



PREMIUM TOURISM BRANDING THROUGH DIGITAL DIPLOMACY: A CASE STUDY OF THE LABUAN BAJO FLORES AUTHORITY (BPOLF)

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the branding strategy of premium tourism implemented by the Labuan Bajo Flores Authority (BPOLF) through digital diplomacy. The research aims to elucidate how BPOLF leverages digital platforms to showcase Labuan Bajo as a top-tier tourism destination while formulating a paradigm for tourism branding rooted in digital diplomacy. Utilizing a qualitative case study methodology, data was gathered via extensive interviews, participant observation, and document scrutiny involving key figures from local government, tourism entities, and stakeholders in Labuan Bajo. The findings demonstrate that BPOLF adeptly aligns its branding themes with the national tourism agenda while integrating indigenous cultural facets to enrich the allure of the destination. The judicious utilization of social media platforms enables BPOLF to interact with prospective tourists, disseminate captivating content, and customize messages for distinct audience segments. Nonetheless, challenges such as competition from alternative destinations and evolving tourist preferences necessitate perpetual innovation in branding strategies. The influence of digital diplomacy on tourism branding is substantial, culminating in heightened visibility, augmented engagement, and data-driven insights into tourism promotion. Recommendations for BPOLF encompass fostering partnerships with local enterprises and investing in data analytics to fine-tune marketing strategies. Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of embedding digital diplomacy in tourism branding to allure and retain visitors in a fiercely competitive milieu. By harnessing digital tools and community engagement, BPOLF can elevate its branding endeavors and position Labuan Bajo as a preeminent destination in the global tourism sphere.

Keywords: (a) Tourism Branding, (b) Digital Diplomacy (c) BPOLF, (d) Premium Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has become one of the most dynamic sectors globally, significantly contributing to economic growth, job creation, and cultural exchange. In recent years, the landscape of tourism has been reshaped by rapid technological advancements and the increasing reliance on digital platforms for information and engagement. As destinations vie for the attention of both domestic and international travelers, effective branding strategies have emerged as crucial tools for attracting visitors and enhancing their experiences. This is particularly true for Labuan Bajo, a coastal town in Indonesia that has gained recognition as a premium tourism destination, celebrated for breathtaking natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and diverse marine ecosystems.

Labuan Bajo is strategically located in the eastern part of Indonesia, serving as the gateway to the Komodo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its unique wildlife,

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including the famous Komodo Dragon. The region's stunning landscape, comprising pristine beaches, rugged hills, and vibrant coral reefs, make it an attractive destination for adventure seekers, nature lovers, and cultural enthusiasts alike. As tourism in Labuan Bajo continues to grow, the Labuan Bajo Flores Authority (BPOLF) has been tasked with promoting the area and ensuring sustainable development that benefits local communities while preserving its natural and cultural assets.

In this context, BPOLF has recognized the importance of branding Labuan Bajo as a premium tourism destination. Branding is not merely about creating a logo or a catchy slogan; it involves crafting a compelling narrative that resonates with potential visitors and differentiates the destination from competitors. Effective branding can enhance a destination's visibility, foster emotional connections with travelers, and ultimately drive tourist interest and visitation. However, in an era where consumers are inundated with information and choices, traditional marketing approaches may no longer suffice. This is where digital diplomacy comes into play.

Digital diplomacy refers to the use of digital tools and platforms to engage with global audiences, facilitate communication, and promote a positive image of a destination. It encompasses a range of activities, including social media engagement, online content creation, and digital storytelling. BPOLF has embraced digital diplomacy as a key component of its branding strategy, leveraging various digital platforms to reach a broader audience and foster meaningful connections with potential tourists. By utilizing social media channels, official websites, and digital travel guides, BPOLF aims to create a compelling narrative that showcases the unique offerings of Labuan Bajo while aligning with national tourism objectives.

