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(Research) Article

Digital-Based Tourism Destination Development Strategies to Enhance Tourism Competitiveness in Gorontalo Province

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Abstract. Digital transformation has changed the way tourism destinations are promoted, managed, and accessed by visitors. Digital technology is no longer limited to promotional activities but has become part of destination management, information provision, service delivery, governance, and tourism experience creation. Gorontalo Province has natural, marine, and cultural tourism resources that can be developed to strengthen regional tourism competitiveness. This study aims to analyze and synthesize digital-based destination development strategies relevant to Gorontalo Province. A qualitative literature review approach was employed by examining publications from 2022–2026 concerning tourism digital transformation, digital marketing, smart tourism, destination governance, and tourism competitiveness, supported by official regional statistics as contextual evidence. The synthesis indicates that digital strategies should be developed in an integrated manner through stronger digital marketing, accurate and accessible tourism information, smart tourism applications, human resource development, digital infrastructure, data utilization, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Official statistics indicate that domestic tourist trips to Gorontalo reached 482,466 trips in May 2026, following 572,637 trips in March 2026, indicating substantial domestic tourism activity and the need for destination management that can respond to changing visitor demand. Digital strategies in Gorontalo should therefore be implemented gradually and adapted to the characteristics of each destination, infrastructure readiness, human resource capacity, and local community involvement.

Keywords: Competitiveness; Digital Marketing; Gorontalo; Smart Tourism; Strategic Management.

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1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has changed the competitive environment in the tourism industry. Tourists increasingly rely on search engines, social media, digital maps, travel platforms, online reviews, and various digital channels when searching for information, comparing destinations, planning trips, and sharing experiences. This change means that destinations no longer compete only through physical attractions, but also through their ability to provide information, build digital communication, deliver services, and create accessible tourism experiences. Huang et al. (2023) show that digitalization, destination marketing, tourism experience, governance, and resources are important themes in the development of destination research.

Digital transformation also changes how tourism organizations build competitive advantages and adapt to their environment. Ku (2024) explains that digital capabilities, technology collaboration, and organizational capabilities can support tourism product advantages and supply-chain resilience. Rodrigues and Breda (2024), through a systematic

review of Industry 4.0 in tourism, show that developments in digital technology have brought changes to business models, tourism experiences, and the management of the tourism sector. Therefore, digitalization needs to be positioned as part of strategic management, rather than merely as a promotional activity (Palilingan et al., 2026) .

At the destination level, the concept of smart tourism is increasingly used to describe the utilization of information and communication technologies to improve destination management and tourism experiences. Abdelmalak (2024) shows that adaptive governance and strategic planning are important elements in implementing smart tourism initiatives. Ivars-Baidal et al. (2024) also show that smart tourism governance is related to relationships among stakeholders. These findings indicate that technology does not operate independently, but requires organizational coordination, governance, and the involvement of actors within the destination ecosystem.

Digital marketing is one of the most visible aspects of tourism digitalization. Arofah and Achsa (2022) found that digital marketing can support tourism recovery through the Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share model. Meanwhile, Vega (2022) shows that digital marketing can expand access to information about tourism potential and support community-based marketing. These findings reinforce the view that digital channels function not only to introduce tourism attractions, but also to help tourists obtain information and plan their trips.

On the other hand, digitalization does not automatically produce destination competitiveness. Tourism competitiveness is a multidimensional concept influenced by a combination of resources, enabling environments, infrastructure, tourism experiences, governance, and the destination's ability to create value. Shariffuddin et al. (2023) show that the destination competitiveness literature contains various indicators and that there is no single universal measure applicable to all destinations. Lasisi et al. (2023) show that enabling environments and certain infrastructure are associated with tourism's contribution to the economy in smart tourism destinations. Therefore, digital strategies need to be integrated with other destination-supporting factors (Anggarini et al., 2026).

This context is relevant to Gorontalo Province. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) show that domestic tourist trips to Gorontalo reached 572,637 trips in March 2026 and 482,466 trips in May 2026. In December 2025, the number of domestic tourist trips was also recorded at 482,639 trips. These data indicate that domestic travel activity in Gorontalo is substantial and changes over time (BPS-Statistics Gorontalo Province, 2026a, 2026b). This condition is an important context for managing destinations capable of providing information, services, and experiences that meet tourists' needs.

