Go Mandalika: Digital Innovation of the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office in Implementing Smart Branding of Local Destinations

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Submitted:18/06/2025; Fixed:25/06/2025; Approved: 24/07/2025

Abstract

Go Mandalika is a digital platform managed by the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office to promote local tourist destinations. Despite its attractive features, Go Mandalika faces major challenges in terms of branding and content management due to the lack of human resources (HR) who are experts in digital marketing. This study aims to analyze the role of Go Mandalika as a digital promotion tool and how branding optimization can increase its visibility and effectiveness in promoting tourism in Central Lombok. Through literature review and content analysis, this study found that although Go Mandalika has great potential, problems in management and branding are the main obstacles. Therefore, recommendations from this study include strengthening branding, developing digital marketing HR, and more intense collaboration with external content to support regional promotion. This study is expected to contribute to improving the quality of government digital platform management in the tourism sector.
Keywords: Go Mandalika, Digital Innovation, Smart Branding, Digital Tourism, Central Lombok

INTRODUCTION

Digitalisation is included in governance. The Indonesian government, through various ministries and agencies, encourages digitalisation in various sectors to improve the efficiency of public services and national competitiveness as stipulated in Presidential Regulation No. 95/2018 on Electronic-Based Government Systems (SPBE). One sector that is greatly affected by digitalisation is the tourism sector. In this context, digitalisation plays a crucial role in expanding promotional reach, improving tourist destination information systems, and enhancing the overall tourist experience.

Tourism is a strategic sector that contributes greatly to regional income and community welfare. Therefore, digitalisation in tourism is not only aimed at modernising services, but also as an effort to respond to the challenges of globalisation and changes in tourist behaviour that now tend to seek information and services online. The utilisation of digital platforms allows local governments to introduce local tourism potential more widely, with more efficient promotion costs and a more global reach.

In response to these developments, the Central Lombok Regency Government launched a tourism digital platform called Go Mandalika. Go Mandalika is an official digital platform launched on 15 March 2021 with the aim of promoting tourist destinations in the area. This platform provides complete information about tourist destinations, events, and a directory of creative economy businesses in Central Lombok. In addition, Go Mandalika also offers content in the form of photos, videos, and articles that are open license, allowing the community and tourism actors to access and utilise promotional materials freely. The platform also provides a contribution feature, where users can submit their content for publication, creating collaboration between the government, community, and tourism industry players.

However, in its implementation, Go Mandalika still faces various challenges that hinder the achievement of its main objectives. One of the fundamental problems is the limited human resources (HR) who have competence in digital marketing. The low capacity of human resources in managing the platform and designing digital marketing strategies causes information dissemination to be less than optimal and unable to compete with other destinations that are more aggressive in digital promotion. In addition, the platform also does not yet have a strong branding identity, so it has not been able to attract

tourists' attention effectively or build a distinctive image that sticks in people's minds.

Go Mandalika, as a government platform, does not emphasise its identity as part of the Tourism Office in all of its content and strategies. This causes confusion for audiences regarding the platform's relationship with the local government, which in turn affects its credibility and public trust in it.

A large amount of content from third parties, such as influencers or travellers sharing their experiences in Central Lombok tourist destinations, has a wider reach and attracts more attention than official content from Go Mandalika. This suggests that Go Mandalika needs to increase engagement with audiences and utilise the power of user-generated content to increase visibility.

Therefore, there is a need to strengthen digital branding that is more focused and strategic through the application of the smart branding concept. Smart branding is an approach to building a brand identity that is adaptive, data-driven, and integrated with digital technology. This concept includes elements such as a consistent visual identity, a strong brand narrative, interactive use of social media, and analysis of consumer behaviour to formulate a more targeted strategy. The implementation of smart branding will not only strengthen Go Mandalika's position as the main platform for tourism promotion of the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office, but will also contribute to increasing regional competitiveness in the national and international tourism industry.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Go Mandalika platform as a digital innovation of the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office in implementing smart branding of local destinations. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually, understand the processes and dynamics that occur in the field, and examine the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders involved in the regional tourism promotion digitalisation program. The research was conducted at the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office during the Internship III period which lasted from April to May 2025. This location was chosen because it is an institution that directly manages and develops the Go Mandalika platform, as well as being the coordinating centre for various promotional and marketing activities for local tourist destinations.

The data sources used in this research consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through participatory observation activities and semi-structured interviews with Tourism Office employees, especially in the field of promotion and marketing, as well as with local tourism actors directly related to the use of the Go Mandalika platform. Interviews were conducted to gather information on the content management process, digital promotion strategies, challenges faced, and perceptions of the platform's effectiveness. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through a literature study of policy documents, official agency reports, scientific journals, news articles, and other publications relevant to the topic of digital innovation and smart branding strategies in the tourism sector.