The integration of digital diplomacy into tourism branding presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, digital platforms provide unprecedented access to global audiences, allowing destinations to share their stories, engage with travelers, and respond to inquiries in real-time. Social media, in particular, has transformed the way travelers discover and interact with destinations, enabling them to share their experiences and recommendations with their networks. This user-generated content can significantly influence the perceptions and decisions of potential visitors, making it essential for tourism authorities to actively participate in these digital conversations.

On the other hand, the digital landscape is highly competitive, with numerous destinations vying for attention. As travelers increasingly turn to online sources for information, the challenge for BPOLF lies in effectively capturing and retaining the interest of potential tourists amidst a sea of options. Moreover, the rapid pace of technological change necessitates continuous adaptation and innovation in branding strategies. BPOLF must not only keep up with emerging trends but also anticipate the evolving preferences and behaviors of travelers in order to remain relevant and appealing.

This research aims to investigate the branding strategy employed by BPOLF in promoting Labuan Bajo as a premium tourism destination through digital diplomacy. The study will explore the effectiveness of various digital platforms in enhancing brand visibility, engaging with target audiences, and driving tourist interest. Additionally, it will examine the challenges faced by BPOLF in implementing these strategies and the opportunities that arise from the evolving digital landscape.



To achieve these objectives, a qualitative case study approach will be employed, involving in-depth interviews with key informants from BPOLBF, local government, tourism agencies and stakeholder in Labuan Bajo. Participant observation and document analysis will also be utilized to gain a comprehensive understanding of the branding efforts and their impact on tourism promotion. By focusing on the experiences and perspective of those directly involved in the branding process, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the intersections of tourism branding and digital diplomacy.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism development, particularly in the context of emerging destinations like Labuan Bajo. As the tourism industry continues to evolve, understanding the role of digital diplomacy in branding will be essential for tourism authorities and stakeholders seeking to enhance their marketing efforts and attract visitors in an increasingly competitive market. Furthermore, this research will highlight best practices and strategies that can be adopted by other destinations looking to leverage digital platforms for effective tourism promotion.

In conclusion, the integration of digital diplomacy into the branding strategy of BPOLBF represents a significant step towards positioning Labuan Bajo as a premier tourism destination. By harnessing the power of digital tools and platforms, BPOLBF aims to create a compelling narrative that resonates with potential visitors, fosters engagement, and drives interest in the region. As the study unfolds, it will shed light on the effectiveness of these strategies and provide recommendations for enhancing tourism branding efforts in Labuan Bajo and beyond.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a case study approach to explore the branding strategies implemented by the Labuan Bajo Flores Authority (BPOLBF) in promoting Labuan Bajo as a premium tourism through digital diplomacy. The qualitative approach is chosen to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders involved in the branding process.

Data collection will involve multiple methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Key informants will include representatives from BPOLBF, local government officials, tourism agencies, and community stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews will facilitate open-ended discussions, allowing participants to share their insights on the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in tourism branding.

Participant observation will be conducted during promotional events and digital campaigns to understand the practical application of branding strategies. Additionally, relevant documents, such as marketing materials, social media content, and reports, will be analyzed to assess the alignment of BPOLBF's branding efforts with its objectives.

Data analysis will follow Creswell's six-step process, involving coding, theme identification, and narrative description to interpret the findings and draw meaningful conclusions regarding the impact of digital diplomacy on tourism branding in Labuan Bajo.



3. RESEARCH RESULTS & DISCUSSION

BPOLBF Branding Strategy

The Labuan Bajo Flores Authority (BPOLBF) has developed a comprehensive branding strategy aimed at promoting Labuan Bajo as a premium tourism destination. This strategy is closely aligned with the themes set by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, ensuring that the branding efforts resonate with national tourism goals. The branding process involves several key components that work synergistically to enhance the destination's appeal. The strategies include:

Theme Alignment

BPOLBF adopts themes that reflect the national tourism agenda while incorporating local cultural elements. This dual approach not only enhances the destination's appeal but also fosters a sense of local identity and pride. By aligning with national themes, BPOLBF ensures that its branding efforts are not only relevant but also contribute to the broader objectives of Indonesia's tourism sector.