Although studies on digital tourism, smart tourism, digital marketing, and destination competitiveness have developed considerably, research that specifically synthesizes these aspects into a single strategic framework for the Gorontalo context remains limited. Destination competitiveness research also shows that destination studies are multidimensional and involve marketing, digitalization, governance, resources, and tourism experience (Huang et al., 2023; Bojić et al., 2023). Therefore, this study is directed toward connecting these findings into a digital-based tourism destination development strategy that can be adapted to the conditions of Gorontalo Province.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the main aspects of digitalization relevant to tourism destination development; (2) to synthesize previous research findings concerning digital marketing, smart tourism, infrastructure, human resources, governance, and destination competitiveness; and (3) to formulate directions for digital-based tourism destination development strategies that are contextual for Gorontalo Province.

2. Literature Review

Strategic Management in Tourism

Strategic management in tourism concerns the process of setting direction, selecting priorities, allocating resources, and adapting an organization or destination to environmental changes. In the digital context, strategy is not limited to determining which social media platforms to use, but needs to include digital objectives, resource readiness, information quality, services, technology, data management, and evaluation mechanisms. Ku (2024) emphasizes the importance of digital capabilities and technology collaboration in supporting product advantages and the ability to respond to change. Therefore, digitalization needs to be incorporated into the overall strategic planning of a destination (Nazara & Rosmita, 2026).

Tourism Destination Development

Destination development is a process involving tourism attractions, accessibility, facilities, services, information, tourist experiences, and governance. Huang et al. (2023) show that destination research has developed around various themes, including destination digitalization, destination marketing, destination governance, destination experience, and destination resources. This indicates that a destination is a system consisting of various interconnected elements.

Tourism Digitalization and Digital Marketing

Tourism digitalization includes the use of technology for promotion, communication, information provision, transactions, services, data collection, and destination management. Digital marketing is one form of its application. Arofah and Achsa (2022) demonstrate the use of the AISAS model to examine tourist responses to digital marketing, while Vega (2022) emphasizes the use of digital marketing in community-based tourism destination marketing. More broadly, Rodrigues and Breda (2024) explain that Industry 4.0 technologies have implications for tourism processes and business models.

Smart Tourism and Destination Governance

Smart tourism positions technology as part of the destination management system. Abdelmalak (2024) shows that the success of smart tourism initiatives is associated with adaptive governance and strategic planning. Ivars-Baidal et al. (2024) demonstrate that smart tourism governance is also related to stakeholder networks. Xu and Chen (2025) develop a perspective on digital innovation in smart tourism destinations and show the importance of integrated components and implementation pathways. Therefore, smart tourism implementation needs to be adapted to organizational capacity and destination characteristics.

Tourism Competitiveness

Destination competitiveness cannot be understood solely from the number of tourists. Competitiveness includes the ability of a destination to create value, provide experiences, deliver infrastructure and services, and adapt to environmental changes. Kim et al. (2022) show that competitiveness in the visitor economy is a complex concept that develops across various scales. Shariffuddin et al. (2023) also find diverse indicators in the destination competitiveness literature. In smart tourism, Lasisi et al. (2023) link competitiveness with enabling-environment factors and infrastructure. Therefore, technology can become a strategic resource when it is able to increase value for tourists and the effectiveness of destination management.

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method. The literature was selected based on its relevance to the topics of tourism strategic management, digital marketing, digital transformation, smart tourism, destination governance, destination competitiveness, and digital innovation. Academic literature was primarily prioritized from publications dated 2022–2026 so that the synthesis reflects recent developments. In addition to academic sources, official data from BPS-Statistics Gorontalo Province were used as regional empirical context, not as data for testing causal relationships.

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, recurring key concepts in the literature were identified. Second, findings were grouped by theme, namely digital marketing, tourism information, smart tourism, human resources, infrastructure, governance, data, and competitiveness. Third, research findings were compared to identify relationships among the elements. Fourth, a strategy synthesis was developed that could be adapted to the characteristics of tourism destinations in Gorontalo. A synthesis approach was used because this study did not collect primary data from tourists or destination managers.

4. Results And Discussion

Literature Synthesis

Table 1. Literature Findings and Strategic Directions for Tourism Development in Gorontalo.

