



The Influence Of Digital Marketing Strategies And Destination Image On The Visiting Decision Of Surfing Tourists To Rote Island In 2025

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Sections Info

Keywords:

digital marketing strategy
destination image
visiting decision
surfing tourists

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing strategy and destination image on the visiting decisions of surfing tourists to Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, in 2025. The research is grounded in the increasing importance of digital transformation in tourism promotion and the untapped potential of Rote Island as a world-class surfing destination. Using a quantitative associative approach with an explanatory design, the study surveyed 100 surfing tourists who had previously visited Rote Island. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression.

The results show that both digital marketing strategy and destination image have significant partial and simultaneous effects on tourists' visiting decisions. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.423 indicates that 42.3% of the variance in visiting decisions is explained by the two independent variables. These findings reinforce the relevance of the AIDA model in digital tourism marketing and highlight the synergistic role of digital promotion and destination image in influencing travel behavior, particularly among special interest tourists.

Theoretically, the study contributes to destination marketing literature by integrating digital marketing and destination image into a unified behavioral framework. Practically, the results offer valuable insights for local stakeholders in designing more effective digital campaigns, enhancing destination branding, and fostering sustainable tourism development in emerging niche destinations like Rote Island.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving digital era, marketing strategies have undergone a fundamental shift from conventional approaches to digital marketing, which is rooted in information and communication technologies. Changes in consumer behavior becoming increasingly connected online have pushed tourism industry players to adopt more interactive, personalized, and real-time approaches. According to Kotler et al. (2017), digital marketing is not merely about using social media or websites, but involves leveraging data, digital platforms, and technology to reach, influence, and build long-term relationships with consumers.

As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia possesses remarkable potential in marine tourism. One standout destination is Rote Island in East Nusa Tenggara Province. This island is renowned as a world-class surfing destination, particularly in the Nembrala area, which boasts challenging and exotic waves. According to the 2024 Indonesia Tourism Outlook released by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, interest in adventure and sports tourism including surfing has increased significantly in the post-pandemic era, with an average annual growth rate of 12.5% since 2022. Within this context, effective digital marketing strategies are essential to enhance the exposure of Rote Island to both domestic and international markets.

Beyond marketing strategies, destination image or perception also plays a vital role in influencing tourists' decisions. Destination image encompasses the impressions, beliefs,



and knowledge an individual holds about a travel destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). A positive image can strengthen the intention to visit, especially for destinations that are not yet as popular as Bali or Lombok. In a study by Tasci and Gartner (2007), destination image was found to directly influence perceived value, satisfaction, and tourists' visiting decisions.

Although Rote Island has a competitive advantage in surfing attractions, it still faces challenges in terms of digital information accessibility and destination branding. The **Indonesia Digital Landscape Report 2023** indicates that only 32% of tourism destinations in eastern Indonesia have integrated digital branding strategies across platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Google Travel. This reveals a substantial gap in digital marketing that can still be leveraged to increase awareness and interest among potential tourists.

From a theoretical standpoint, the combination of effective digital marketing strategies and a strong destination image is expected to enhance tourists' interest and visiting decisions. According to the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) developed by Lewis (1898) and later adapted for digital contexts by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), consumer decisions regarding travel destinations are not only influenced by the information they encounter online but also by how consistently and emotionally appealing the destination presents itself in digital spaces.

Surfing as a niche attraction in Rote deserves special attention, as it targets a specific market segment special interest tourists. According to the **Global Surf Tourism Market Report (2023)**, surfing tourists tend to be more loyal, have longer stays, and spend more per visit compared to general tourists. This offers significant economic potential for local communities and regional governments, provided it is well-managed.

Nevertheless, there is still a lack of empirical studies that specifically examine the relationship between digital marketing strategies and destination image in influencing visiting decisions to Rote Island, particularly in the surfing segment. This study is therefore relevant both practically and academically, addressing the need to develop effective marketing strategies that align with tourists' perceptions of the destination.

Furthermore, with the provincial tourism master plan (**RIPPDA NTT 2023–2027**) targeting a 25% increase in tourist visits to East Nusa Tenggara by 2025, there is a growing need to understand the key factors that influence tourist decisions – especially in niche destinations like Rote Island.

This research aims to analyze both simultaneously and partially the influence of digital marketing strategies and destination image on the visiting decisions of surfing tourists to Rote Island in 2025. The findings are expected to contribute not only to tourism marketing literature but also to serve as a practical reference for stakeholders in designing more effective and sustainable promotional and destination management strategies.