For instance, themes such as sustainability, cultural heritage, and adventure tourism are emphasized, which resonate with both domestic and international tourists seeking authentic experiences. Sustainability is particularly crucial in the context of Labuan Bajo, known for its stunning natural landscapes and biodiversity. By promoting eco-friendly practices and responsible tourism, BPOLBF positions Labuan Bajo as a destination that values environmental conservation while providing unique travel experiences.

Cultural heritage is another significant theme in BPOLBF's branding strategy. Labuan Bajo is rich in cultural diversity, with various ethnic groups and traditions. By showcasing local customs, traditional arts, and culinary delights, BPOLBF not only attracts tourists but also empowers local communities to take pride in their heritage. This cultural emphasis creates a more immersive experience for visitors, allowing them to connect with the local way of life. Adventure tourism is also a focal point of BPOLBF's branding efforts. The region offers a plethora of outdoor activities, including diving, hiking, and island hopping. By highlighting these adventure opportunities, BPOLBF appeals to thrill-seekers and nature enthusiasts, further broadening its target audience. This strategic alignment with national tourism themes ensures that Labuan Bajo remains competitive in the global tourism market.

Local Content Elaboration.

By integrating local stories, traditions, and attractions into their branding, BPOLBF effectively showcases the unique aspects of Labuan Bajo. This strategy aims to elevate the perceived value of the destination, making it more attractive to potential tourists. Local narratives, such as the stories of the indigenous communities, traditional culinary experiences, and unique natural landscapes, are highlighted in promotional materials. This not only enriches the tourist experience but also empowers local communities by giving them a platform to share their heritage and culture.

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Use Of Digital Platform

Digital diplomacy plays crucial role in BPOLBF's branding efforts. The authority utilizes various digital platforms to disseminate information and engage with potential visitors. Key aspects of this digital strategy include:

Social Media Engagement.

BPOLBF actively manages its presence on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (X). These platforms are used to share visually appealing content, including images and videos of local attractions, events, and cultural experiences. This approach not only captures the attention of potential tourists but also encourages user interaction and sharing.

Engaging content, such as behind-the-scenes videos, live Q&A sessions, and user-generated content campaigns, fosters a sense of community among followers and enhances the overall brand experience.

Targeted Messaging

The selection of digital platforms is based on user demographics and preferences. BPOLBF tailors its messaging to suit the characteristics of each platform's audiences, ensuring that the content is relevant and engaging. For example, Instagram is leveraged for visual storytelling capabilities, while Facebook is used for community building and event promotion. This targeted approach enhances the effectiveness of their promotional efforts, as it allows BPOLBF to reach specific audience segments with tailored messages that resonate with their interest and motivations.

Digital Diplomacy

In today's digital age, effective branding requires a strong online presence, and BPOLBF has embraced digital diplomacy as a key component of its strategy. Digital diplomacy involves using digital platforms to promote tourism, engage with potential visitors, and build a positive image of the destination. BPOLBF leverages social media, websites, and digital marketing campaigns to reach a wider audience and create meaningful connections with travelers.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter play a crucial role in BPOLBF's digital diplomacy efforts. By sharing visually appealing content, including stunning photographs of Labuan Bajo's landscapes, cultural events, and local cuisine, BPOLBF captures the attention of potential tourists. Engaging storytelling and user-generated content further enhance the online presence, allowing visitors to share their experiences and recommendations.

Moreover, BPOLBF utilizes targeted advertising on social media to reach specific demographics. By analyzing user data and preferences, BPOLBF can tailor its messaging to resonate with different audience segments, such as adventure travelers, families, or eco-conscious tourists. This personalized approach increases the likelihood of attracting visitors who align with Labuan Bajo's unique offerings.

