in destination branding, community development, and facilitating the creation of tourism product and services (Timareva et al., 2015). Tourism destination branding by DMOs involves crafting a unique identity for a destination to attract potential visitors. As study conducted by Abiola-Oke (2023) which underscores the importance of branding in differentiating one destination from others, thereby enhancing its competitiveness and contributing to overall economic growth. Moreover, the destination image shaped by DMOs has a significant influence on tourist behavior, particularly in terms of their interest in visiting, returning, or recommending the destination to others (Yuan & Vui, 2024). Thus, the relationship between DMO's roles and tourism promotion efforts highlights the necessity for DMOs to adopt effective marketing strategies that align with tourist's perceptions and expectations. While local-level DMOs (regency/city) provide more detailed travel information and aiding tourist in making informed decisions, much of the existing literature still focuses on regional and national-level DMOs (Feng et al., 2004).

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was employed in this study, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive analysis of the social media strategies used by DMOs in Gorontalo. Two primary techniques were utilized for data collection. First, social media content analysis was conducted to assess the promotional activities of the Gorontalo DMOs on their official Facebook and Instagram accounts over a two-year period (2022-2023). The analysis focused on identifying key promotional strategies, type of content shared (photos, videos, links), and user engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares. Data was collected from the

official social media accounts of the Tourism Offices in six regions: Pohuwato, Boalemo, Gorontalo Regency, Gorontalo City, and Bone Bolango. The content was categorized and quantified based on post type, engagement levels, and the frequency of posts promoting destinations, events, or services. This framework followed established guidelines to ensure consistency in the data analysis (Hays et al., 2013). See Table 1.

Second, an online survey was conducted to gather data on tourists' perception of the promotional content shared by the DMOs. The survey aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of social media strategies in influencing tourists' decisions to visit Gorontalo. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions allowed for quantitative analysis while open-ended responses provided qualitative insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current promotional strategies. NVivo software was used to analyze the qualitative data with a word cloud visualization highlighting key themes which emerged as important factors for improving social media strategies. The combination of these two methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of current social media strategies, offering actionable insights for the Gorontalo DMOs to enhance their tourism promotion efforts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Content analysis of DMO's Facebook and Instagram pages

Facebook (FB) and Instagram (IG) are the most popular social media platforms used by the Tourism Offices of Regencies and Cities in Gorontalo to promote tourism destinations. The study analyzed the social media presence of DMOs in Gorontalo by focusing on the content shared across those two platforms during 2022-2023. See Table 2. The analysis revealed variation in the use of these platforms among different DMOs. Specifically, Pohuwato emerged as the most active DMO on Facebook in 2022 with the highest volume of promotional content and user interactions. However, Gorontalo City and Bone Bolango had limited activity with fewer tourism promotion post published. See Table 3. In 2023, the Gorontalo City displayed a notable increase in Facebook activity, surpassing previous year levels, but user engagement remained lower than that of Pohuwato. Conversely, Pohuwato and Bone Bolango experienced a drastic decline in social media activity which indicate a shift in promotional focus. See Table 4.

On Instagram, the DMOs' performance in 2022 was relatively weak with minimal content production. For instance, Gorontalo City posted just one video with

only five likes, no comments, and no shares. See Table 5. The lack of promotional activity in 2022 suggests that the DMOs did not effectively leverage Instagram's potential as an effective tourism promotional platform. However, 2023 witnessed an improvement, particularly for Bone Bolango, which became the most active DMO on Instagram by producing 14 photos and 23 videos. This content attracted significant engagement with a total of 878 likes, 17 comments, and 101 shares which indicating that the content successfully captured the audience's attention. While other DMOs, such as Gorontalo City and Boalemo, also increased their activity compared to the previous year, despite producing less content that Bone Bolango. Boalemo only produced one photo, while Gorontalo City created one video, both generating relatively low user enganement. See Table 6.

