

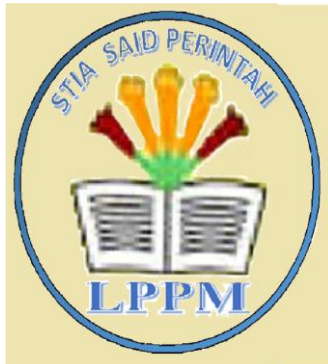
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# Public Policy: Jurnal Aplikasi Kebijakan Publik dan Bisnis

## Sustainable Tourism Marketing in the Digital Age

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### Abstract

*This study examines a sustainable tourism marketing strategy for Kupang City, NTT, which faces low tourist arrivals despite its significant potential. Using a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews with 10 key informants and field observations, three main challenges were identified: suboptimal use of digital technology, limited local community involvement, and insufficient competence among tourism marketing human resources. The study proposes several recommendations, including an integrated digital marketing strategy, community empowerment programs, improved HR competencies, the development of a monitoring and evaluation system, and enhanced stakeholder collaboration. This research offers both theoretical and practical insights into sustainable tourism marketing strategies for small towns in developing countries, with important implications for policymakers and tourism industry stakeholders in Kupang City.*

*Keywords ; Digital Marketing, Community Empowerment, Tourism Marketing Strategy*

## **Introduction**

The tourism sector holds a strategic position in fostering economic growth in Indonesia, particularly in Kupang City, the capital of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) province. Despite its abundant natural attractions, rich cultural heritage, and distinctive culinary offerings, Kupang faces persistent challenges in attracting a significant number of tourists (Kupang City Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Statistical data indicates a relatively low number of tourist arrivals, totaling approximately 238,000 in 2019 (Kupang City Tourist Visit Statistics, 2020) even though the sector contributed 4.8% to the city's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) in the same year. Asnawi, (2021) underscores the importance of tourism in Indonesia's economic framework, highlighting that in 2011–2012, it ranked as the fifth-largest contributor to foreign exchange earnings, following oil and gas, coal, palm oil, and processed rubber. Similarly, Tupamahu et al., (2021) emphasize that tourism is among the leading sectors driving Indonesia's national economy and plays a pivotal role in generating foreign exchange revenue.

Recent studies underscore the pivotal role of effective tourism marketing in enhancing the appeal of destinations. Buhalis & Volchek, (2021) demonstrated that the strategic implementation of digital marketing led to a 45% increase in tourist visits to developing destinations. Similarly, Hristov & Ramkissoon, (2021) highlighted the impact of integrated digital platforms in improving destination visibility and fostering tourist engagement. Their findings emphasize how social media marketing has transformed small tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, showcasing successful examples of community-based tourism marketing in developing regions.

However, Deng et al., (2019) identified several obstacles to tourism marketing in emerging destinations, including inadequate digital infrastructure, limited stakeholder coordination, and insufficient human resource capacity. These challenges are similarly observed in Kupang City, where previous studies by Adi & Sari, (2017) and Putri, (2018) highlighted issues such as inadequate promotional efforts, poor stakeholder collaboration, limited budget allocation, and a shortage of skilled human resources.

The sustainability of tourism development is another critical consideration. Research has documented how unmanaged tourism growth has led to environmental degradation and cultural erosion in several developing destinations. These findings align with broader studies

indicating that tourism development, when lacking sustainability measures, can result in environmental harm, the erosion of local cultural values, and increased socioeconomic disparities.

This study addresses a significant research gap in the field of sustainable tourism marketing by focusing on Kupang City, despite its abundant natural and cultural resources. While there is existing literature on tourism marketing strategies in other developing regions, these studies tend to overlook the specific challenges faced by Kupang, such as inadequate digital infrastructure, poor coordination among stakeholders, and a shortage of skilled human resources. Additionally, the sustainability aspect of tourism development is often insufficiently explored, especially in emerging destinations like Kupang. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on creating a sustainable tourism marketing strategy tailored to the unique context of Kupang, integrating local challenges, stakeholder perspectives, and a commitment to long-term environmental and cultural sustainability.