Data collection techniques in this research were conducted through three main methods, namely desk study, field observation, and interviews. Desk study was conducted to understand relevant theories as well as global and national trends in digital tourism development. Participatory observation was conducted by directly following promotional activities carried out by the Tourism Office and observing user interactions with the Go Mandalika platform. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain deeper and more flexible data, allowing informants to openly explain their problems and expectations of the platform.

All data collected was then analysed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) data analysis technique, which consists of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data reduction stage was carried out by sorting and simplifying relevant data from observations and interviews. Furthermore, the data that has been reduced is presented in the form of a structured descriptive narrative to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn to find patterns, relationships between concepts, and policy implications that can be used as the basis for strategic recommendations. With this method, the research results are expected to not only provide

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a factual picture of the implementation conditions of Go Mandalika, but also present a critical analysis of the factors that influence the success or obstacles in implementing smart branding in the regional tourism sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and document reviews conducted during the internship, several main findings were obtained at the Promotion and Marketing Division of the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office:

Implementation of the Go Mandalika Platform as a Digital Innovation of the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office in the Promotion of Local Tourism Destinations

The Central Lombok Regency Government through the Tourism Office has launched the Go Mandalika digital platform on 15 March 2021 as part of efforts to promote local tourist destinations and support the tourism sector after the COVID-19 pandemic. The launch was inaugurated by the Regent of Central Lombok, Lalu Pathul Bahri, and witnessed virtually by the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno. The Go Mandalika platform is designed as a tourism information media that presents content in the form of quality photos, videos, and articles about tourist destinations in Central Lombok Regency. The content is open licence, allowing the community and industry players to access and use it in their tourism promotion.

In addition, Go Mandalika also provides a Business Directory service, which allows creative economy and tourism businesses to promote their businesses digitally. This is in line with the local government's goal to empower local communities and expand market reach through digital technology.

As part of the smart branding strategy, Go Mandalika not only functions as a promotional platform, but also as a digital collaboration platform for all tourism stakeholders in Central Lombok. Through this platform, various parties can contribute to the production of content and information that can be processed into promotional materials for tourism and the regional creative economy. The implementation of Go Mandalika is also supported by digital marketing training activities for tourism and creative economy players in Central Lombok. This training aims to improve the digital competence of the community in utilising the Go Mandalika platform to the fullest.

With Go Mandalika, it is expected to create a digital ecosystem that supports the promotion of local tourist destinations effectively and efficiently, and increase the competitiveness of Central Lombok Regency tourism at the national and international levels.

Challenges Faced in Implementing Smart Branding through the Go Mandalika Platform

While the Go Mandalika platform is a step forward in the digitalisation of local tourism promotion, its implementation in the field still faces various challenges that need to be considered so that the implementation of smart branding can run optimally and sustainably.

1. Low Digital Literacy of Local Communities

    One of the main challenges is the low level of digital literacy of the community, especially among tourism MSME players and village communities. Many businesses are not accustomed to using digital platforms for promotion, so the potential of Go Mandalika has not been fully utilised.

2. Technology Infrastructure Limitations

    Some areas in Central Lombok Regency, especially tourist villages in mountainous or coastal areas, still have limited or unstable internet access. This hampers the process of content upload, digital interaction, and active engagement in the Go Mandalika ecosystem.

3. Lack of Specialised Human Resources (HR)

Within the Tourism Office itself, there are still limited professionals with expertise in information technology, creative content, and digital platform management. This limitation has an impact on content management and information updates that are not optimal and inconsistent.

4. Lack of Budget for Maintenance and Development
The development of digital platforms requires ongoing budget support, both for operations, feature upgrades, and community training. Unfortunately, available funding allocations are often limited and dependent on central programmes or cooperation partners.

5. Competition with Commercial Platforms
Go Mandalika is also competing with large tourism platforms such as Google Travel, TripAdvisor, and social media, which have already been referenced by travellers. Without a strong differentiation and promotion strategy, it is difficult for these local platforms to compete globally.

6. Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation
There is no structured monitoring and evaluation system that can measure the effectiveness of Go Mandalika as a digital promotion tool. This makes it difficult for the Tourism Office to assess the extent of the platform's contribution to increased tourist arrivals or local economic growth.

Strategies that can be done to Optimise the Implementation of Smart Branding in Supporting Central Lombok Tourism Promotion Through Go Mandalika

The implementation of smart branding through the Go Mandalika platform has great potential in increasing the visibility and attractiveness of Central Lombok Regency tourism. However, to optimise the success of this platform, various strategies need to be implemented so that it can be more effective in attracting tourists and improving the local economy.

1. Improving Digital Literacy of the Community and Tourism Actors
One of the main strategies is to improve the digital literacy of the community, especially MSME players and local tourism businesses. The local government together with the Tourism Office can organise regular training on the use of digital technology for promotion and marketing, as well as utilising the Go Mandalika platform. With a better understanding of how to use this platform, tourism players can maximise the potential of existing promotions.