The content analysis highlights a key inconsistency in the use of social media for tourism promotion across Gorontalo's DMOs. The discrepancy in promotional activity between 2022 and 2023 suggest that while certain DMOs, such as Pohuwato and Bone Bolango, demonstrated strong engagement during specific periods, others, like Gorontalo City, were slower to adopt or fully leverage social media platforms for effective promotion. The significant dip in activity for several regions in 2023 is particularly concerning as it may indicate a misalignment in the focus of their tourism promotion strategy or a lack of resources dedicated to maintaining consistent online visibility. In order to avoid this issues, DMOs should allocate resources to ensure consistent and innovative online presence and create a more impactful tourism promotion strategy (Sari et al., 2024).

Textual analysis of questionnaire responds through a word cloud

To deepen the content analysis of DMO social media accounts in measuring the effectiveness of Instagram and Facebook as tourism promotion platforms for the Gorontalo DMO, a word cloud was generated using the NVIVO program to visually highlight the main suggestions provided by respondents on how to improve the promotion of Gorontalo's tourism destinations through social media. A word cloud is used to display the frequency of selected words from a text with words that appear more frequently shown in larger fonts (Devasia & P. V., 2022). This method helps identify key terms and concepts by narrowing down relevant words from the data (Harahap et al., 2024).

The word cloud reveals several prominent themes with terms such as "content", "tourism", "Gorontalo", "engaging", "social media", and "promotion" standing out. See Figure 1. This critical insight from the word cloud reinforces the need for visually appealing and engaging content. Respondent empathized the importance of showcasing the uniqueness of Gorontalo's tourism offerings through high-quality videos and photos which aligns with trends in the tourism industry where visual content plays a pivotal role in influencing tourist decisions. More frequent and strategically tailored content is recommended to better resonate with potential visitors. Visualization and promotion of natural destinations have a significant impact on attracting tourist (McCreary et al., 2020).

Moreover, the word cloud highlighted "local" and "culture" as essential elements in promotional content, suggesting that respondents value the inclusion of local heritage and cultural experiences into the DMOs' promotional strategies. This reflects a growing interest in cultural tourism where tourists seek authentic local experiences. By highlighting Gorontalo's rich cultural traditions, the destination could appeal to a broader audience. Additionally, terms like "visitors" and "place" indicate that respondents want promotional content to not only inform but also enhance the visitor experience by offering insights into activities and attractions. The Gorontalo DMOs can regularly and interactively provide information through photo and video posts related to cultural events, natural landscapes, exhibitions, cuisine, and historical tourism. Lastly, the role of user-generated content (UGC) in enhancing engagement cannot be overstated. DMOs could benefit from encouraging tourists to share their experiences, creating a sense of community and trust, which is crucial in building a destination's brand and attracting new visitors. This approach complements advertising strategies that draw on the affective image by emphasizing emotions of happiness and relaxation. By showcasing authentic, visitor-created stories alongside professionally curated visual and interactive content on platforms line Instagram and Facebook, DMOs can create a compelling narrative that highlights both the emotional and experiential value of a destination (Hardiansyah & Ernawadi, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the use of social media by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in the Tomini Bay area of Gorontalo remains

inconsistent and underutilized. While some DMOs, such as Pohuwato, were more active in promoting tourism through social media platforms, other regions, like Gorontalo City and Bone Bolango, demonstrated limited engagement especially during the initial study period. The decline in social media activity by several regions in 2023 highlights a shift in focus or a lack of sustained promotional efforts which could impact the overall effectiveness of tourism promotion in the region. The analysis also revealed that Instagram, a highly visual platform ideal for promoting tourism, was not fully leveraged by most DMOs. The increased activity on Instagram by Bone Bolango in 2023 demonstrates the platform's potential to engage audiences through visually appealing content, as evidenced by the higher user interaction. However, other DMOs continued to struggle with consistent content production and engagement. The word cloud analysis of tourist feedback further emphasized the need for more engaging and visually appealing content with a focus on showcasing Gorontalo's unique local culture and natural beauty.

To enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotion strategies, DMOs must focus on several key areas: (1) maintaining consistency in posting frequency across all platforms, (2) diversifying the types of content to include more videos, photos, and interactive posts, and (3) optimizing user-generated content to foster community engagement and enhance the destination's appeal. Although this study provides valuable insights into the current state of social media use by DMOs in Gorontalo, further research is encouraged to explore the application of these strategies across different types of tourism destination in Indonesia. This could help to identify best practices for digital tourism promotion and inform the development of more comprehensive and tailored strategies for diverse tourism context.

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FIGURE DAN TABLE

Table 1. Category list for content analysis

Region (Gorontalo – Teluk Tomini)
Social media platform used (Instagram or Facebook)
Are there likes on each post?
How many likes?
Are there comments on each post?
How many comments?
What type of posts are uploaded?
Do the posts include links to other sources of information?
Do the posts include photos?
Do the posts include videos?
Are the posts related to promotion?
Do they promote an event?
Do they promote a tourist destination?
Do they promote a restaurant or hotel?
Do the post provide factual information or opinions?

Table 2. DMO social media accounts in the Tomini Bay area of Gorontalo

Region	FB	IG	DMO's official account
Pohuwato Regency	√	√	FB: Pariwisata Pohuwato IG: @pariwisata_pohuwato
Boalemo Regency	√	√	FB: Dinas Pariwisata Boalemo IG: @pesonaboalemo
Gorontalo Regency	-	-	-
Bone Bolango Regency	√	√	FB: Pariwisata Bone Bolango IG: @pariwisatabonebolango @bonebol_tourism
Gorontalo City	√	√	FB: Disparpora Kota Gorontalo IG: @disparpora.kotagorontalo

Table 3. Content Analysis of Gorontalo DMOs' Facebook pages (2022)

DMO Generated Content	Rank	Photo	Video	Link	
	1st	Pohuwato (27)	Pohuwato (7)	Pohuwato (5)	
	2nd	Kota Gorontalo (3)	-	Kota Gorontalo (2)	
	3rd	Bone Bolango (1)	-	-	
User Generated Content	Rank	Likes	Comments	Video views	Shares
	1st	Pohuwato (844)	Pohuwato (418)	Pohuwato (5187)	Pohuwato (418)
	2nd	Kota Gorontalo (17)	-	-	-
	3rd	Bone Bolango (1)	-	-	-

Table 4. Content Analysis of Gorontalo DMOs' Facebook pages (2023)

DMO Generated Content	Rank	Photo	Video	Link	
	1st	Kota Gorontalo (5)	Kota Gorontalo (1)	-	
	2nd	-	-	-	
	3rd	-	-	-	
User Generated Content	Rank	Likes	Comments	Video views	Shares
	1st	Kota Gorontalo (46)	Kota Gorontalo (16)	Kota Gorontalo (63)	Kota Gorontalo (18)
	2nd	-	-	-	-
	3rd	-	-	-	-

Table 5. Content Analysis of Gorontalo DMOs' Instagram pages (2022)

DMO Generated Content	Rank	Photo		Video
	1st	-		Kota Gorontalo (1)
	2nd	-		-
	3rd	-		-
User Generated Content	Rank	Likes	Comments	Shares
	1st	Kota Gorontalo (5)	-	-
	2nd	-	-	-
	3rd	-	-	-

Table 6. Content Analysis of Gorontalo DMOs' Instagram pages (2023)

DMO Generated Content	Rank	Photo		Video
	1st	Bone Bolango (14)		Bone Bolango (23)
	2nd	Boalemo (1)		Kota Gorontalo (1)
	3rd	-		-
User Generated Content	Rank	Likes	Comments	Shares
	1st	Bone Bolango (878)	Bone Bolango (17)	Bone Bolango (101)
	2nd	Kota Gorontalo (17)	Kota Gorontalo (2)	-
	3rd	Boalemo (8)	-	-

Figure 1. Word cloud for Gorontalo tourism