Building on these research gaps and its innovative approach, the aim of this study is to develop a sustainable tourism marketing strategy for Kupang City through a qualitative research design. The study seeks to engage stakeholders involved in tourism marketing to explore their perspectives and practices, focusing on key challenges such as limited promotion, weak coordination, and scarce resources. By addressing these issues, the research aims to offer practical recommendations to maximize Kupang's tourism potential while promoting sustainability, safeguarding the environment, and preserving local culture. Ultimately, this strategy aims to contribute to the city's economic development and long-term prosperity.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Sustainable tourism development in Kupang city is based on several theoretical frameworks and recent empirical findings. Sustainable tourism development theory emphasizes the importance of considering sustainability aspects in tourism development, in order to provide sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits to local communities by Hall, (2019); Sharpley, (2020). These sustainability aspects include, among others, conservation of natural resources, preservation of culture and local wisdom, and equitable distribution of tourism economic benefits.

In the context of sustainable tourism marketing, tourism theory emphasizes the importance of a holistic and integrated approach that not only focuses on increasing tourist visits, but also supports sustainable tourism development goals. (Fyall & Garrod, 2020). One important aspect of sustainable tourism marketing is the involvement of local communities, the theory of local community empowerment states that the participation and empowerment of local communities in tourism activities can increase economic benefits, encourage cultural preservation, and create a sense of belonging from the community to tourist destinations Moscardo, (2018) and Tolkach & King, (2020).

In addition, human resource management theory in the tourism industry emphasizes the important role of competent and professional human resources in supporting tourism sustainability. Previous research results show that the shortage of skilled human resources in tourism marketing is one of the main challenges (Adi & Sari, 2017). Increasing the competence of human resources in sustainable tourism marketing can contribute to marketing effectiveness and destination sustainability.

Furthermore, tourism digital marketing theory states that the utilization of digital technologies, such as social media and search media, can effectively increase the visibility and attractiveness of tourism destinations, as well as reach a wider segment of tourists (Johnson, 2019). The use of digital marketing is also considered important in supporting information transformation and collaboration between stakeholders, which are important elements in sustainable tourism marketing.

## **Research Method**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, chosen to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of sustainable tourism marketing in Kupang City from the perspectives of various stakeholders. Data were collected through interviews and field observations. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the tourism sector, including representatives from the local government, specifically the Kupang City Tourism Office, as well as tourism associations, businesses, and local communities. Observations focused on assessing the conditions of tourist destinations, supporting infrastructure, and existing tourism marketing practices. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 10 key informants who possess relevant knowledge and experience regarding the research topic.

This study aims to explore key concepts related to sustainable tourism marketing, including the utilization of digital technology in tourism promotion—such as the use of social media, websites, and search engines; the involvement of local communities in tourism marketing, encompassing participation in promotion, management of tourist attractions, and the development of tourism products; and the competence of human resources in tourism marketing, including their knowledge, skills, and professionalism.

Data collected through in-depth interviews and field observations will be analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. This approach enables the identification of core themes emerging from the data. The analysis will be conducted both inductively and deductively. In the inductive process, the researcher will refrain from applying predefined theories or hypotheses, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data. Subsequently, a deductive approach will be used to link these findings with the theoretical framework established prior to the study. This dual approach ensures that the data are interpreted in alignment with existing theories and concepts while remaining grounded in the field observations and interview results.

## **Discussion of Research Results**

### **Utilization of Digital Technology in Tourism Marketing**

The results showed that the utilization of digital technology in tourism marketing in Kupang City is still not optimal. Although some stakeholders have realized the importance of digital marketing, its implementation is still limited and not well coordinated.