In addition to social media, BPOLBF maintains an informative and user-friendly website that serves as a central hub for tourism information. The website features details about attractions, accommodations, travel tips, and upcoming events, making it a valuable resource for

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potential visitors. By optimizing the website for search engines, BPOLBF ensures that Labuan Bajo appears prominently in online searches, further enhancing its visibility.

Community Involvement

A successful branding strategy cannot be achieved in isolation; it requires the active involvement of the local community. BPOLBF recognizes the importance of engaging local stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and cultural organizations, in the branding process. By fostering collaboration and inclusivity, BPOLBF creates a sense of ownership among the community, which is essential for sustainable tourism development. Community involvement is evident in various initiatives led by BPOLBF. For example, local artisans and craftsmen are encouraged to showcase their products and skills through cultural events and markets. This not only provides economic opportunities for residents but also enriches the visitor experience by offering authentic local products. Tourists are more likely to appreciate their experiences when they can interact with local communities and learn about their traditions.

Furthermore, BPOLBF conducts training programs for local businesses in the tourism sector, equipping them with the skills needed to provide high-quality services. This investment in human capital enhances the overall visitor experience and contributes to the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry in Labuan Bajo. When local businesses thrive, the entire community benefits, creating a positive feedback loop that supports tourism growth.

Sustainable Practices

Sustainability is a core principle of BPOLBF's branding strategy. As a destination known for its natural beauty and biodiversity, Labuan Bajo faces challenges related to environmental conservation and responsible tourism. BPOLBF is committed to promoting sustainable practices that protect the region's ecosystems while providing enriching experiences for visitors.

One of the key initiatives in this regard is the promotion of eco-friendly accommodations and activities. BPOLBF collaborates with local hotels and tour operators to encourage sustainable practices, such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and responsible wildlife tourism. By highlighting these eco-friendly options in its branding efforts, BPOLBF appeals to environmentally conscious travelers who prioritize sustainability in their travel choices.

Additionally, BPOLBF actively engages in conservation efforts to protect the marine and terrestrial ecosystems of Labuan Bajo. This includes initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of preserving coral reefs, protecting endangered species, and promoting responsible snorkeling and diving practices. By positioning Labuan Bajo as a destination that prioritizes environmental stewardship, BPOLBF attracts tourists who are passionate about conservation and responsible travel.

The branding strategy developed by BPOLBF is a multifaceted approach that effectively promotes Labuan Bajo as a premium tourism destination. Through theme alignment, digital diplomacy, community involvement, and sustainable practices, BPOLBF enhances the destination's appeal while contributing to the broader goals of Indonesia's tourism sector. By emphasizing sustainability, cultural heritage, and adventure tourism, BPOLBF not only attracts

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visitors but also fosters a sense of pride and ownership among local communities. As Labuan Bajo continues to evolve as a tourist destination, BPOLBF's comprehensive branding strategy will play a crucial role in shaping its future and ensuring its long-term success in the competitive global tourism market.

Challenges and Opportunities

While BPOLBF has made significant strides in utilizing digital diplomacy for tourism branding, several challenges and opportunities have emerged:

Challenges:

Competition:

Labuan Bajo Faces competition from other emerging tourist destinations, both domestically and internationally. This necessitates continuous innovation in branding strategies to maintain a competitive edge. Destinations such as Bali, Yogyakarta, and other Southeast Asian Countries are vying for the same tourist demographic, making it imperative for BPOLBF to differentiate Labuan Bajo through unique selling propositions and compelling narratives.

Changing Tourist Preferences

The preferences of tourists are constantly evolving, influenced by trends in travel, technology, and social media. BPOLBF must remain agile and responsive to these changes to effectively attract and retain visitors. For instance, the rise of eco-tourism and sustainable travel has shifted tourist expectations, requiring BPOLBF to incorporate sustainable practices into its branding and promotional strategies.