Aspect	Literature Findings	Strategic Direction	Gorontalo Context
Digital marketing	Digital marketing helps expand information reach	Consistent, informative, visual,	Strengthen the visibility of natural,

	and shape tourist responses (Arofah & Achsa, 2022; Vega, 2022).	and experience-based content.	marine, and cultural destinations.
Tourism information	Digitalization makes destination information easier to search for and share.	Provide official information on location, access, prices, facilities, operating hours, and contact details.	Reduce information gaps among tourism attractions.
Smart tourism	Smart tourism integrates technology, governance, and stakeholder networks.	Start with simple services and develop gradually according to readiness.	Develop digital services appropriate to destination capacity.
Human resources	Digital competencies influence the ability to use technology effectively (Ku, 2024).	Provide training in content creation, social media, digital services, and data.	Strengthen the capacity of destination managers, communities, and local businesses.
Infrastructure	Connectivity and digital infrastructure support smart destination competitiveness (Lasisi et al., 2023).	Prioritize internet access, devices, information systems, and digital payment facilities.	Prioritize destinations with high potential but limited digital access.
Governance	Smart tourism governance requires stakeholder networks and coordination (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024).	Establish coordination forums, clear roles, targets, and evaluation.	Strengthen collaboration among government, academia, business, communities, and media.
Competitiveness	Competitiveness includes value creation, experience, service, infrastructure, and adaptability (Kim et al., 2022; Shariffuddin et al., 2023).	Use indicators covering digital access, information quality, service, satisfaction, and data use.	Evaluate digitalization based on its contribution to destination performance.

Strengthening Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is an initial strategy that can strengthen destination visibility. Arofah and Achsa (2022) show that digital marketing can be examined through the stages of Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share. This means that content should not stop at attracting attention, but should also provide information that helps tourists search, evaluate, and decide whether to visit. Vega (2022) also shows that digital marketing can support community-based destination marketing.

For Gorontalo, digital content can focus on local stories, cultural uniqueness, tourist experiences, natural and marine attractions, activity information, and profiles of local businesses. Content should be accompanied by practical information about location, access, prices, facilities, operating hours, and contact details. Managers also need to maintain consistency of information across social media, websites, Google Maps, and other official channels. In this way, promotion becomes not only persuasive but also informative.

Provision of Integrated Tourism Information

Information is an important component of travel because tourists need certainty before making a trip. Destination research literature shows that destination marketing, digitalization, experience, governance, and resources are interconnected themes (Huang et al., 2023). Therefore, digital information channels need to be developed as part of the destination service system.

The minimum information that should be available includes location, routes, transportation access, ticket prices, operating hours, facilities, activities, accommodation options, service conditions, manager contact details, and safety information. Information needs to be updated regularly. Inconsistency between digital information and actual field conditions can reduce tourist trust and diminish the benefits of digitalization.

Gradual Development of Smart Tourism

Smart tourism needs to be understood as a system, not merely as the use of applications. Abdelmalak (2024) emphasizes the importance of adaptive governance and strategic planning, while Ivars-Baidal et al. (2024) highlight the relationship between stakeholder networks and smart tourism governance. Xu and Chen (2025) also show that digital innovation in smart tourism destinations requires integrated components and implementation pathways.

Implementation in Gorontalo can begin with relatively simple technologies, such as QR codes for attraction information, digital tourism maps, feedback forms, facility information systems, and online ticketing. The next stage can include visitor-data integration, tourist-behavior analysis, information personalization, and the use of more advanced technologies once organizational and infrastructure readiness is adequate.

Improving Human Resource Competencies

Technology will not provide maximum benefits if human resources do not yet have the ability to use it. Ku (2024) demonstrates the importance of digital competencies in tourism transformation. Therefore, capacity-building programs need to include content creation, photography and videography, social media management, service delivery through digital channels, basic information security, review management, and the ability to interpret simple data.

Training should not be directed only at government or destination managers, but also at tourism-awareness groups, local communities, and local businesses. This approach is important because tourist experiences are formed through various services provided by the destination ecosystem.

Strengthening Digital Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the foundation for implementing digital strategies. Lasisi et al. (2023) demonstrate the importance of the enabling environment and infrastructure in the context of smart destination competitiveness. Relevant infrastructure includes not only internet networks, but also devices, information systems, digital payment facilities, location maps, and data-management mechanisms.

Infrastructure development in Gorontalo needs to use a priority-based approach. Destinations with high potential but limited digital access can be prioritized for stronger connectivity and basic information. Destinations that already have better networks can be directed toward service integration and data utilization. This gradual approach can reduce the risk of technology investments that do not match destination capacity.

Pentahelix Collaboration and Governance

Digital-based destination development requires cooperation among government, academia, business, communities, and media. The smart tourism governance perspective shows that relationships among stakeholders are an important part of destination management (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024). In the context of Gorontalo, the government can play roles in policy, infrastructure, information standardization, and facilitation; academia in research and evaluation; businesses in product and service innovation; communities in managing local potential; and media in disseminating information.

Collaboration needs to be accompanied by clear role allocation, targets, indicators, and evaluation mechanisms. Thus, digitalization does not become a program that operates independently, but becomes part of destination governance.