#### **a. Social Media Usage**

This study found that the use of social media for tourism promotion in Kupang City is sporadic and inconsistent. While the Kupang Tourism Office manages a social media account, its activities are irregular, and the content lacks appeal. Some younger-generation-managed tourism businesses actively use social media for promotion, but the majority still rely on traditional marketing methods. These findings align with Putri, (2018) who identified inadequate promotion as a significant obstacle to tourism marketing in Kupang. However, this study highlights untapped potential in leveraging social media more effectively to enhance tourism marketing efforts.

b. Website Development and Search Engine Optimization

This research revealed that Kupang City lacks a comprehensive and user-friendly tourism website. The city government's official site provides limited information about tourist attractions, with no interactive features or up-to-date content to engage potential visitors. Furthermore, search engine optimization (SEO) to enhance the online visibility of Kupang's destinations has not been systematically implemented. These findings underscore the critical role of digital technology in boosting destination visibility and appeal, as highlighted by Buhalis & Volchek, (2021). The underutilization of websites and SEO likely contributes to the low number of tourist visits to Kupang City.

c. Digital Marketing Strategy Integration

The results indicate that Kupang City lacks an integrated digital marketing strategy for tourism, with stakeholders conducting digital marketing efforts independently and without proper coordination. This fragmentation leads to inconsistent messaging and hinders the effectiveness of building a strong destination image. This finding aligns with tourism marketing theory (Fyall & Garrod, 2020; Morrison, 2019), which emphasizes the need for a holistic and integrated approach. Integrating digital marketing strategies across stakeholders can enhance marketing effectiveness and support the goals of sustainable tourism development in Kupang City.

### **Local Community Involvement**

This research found that local community involvement in tourism marketing in Kupang City is still limited, but shows promising potential for further development.

a. Participation in Promotion

The results of interviews and observations show that local community participation in tourism promotion in Kupang City is still minimal. Most communities do not understand their role in promoting tourism destinations in their area. However, some local communities, especially those involved in community-based tourism management, have begun to show initiative in promoting tourism destinations through social media and cultural events. This finding confirms the importance of local community empowerment in tourism activities, as emphasized in local community empowerment theory (Moscardo, 2018; Tolkach & King, 2020). Increased community

participation in tourism promotion can increase the sense of belonging to tourist destinations and encourage the preservation of local culture.

b. Tourism Object Management

This research identified several emerging examples of community-based tourism management in Kupang City, including beach management and village tourism initiatives. Although these efforts are still small in scale, they demonstrate the potential for broader involvement of local communities in tourism management and marketing. This finding aligns with the concept of sustainable tourism, which stresses the importance of local community participation in destination management (Sharpley, 2020). Community-based management can contribute to a more equitable distribution of tourism's economic benefits while promoting environmental conservation and the preservation of local culture.

c. Tourism Product Development

The results highlight the significant potential of local communities in developing tourism products based on local wisdom, such as handicrafts, traditional cuisine, and cultural attractions. However, challenges such as a lack of knowledge about quality standards, understanding tourist preferences, and limited access to broader markets hinder the development of competitive tourism products. This finding aligns with the concept of sustainable tourism, which emphasizes integrating local wisdom into tourism product development (Hall, 2019). Such products can offer unique attractions for tourists while promoting cultural preservation and enhancing community economic welfare.

### **Competence of Human Resources in Tourism Marketing**

This research confirms previous findings about the shortage of competent human resources in tourism marketing in Kupang City (Adi & Sari, 2017), (Putri, 2018). However, this study also identified some specific aspects related to HR competencies that need to be improved.

a. Knowledge of Digital Marketing

Interview results show that most tourism businesses and government staff involved in tourism marketing in Kupang City have limited knowledge of digital

marketing strategies. This deficiency is one of the factors that hinder the optimization of digital technology utilization in tourism marketing. This finding confirms the importance of increasing HR competencies in digital marketing, as emphasized in the theory of human resource management in the tourism industry (Adi & Sari, 2017). Increased knowledge of digital marketing can contribute to the marketing effectiveness and competitiveness of Kupang City's tourist destinations.

b. Content Development Skills

This research found that skills in developing engaging and relevant content for tourism marketing are lacking among stakeholders in Kupang City. Existing promotional content tends to be monotonous and does not reflect the uniqueness and attractiveness of Kupang's tourist destinations. This finding underscores the importance of skill development in creating engaging and authentic content for digital tourism marketing, as emphasized in tourism digital marketing theory (Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2021). Improved content development skills can increase the attractiveness and visibility of Kupang City's tourism destinations on digital platforms.