Opportunities

Leveraging Technology

The increasing use of digital technology among travelers presents an opportunity for BPOLBF to enhance its marketing efforts. By utilizing data analytics and digital marketing tools, BPOLBF can gain insights into tourist behavior and preferences, allowing for more personalized marketing strategies. For example, analyzing social media engagement metrics can help BPOLBF identify which types of contents resonate most with their audience, enabling them to refine their messaging and improve engagement rates.

Collaborative Partnerships

Collaborating with local business influencers and tourism stakeholders can amplify BPOLBF's branding efforts. Such partnerships can enhance the reach and impact of promotional campaigns, creating a more cohesive tourism experience. By working with local influencers who have genuine connection to Labuan Bajo, BPOLBF can tap into their followers and leverage their credibility to promote the destination authentically.

Impact of Digital Diplomacy on Tourism Branding

The implementation of digital diplomacy has significantly transformed the tourism branding efforts of the BPOLBF. This transformation is evident in several key outcomes that have reshaped how Labuan Bajo is perceived as a tourist destination. The following sections will delve deeper into the various impacts of digital diplomacy on tourism branding, including



increased visibility, enhanced engagement, data-driven insights, and the overall implications for sustainable tourism development.:

Increased Visibility

One of the most profound impacts of digital diplomacy is the increased visibility of Labuan Bajo as a premier tourist destination. The strategic use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter has allowed BPOLBF to showcase the unique attractions and experiences that Labuan Bajo has to offer. By curating visually appealing content that highlights the natural beauty, cultural richness, and adventure opportunities available in the region, BPOLBF has successfully captured the attention of potential tourists.

The heightened awareness generated through digital channels is crucial for attracting both domestic and international tourists. In a competitive tourism market, where travelers have countless options, standing out is essential. The use of targeted advertising on social media platforms has enabled BPOLBF to reach specific demographics, including adventure seekers, eco-tourists, and cultural enthusiasts. By tailoring advertisements to resonate with the interests and preferences of these groups, BPOLBF has effectively positioned Labuan Bajo as a must-visit destination.

Moreover, the integration of search engine optimization (SEO) strategies into BPOLBF's digital marketing efforts has further enhanced visibility. By optimizing website content and utilizing relevant keywords, BPOLBF has improved its ranking on search engines, making it easier for potential visitors to discover Labuan Bajo when researching travel options. This increased online presence not only attracts tourists but also encourages travel agencies and influencers to promote Labuan Bajo, amplifying its reach.

Enhanced Engagement

Digital diplomacy facilitates direct interaction between BPOLBF and potential tourists, fostering a sense of community and connection. This engagement is vital in today's digital age, where consumers seek authentic experiences and personal connections with brands. Through social media platforms, BPOLBF can respond to inquiries, share updates, and engage with followers in real-time. This two-way communication builds trust and loyalty among potential visitors, making them more likely to choose Labuan Bajo as their travel destination.

User-generated content (UGC) campaigns have proven particularly effective in enhancing engagement. By encouraging tourists to share their photos and experiences using specific hashtags, BPOLBF has created a vibrant online community. This not only promotes Labuan Bajo through authentic testimonials but also empowers tourists to become brand ambassadors. When potential visitors see real experiences shared by fellow travelers, it enhances their perception of Labuan Bajo and increases their likelihood of visiting. Additionally, BPOLBF has leveraged live streaming and interactive content to engage with audiences. Virtual tours, Q&A sessions, and behind-the-scenes glimpses of local culture and attractions allow potential tourists to experience Labuan Bajo in a unique way. This interactive approach not only



captivates audiences but also provides them with valuable information that can influence their travel decisions.

Data-Driven Insights

The use of digital tools in tourism branding has enabled BPOLBF to gather valuable data on tourist preferences and behaviors. This data-driven approach is essential for developing effective branding strategies and promotional campaigns. By analyzing engagement metrics, BPOLBF can identify peak travel seasons, popular attractions, and preferred content types, allowing them to optimize their marketing efforts accordingly.