2. Technology Infrastructure Improvement
Improving the quality and coverage of internet infrastructure in areas that are still isolated is very important. Cooperation with internet service providers and telecommunication operators can be a step to expand internet access in tourist areas, so that tourism actors and tourists can more easily access the Go Mandalika platform and interact with existing content.

3. Collaboration with Local and National Influencers
One very effective way to expand the reach of promotion is by working with local and national influencers who have audiences relevant to the tourism sector. Influencers can be a bridge to introduce the Go Mandalika platform to a wider audience, both domestically and internationally. Collaboration with local influencers who have an emotional attachment to the tourist destination of Central Lombok can strengthen the positive image of this area. Influencers who have influence among young tourists or travellers interested in ecotourism and local culture can help showcase interesting and authentic content on the Go Mandalika platform, which in turn will increase tourists' interest in visiting.

In addition, influencers can also help create trends or challenges related to tourist destinations on the Go Mandalika platform, introducing various tourist sites in a more interesting and creative way. This can be done in the form of content collaboration, livestreaming tourism events, or promotional campaigns that involve influencers in their travels.

4. Strengthening Collaboration Between Stakeholders
To improve the sustainability and effectiveness of Go Mandalika, it is important

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to strengthen collaboration between the local government, tourism actors, local communities, and the private sector. One form of collaboration that can be done is by organising tourism events that involve various parties, such as cultural festivals, creative economy exhibitions, and digital competitions. These events can be widely promoted through Go Mandalika, giving greater exposure to local tourist destinations, and utilising the platform to build networks between industry players and tourists.

5. Content Diversification and Interactivity on Platforms

The content presented on Go Mandalika needs to be more varied and interactive. The use of different types of media such as videos, podcasts, articles, and testimonials from tourists and businesses will enrich the user experience. In addition, the platform should integrate interactive features, such as voting for favourite tourist attractions, quizzes based on tourist sites, or social media challenges directly linked to Go Mandalika.

6. Promotion and Reward System Feature Development

Developing a reward system for travellers who frequently access and participate in promotions on Go Mandalika could be an interesting strategy. For example, travellers who share content about Central Lombok tourism or use certain features on the platform can earn points that can be exchanged for vouchers or discounts for local tourism facilities.

7. Periodic Monitoring and Evaluation

Periodic monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of Go Mandalika is essential to ensure that the platform continues to evolve and is able to deal with market dynamics. User satisfaction surveys, website and social media visitor traffic analysis, and feedback from tourism players can be the basis for continuous improvement.

The above strategies will assist in optimising the implementation of smart branding through Go Mandalika, by leveraging digital technology, increasing community and business participation, and expanding reach through collaboration with local and national influencers. This collaboration is expected to not only increase the visibility of local tourist destinations, but also create an ecosystem that supports the growth of a more sustainable and inclusive tourism sector.

During the internship at the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office, the author directly observed the process and implementation of the Go Mandalika digital platform as part of the local destination smart branding strategy. This innovation is a form of digital transformation aimed at increasing the competitiveness of Mandalika tourism, one of the leading areas in the National Priority Super Destinations.

The Go Mandalika platform comes as an application and digital portal that integrates various tourism information, such as:
- Tourism destination profiles,
- Local events calendar,
- Tour and accommodation booking services,
- Interactive map-based digital navigation features,
- Promotion of local creative economy products.

The application of this technology is in line with the principles of smart tourism, where the utilisation of data and information technology is geared towards improving the traveller experience, service efficiency, and destination image.

From a destination branding perspective, Go Mandalika serves as a visual and narrative communication medium that emphasises Mandalika's uniqueness as a destination that combines natural beauty, local Sasak culture and modern digital experiences. Smart branding here is not only promoting the location, but also building a cohesive digital identity that appeals to a new generation of tech-savvy travellers. During the internship, the author was involved in the creation of digital promotional content, namely digital narrative text, which based on this involvement, the author found that Go Mandalika has great potential in shaping positive perceptions of Central Lombok as a destination that is adaptive to the digital era.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of Internship III at the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office from April to May 2025 has provided meaningful empirical experience for praja in understanding the dynamics of local government work, especially in the field of tourism. The Go Mandalika programme is a digital innovation from the Central Lombok Regency Tourism Office that aims to strengthen destination branding through a technological approach. This platform is able to integrate tourist information, promotion of local MSMEs, and digital services that support the tourist experience. Through internship activities, the author observes that Go Mandalika plays an important role in digitalising tourism promotion and encouraging the involvement of local communities in the creative economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

However, its implementation still faces challenges, such as the low digital literacy of the community and limited internet infrastructure in some areas. Therefore, training support and continuous system development are needed. This internship experience provides first-hand knowledge on the practice of destination smart branding and the importance of synergy between government, technology, and community in building sustainable tourism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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