c. Professionalism in Traveler Services

Observations and interviews reveal significant gaps in the professionalism of tourism services across Kupang City's tourism sector. These gaps include foreign language proficiency, understanding travelers' needs and preferences, and the ability to manage complaints and emergency situations. This finding underscores the importance of enhancing the professionalism of tourism human resources, as highlighted in human resource management theory for the tourism industry (Putri, 2018). Improving professionalism in tourism services can lead to higher tourist satisfaction and foster positive word-of-mouth marketing.

Based on the findings above, this research proposes several recommendations for developing sustainable tourism marketing strategies in Kupang City: Development of an Integrated Digital Marketing Strategy: The Kupang City Government, through the Tourism Office, needs to develop an integrated digital marketing strategy, involving various stakeholders. This strategy should include the development of a comprehensive tourism



website, optimizing the use of social media, and implementing SEO to increase the visibility of Kupang as a tourist destination.

**Community Empowerment Program in Tourism Marketing:** It is necessary to develop programs that empower local communities in tourism marketing, such as training in the use of social media for tourism promotion, development of local wisdom-based tourism products, and facilitation of access to wider markets. **Tourism HR Competency Improvement:** A comprehensive tourism HR competency improvement program is needed, including training in digital marketing, content development, and improving tourist service skills. Collaboration with educational institutions and the tourism industry can support this effort.

**Development of Monitoring and Evaluation System:** An effective monitoring and evaluation system needs to be developed to measure the impact of tourism marketing strategies on tourist arrivals, economic benefits to local communities, and environmental and cultural sustainability. **Collaboration and Coordination Among Stakeholders:** Increased collaboration and coordination among stakeholders in Kupang's tourism industry, including government, businesses, local communities and academics, is needed to effectively implement sustainable tourism marketing strategies.

This research reveals that the development of a sustainable tourism marketing strategy in Kupang City requires a comprehensive approach that combines the utilization of digital technology, empowerment of local communities, and increased competence of tourism human resources. Despite challenges in implementation, the potential to develop sustainable tourism in Kupang City is great. By adopting the proposed recommendations, Kupang City can increase its attractiveness and competitiveness as a tourist destination, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry.

## **Conclusion**

This research highlights that developing a sustainable tourism marketing strategy for Kupang City requires an integrated approach that emphasizes digital technology, local community engagement, and the enhancement of tourism workforce competencies. The study finds that the use of digital technology in tourism marketing remains suboptimal, community involvement is limited but holds potential, and there are gaps in the skills of human resources in digital tourism marketing and tourist services.

This study offers valuable insights for developing sustainable tourism marketing strategies in small towns in developing countries by combining digital marketing, local community participation, and enhanced human resource quality. The findings are particularly useful for policymakers and stakeholders in Kupang's tourism sector, providing a reference for designing and executing effective, sustainable marketing strategies.

### **Recommendation**

Based on these findings, several strategic measures are recommended. These include creating a comprehensive digital marketing plan, involving local communities in tourism promotion activities, improving workforce competencies through targeted training programs, establishing effective monitoring and evaluation systems, and fostering stronger collaboration between stakeholders. Implementing these recommendations is expected to enhance Kupang's competitive advantage as a tourist destination while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector.

### **Limitation and Future Research**

The study's limitations include its narrow focus on Kupang City, making it challenging to generalize the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the qualitative methodology with a limited number of respondents may not fully capture the diverse perspectives within the tourism industry, offering only a partial view of the sector's complexity. Future research could expand geographically by comparing sustainable tourism marketing strategies across various small cities in Indonesia or other developing countries. Quantitative studies measuring the impact of digital marketing on tourist visits and economic benefits to local communities would provide a broader understanding. Furthermore, research on the effectiveness of different community empowerment programs in tourism marketing could provide deeper insights for promoting sustainable tourism development.

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