For instance, by tracking social media interactions, BPOLBF can determine which posts resonate most with their audience. This insight enables them to refine their content strategy, focusing on themes and topics that generate the highest engagement. Additionally, understanding the demographics of their audience helps BPOLBF tailor their messaging to align with the interests and preferences of potential visitors.

Furthermore, BPOLBF can utilize analytics tools to monitor website traffic and user behavior. By analyzing data such as page views, bounce rates, and conversion rates, BPOLBF can assess the effectiveness of their digital marketing campaigns. This information is invaluable for making informed decisions about future branding initiatives and promotional strategies.

The ability to gather and analyze data also allows BPOLBF to respond to market trends and shifts in consumer behavior. For example, if data indicates a growing interest in eco-tourism, BPOLBF can adjust their branding efforts to highlight sustainable practices and eco-friendly attractions in Labuan Bajo. This adaptability is crucial in a rapidly changing tourism landscape, where consumer preferences can shift quickly.

Implications for Sustainable Tourism Development

The impact of digital diplomacy on tourism branding extends beyond immediate marketing benefits; it also has significant implications for sustainable tourism development. By promoting Labuan Bajo as a premium tourist destination through digital channels, BPOLBF can attract visitors who are not only interested in leisure but also in cultural exchange and environmental conservation.

Digital diplomacy allows BPOLBF to highlight the importance of responsible tourism practices. Through educational campaigns and informative content, BPOLBF can raise awareness about the need to preserve Labuan Bajo's natural and cultural heritage. This approach encourages tourists to engage in sustainable practices during their visit, such as supporting local businesses, respecting cultural traditions, and minimizing their environmental footprint.

Moreover, the data-driven insights gathered through digital diplomacy can inform sustainable tourism initiatives. By understanding tourist preferences and behaviors, BPOLBF can develop programs that align with the values of eco-conscious travelers. For instance, promoting eco-friendly accommodations, sustainable transportation options, and community-based tourism experiences can enhance the overall visitor experience while supporting local communities.



In conclusion, the implementation of digital diplomacy has profoundly impacted BPOLBF's tourism branding efforts. Through increased visibility, enhanced engagement, and data-driven insights, BPOLBF has successfully positioned Labuan Bajo as a premier tourist destination. Furthermore, the implications for sustainable tourism development highlight the potential for digital diplomacy to contribute to the long-term viability of the region's tourism industry. As BPOLBF continues to leverage digital tools and strategies, the future of Labuan Bajo as a thriving and sustainable tourist destination looks promising.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, BPOLBF's approach to premium tourism branding through digital diplomacy has proven effective in promoting Labuan Bajo as a desirable destination. The integration of local content, strategic use of digital platforms, and responsiveness to market trends are key components of this success. However, to sustain and enhance this momentum, BPOLBF must continue to innovate and adapt to the ever-changing landscape of tourism marketing.

Recommendation for BPOLBF include, firstly, continuous innovation. Regularly update branding strategies to reflect changing tourist preferences and emerging trends in the tourism industry. This could involve exploring new digital marketing techniques, such as augmented reality experiences or virtual tours to engage potential visitors in innovative ways. Secondly, strengthening collaborations. Foster partnerships with local businesses and influencers to enhance the reach and effectiveness of promotional efforts. Collaborative marketing campaigns that highlight local experiences and attractions can create a more authentic and appealing narrative for potential tourists. Thirdly, investing in data analytics. Utilize data analytics tools to gain deeper insights into tourist behavior, enabling more targeted and effective marketing strategies. By understanding the preferences and motivations of their audience, BPOLBF can tailor their messaging and offerings to better meet the needs of potential visitors.

In summary, BPOLBF's strategic use of digital diplomacy in tourism branding has positioned Labuan Bajo as a competitive player in the global tourism market. By continuing to leverage technology, engage with audiences, and adapt to changing trends, BPOLBF can further enhance its branding efforts and ensure the sustainable growth of tourism in Labuan Bajo.

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