Digitalization as Part of Destination Competitiveness

Destination competitiveness cannot be reduced to the number of visits. Kim et al. (2022) and Shariffuddin et al. (2023) show that competitiveness has diverse dimensions. Lasisi et al. (2023) also show that enabling factors and infrastructure are associated with the performance of smart tourism destinations. Therefore, digital strategies need to be evaluated based on their contribution to information quality, ease of access, service quality, tourist experience, management efficiency, and the destination's ability to create value.

For Gorontalo, evaluation indicators may include the accessibility of digital information, the rate of information updates, interaction through digital channels, use of digital services, tourist satisfaction, review quality, ease of access, participation of local businesses, and managers' ability to use data. These indicators can serve as a basis for future empirical research.

Development Strategy Framework for Gorontalo Province

Table 2. Gorontalo Tourism Development Strategy.

Strategy	Implementation	Initial Indicators	Literature Basis
Digital marketing	Visual content, local stories, videos, social media, cross-platform distribution.	Reach, interaction, engagement, content updates.	Arofah & Achsa, 2022; Vega, 2022
Digital information	Official website/channels, Google Maps, access information, prices, facilities, contacts.	Completeness and accuracy of information.	Huang et al., 2023
Smart tourism	QR codes, digital maps, online ticketing, feedback forms, integrated information.	Use of digital services, user feedback, service accessibility.	Abdelmalak, 2024; Xu & Chen, 2025
Human resources	Training in content, social media, digital services, data, and basic information security.	Number of trained participants and manager capabilities.	Ku, 2024
Infrastructure	Internet, digital devices, information systems, payment facilities.	Connectivity and service availability.	Lasisi et al., 2023
Governance	Coordination forums and role allocation among stakeholders.	Collaborative programs and joint evaluation.	Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024
Competitiveness	Evaluation of experience, service quality, access, information, and destination value.	Satisfaction, experience, quality, and destination performance.	Kim et al., 2022; Shariffuddin et al., 2023

Implementation Challenges

Several challenges need to be considered. First, infrastructure gaps can cause the benefits of digitalization to be unevenly distributed. Second, differences in human resource capacity can make it difficult for some managers to maintain the quality of digital channels. Third, outdated information can reduce user trust. Fourth, weak coordination can cause digital platforms and programs to operate separately. Fifth, technology investment without strategic planning can result in systems that are not used optimally.

Therefore, digital strategies need to begin with mapping destination readiness. The initial stage may include mapping infrastructure, human resource capacity, available information channels, tourist needs, and stakeholder roles. The next stage can involve improving basic information and digital marketing, followed by gradual development of smart tourism services and data utilization.

Research Implications

Practically, this study shows that digitalization needs to be incorporated into regional tourism strategic planning. Local governments and destination managers need to connect digital marketing, tourism information, services, infrastructure, human resources, data, and governance within one framework. For businesses and local communities, strengthening digital competencies can help expand market access and introduce tourism products. For academics, the framework can serve as a basis for developing empirical research on the relationships among digital readiness, service quality, tourist experience, and destination competitiveness.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has limitations because it uses a literature review and secondary statistical data as regional context. It does not empirically test the effects of digitalization on tourist satisfaction, visitation intention, or the competitiveness of specific destinations in Gorontalo. In addition, the characteristics of each destination in Gorontalo differ, so the proposed strategies need to be tested and adapted at the level of individual tourism attractions.

Future research can use quantitative methods to test relationships among digital readiness, information quality, digital service quality, tourist experience, and competitiveness.

Qualitative approaches can be used to explore the experiences of managers, government, communities, businesses, and tourists. Mixed methods can also be used to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

5. Conclusion

The development of digital-based tourism destinations in Gorontalo Province needs to be viewed as part of comprehensive destination strategic management. The literature synthesis shows that relevant strategies involve not only digital promotion, but also the provision of accurate information, smart tourism development, improvement of human resource competencies, strengthening of infrastructure, data utilization, adaptive governance, and collaboration among stakeholders.

Digitalization can support competitiveness when it is connected to tourist needs and the actual capabilities of destinations. Therefore, strategies for Gorontalo need to be implemented gradually, beginning with digital-readiness mapping, improvement of basic information, human resource strengthening, development of digital services, and then data utilization. This approach allows each destination to adjust its level of digitalization to its potential, infrastructure, human resources, and tourist characteristics. The resulting strategic framework can serve as a basis for empirical research to test the contribution of digitalization to service quality, tourist experience, and tourism competitiveness in Gorontalo.

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