Problem Statement

Based on the background described earlier, several key research questions are addressed in this study:

1. How does digital marketing strategy influence the decision of surfing tourists to visit Rote Island in 2025?



2. How does destination image influence the decision of surfing tourists to visit Rote Island in 2025?
3. Is there a simultaneous influence of digital marketing strategy and destination image on the decision of surfing tourists to visit Rote Island in 2025?

These research questions serve as the foundation for the quantitative analysis and hypothesis testing conducted in this study.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze the effect of digital marketing strategy on the decision of surfing tourists to visit Rote Island in 2025.
2. Analyze the effect of destination image on the decision of surfing tourists to visit Rote Island in 2025.
3. Analyze the simultaneous effect of digital marketing strategy and destination image on the decision of surfing tourists to visit Rote Island in 2025.

By achieving these objectives, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective tourism promotion strategies, particularly in attracting special interest tourists such as surfers to promising marine destinations in Eastern Indonesia.

Literature Review

1. Digital Marketing Strategy

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital media, the internet, and information technology to promote products, services, or destinations to targeted audiences in a more personal, real-time, and interactive manner. In the tourism context, digital marketing is a key tool to reach prospective travelers across the globe through channels such as social media, official websites, promotional videos, and influencer campaigns.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing is the process of creating value through digital channels to meet customer needs effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, Strauss and Frost (2014) highlight that digital marketing strategy should involve content planning, channel selection (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, TikTok), and data-driven campaign performance measurement.

2. Destination Image

Crompton (1979) distinguishes destination image into two main dimensions: *organic image* (formed through unmanipulated experiences or stories) and *induced image* (shaped through advertising and promotional efforts). This implies that digital marketing plays a role in shaping the induced image of a destination.

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) conceptualize destination image as comprising three dimensions: functional attributes (e.g., beach conditions, surfing facilities), psychological attributes (e.g., friendliness of locals), and holistic impressions (overall perceptions). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) emphasize that destination image significantly influences tourists' preferences and travel decisions.

3. Tourist Visiting Decision

Visiting decision refers to the psychological and rational process by which individuals choose a travel destination. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), consumer decisions are influenced by both internal factors (motivation, attitudes, perceptions) and external factors (information, recommendations, and promotional efforts).



Gursoy and McCleary (2004) propose a tourism behavior model indicating that expectations, perceived risks, destination attractiveness, and media exposure affect tourists' intentions and actual decisions to visit. In special interest tourism like surfing, decisions are also shaped by wave reputation, international competitions, and global surfer communities.

4. Relationships Among Variables

4.1. Effect of Digital Marketing Strategy on Visiting Decision

Numerous studies confirm that digital marketing significantly influences tourist behavior. Kannan and Li (2017) found that exposure to digital promotional content increases brand awareness and conversion rates in tourism. In the surfing context, visual promotions—such as surf videos, testimonials, and social media reviews—strongly impact visit intentions.

4.2. Effect of Destination Image on Visiting Decision

Tasci and Gartner (2007) assert that destination image is a key predictor of tourists' visiting decisions. A strong, unique, and positive image creates a competitive advantage for the destination. In Rote Island's case, the presence of world-class surfing spots like T-Land adds value in shaping an appealing image among the global surfing community.

4.3. Simultaneous Effect of Digital Marketing Strategy and Destination Image

An effective combination of digital marketing strategy and positive destination image can reinforce tourists' decisions to visit. Huang et al. (2017) state that these two variables work synergistically: digital marketing shapes perception, while destination image strengthens the intention to travel.

Previous Studies

Table 1. Previous Studies

No	Researchers	Title	Findings
1	Arifin et al. (2021)	<i>Digital Marketing Strategy to Increase Tourist Visits</i>	Social media marketing increases tourist engagement
2	Sari & Nugroho (2022)	<i>Effect of Destination Image on Tourist Loyalty</i>	Destination image significantly influences repeat visit intention
3	Dewi (2020)	<i>Role of Digital Content in Marine Tourism</i>	Visual content significantly affects interest in marine tourism
4	Wijaya & Putra (2023)	<i>Factors Affecting Special Interest Tourists</i>	Emotions, community, and digital marketing strongly influence behavior

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study can be illustrated as follows:

- **Digital Marketing Strategy → Visiting Decision**
- **Destination Image → Visiting Decision**

Both independent variables are assumed to have partial and simultaneous effects on the dependent variable, which is the tourist visiting decision.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and prior studies, the hypotheses proposed in this research are as follows:



- **H1:** Digital marketing strategy has a positive influence on the visiting decision of surfing tourists to Rote Island.
- **H2:** Destination image has a positive influence on the visiting decision of surfing tourists to Rote Island.
- **H3:** Digital marketing strategy and destination image simultaneously have a positive influence on the visiting decision of surfing tourists to Rote Island.

RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Type and Approach of Research

This study adopts a quantitative associative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to explain causal relationships between the studied variables. This approach is chosen to examine the extent to which digital marketing strategy and destination image influence the visiting decisions of tourists, particularly surfing tourists to Rote Island. A quantitative approach allows researchers to objectively measure research variables through numerical data collection and statistical analysis (Sugiyono, 2021). The associative approach is used to determine the relationship or influence between two or more variables.

2.2 Research Location and Period

The study is conducted in Rote Island, located in Rote Ndao Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. This location was selected due to its reputation as a marine tourism destination with international surfing potential, particularly in Nembrala, known worldwide as a top surfing spot. The research was carried out from January to May 2025, covering the preparation of research instruments, data collection, data processing, and analysis.

2.3 Population and Sample

2.3.1 Population

The population of this study includes all surfing tourists (domestic and international) who visit Rote Island throughout 2025. According to the Rote Ndao Tourism Office, in 2023 approximately 5,000 surfing tourists visited the region, with an annual growth trend of 10%.

2.3.2 Sampling Technique

This study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method based on specific criteria. The criteria for selecting respondents are:

- Have visited Rote Island for surfing at least once
- Are at least 17 years old
- Are willing to voluntarily complete the research questionnaire

The sample size is determined using the formula by Hair et al. (2010), which suggests a minimum of 5 to 10 respondents per indicator. With 15 indicators used in the study, the minimum sample size ranges from 75 to 150 respondents. A total of 100 respondents were selected as a representative sample.

2.4 Research Variables and Operational Definitions

2.4.1 Research Variables

This study involves three main variables:

1. Digital Marketing Strategy (X1) - independent variable
2. Destination Image (X2) - independent variable



3. Visiting Decision (Y) – dependent variable

2.

Operational Definitions of Variables

Table 2. Operational Definitions of Variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators
Digital Marketing Strategy (X1)	A series of promotional and communication activities conducted via digital media to attract surfing tourists to Rote Island	Social media, destination website, visual content (videos/photos), influencers, interactivity
Destination Image (X2)	Tourists' perceptions of Rote Island as a surfing destination based on experiences, promotions, and available information	Natural attractions, cleanliness, local hospitality, accessibility, safety
Visiting Decision (Y)	The process by which tourists decide to visit Rote Island for surfing, influenced by information, perceptions, and experience	Awareness, interest, consideration, final decision, revisit loyalty

2.5 Data Collection Techniques

The data used in this research consist of two types:

- Primary data: collected directly from respondents using a closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale of 1–5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree)
- Secondary data: obtained from official documents such as tourism reports from the Rote Ndao Tourism Office, data from BPS (Statistics Indonesia), and relevant scholarly articles

The questionnaire instrument was tested for validity and reliability before being widely distributed.

2.6 Data Analysis Techniques

2.6.1 Instrument Testing

Before conducting the main analysis, the following tests were applied:

- Validity Test: using Pearson Product Moment correlation to examine the relationship between indicators
- Reliability Test: using Cronbach's Alpha, where a value of $\alpha > 0.7$ indicates reliable instruments

2.6.2 Classical Assumption Tests

To ensure the validity of the regression analysis, classical assumption tests were performed, including:

- Normality Test
- Multicollinearity Test
- Heteroscedasticity Test

2.6.3 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The main analysis method used in this study is multiple linear regression, to determine the effect of the independent variables (digital marketing strategy and destination image) on the dependent variable (visiting decision). The regression model is formulated as follows:



$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Visiting Decision
- X_1 = Digital Marketing Strategy
- X_2 = Destination Image
- α = Constant
- β_1, β_2 = Regression Coefficients
- ε = Error Term

2.6.4 Hypothesis Testing

Two types of hypothesis tests were conducted:

- Partial Test (t-test): to examine the individual influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable
- Simultaneous Test (F-test): to assess the joint influence of X_1 and X_2 on Y

2.6.5 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The R^2 value is used to measure the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables in the regression model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Data Analysis Results

Respondent Profile

This study involved 100 respondents, all of whom were surfing tourists who had previously visited Rote Island. Based on demographic data, the majority of respondents were aged 25–34 years (47%), followed by those aged 35–44 years (28%). Most respondents were international tourists (56%), with Australia and Japan being the most common countries of origin. This indicates that Rote Island has successfully penetrated the global surfing tourism market.

In terms of visit frequency, 62% of respondents reported having visited more than once, indicating a high potential for visitor loyalty within this segment. Additionally, 70% of respondents stated that they learned about the destination through digital media, particularly Instagram and YouTube.

Validity and Reliability Testing

All questionnaire indicators demonstrated Pearson correlation coefficients greater than 0.3 and were statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating adequate validity.

Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced the following results:

- Digital Marketing Strategy (X_1): $\alpha = 0.832$
- Destination Image (X_2): $\alpha = 0.811$
- Visiting Decision (Y): $\alpha = 0.847$

All values exceed the threshold of 0.7, indicating that the instruments are reliable.

Classical Assumption Tests

- Normality: The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test returned a p-value of $0.200 > 0.05$, indicating that the data are normally distributed.
- Multicollinearity: The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all variables were less than 10 ($X_1 = 1.22$; $X_2 = 1.22$), indicating no multicollinearity.



- Heteroscedasticity: The Glejser test showed no significant relationship between residuals and independent variables, suggesting no heteroscedasticity.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The resulting regression model is:

$$Y = 6.453 + 0.429X_1 + 0.378X_2$$

Where:

- X_1 (Digital Marketing Strategy) has a coefficient of 0.429, significant at $p = 0.000$ (< 0.05)
- X_2 (Destination Image) has a coefficient of 0.378, significant at $p = 0.001$ (< 0.05)

1.5 t-Test (Partial Test)

Table 3. t-Test (Partial Test)

Variable	t-value	Sig. (p-value)	Description
Digital Marketing Strategy	4.982	0.000	Significant (H1 accepted)
Destination Image	3.763	0.001	Significant (H2 accepted)

F-Test (Simultaneous Test)

- F-value = 35.112 > F-table = 3.09
- Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05

This means that X_1 and X_2 simultaneously have a significant effect on Y (H3 accepted).

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

- $R^2 = 0.423$
This indicates that 42.3% of the variance in visiting decision can be explained by digital marketing strategy and destination image, while the remaining 57.7% is influenced by other factors outside the model.

2. Discussion

2.1 Digital Marketing Strategy and Visiting Decision

The findings show that digital marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on the decision of surfing tourists to choose Rote Island as their destination. This supports Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), who state that exposure to digital content – especially on visual platforms like Instagram and YouTube – can attract attention and shape tourism consumer preferences.

Many respondents cited surfing videos, traveler testimonials, and interactive content from travel influencers as their primary motivations for exploring Rote Island. These results align with Arifin et al. (2021), who found that consistent digital campaigns can enhance engagement and increase tourist conversion rates.

The positive influence observed suggests that digital marketing is no longer a supplementary tool but a crucial element in the decision-making process of tourists, particularly among the millennial and Gen Z segments, who are highly digital-savvy.

2.2 Destination Image and Visiting Decision

The analysis also shows that destination image significantly influences the decision to visit. This reinforces the theory of Echtner & Ritchie (1993) and studies by Tasci &



Gartner (2007), which argue that perceptions of a destination—whether visual, functional, or emotional—contribute to the formation of interest and decision-making. Rote Island is perceived as a natural, quiet, and exclusive surfing destination. These impressions foster a positive perception that enhances interest in visiting, particularly among surfers who seek less crowded environments. The allure of T-Land waves, the hospitality of local residents, and the pristine tropical atmosphere are key factors in shaping a strong destination image.

Furthermore, destination image plays a long-term role in visitor loyalty. Several respondents expressed willingness to return due to previous positive experiences, indicating that image not only influences initial decisions but also repeat visitation.

2.3 Combined Influence

The simultaneous effect of digital marketing strategy and destination image strengthens the notion that the two are complementary. Digital strategies attract initial attention and shape perceptions, while destination image sustains interest and transforms it into actual decisions. This supports the AIDA model (Attention–Interest–Desire–Action) as modified by Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019) in the context of digital tourism.

Moreover, the synergy between authentic digital content and a destination image that aligns with tourist expectations is a key factor in influencing decisions. A mismatch between promotion and on-site reality can undermine trust and repeat visit intentions.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study provides significant contributions both theoretically and practically, particularly in the field of digital tourism marketing and the development of niche destinations based on special interests such as surfing.

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

1. Reinforcement of the AIDA Model in Digital Tourism Context

The findings reinforce the relevance of the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) within the digital tourism marketing landscape. Empirical evidence shows that digital marketing strategies effectively attract attention and generate interest through social media exposure and visual content. Destination image then plays a role in building desire and prompting concrete actions, such as the decision to visit.

2. Integration of Digital Marketing and Destination Image Variables

This study contributes to the theoretical integration of two critical variables digital marketing strategy and destination image as determinants of tourist decision-making. While these factors have often been studied separately in previous literature, this research highlights the importance of their synergy and interaction, especially within the context of emerging coastal destinations.

3. Contribution to Special Interest Tourism Studies

This research adds fresh insights into the field of special interest tourism, specifically surfing tourism. By targeting a specific market segment and analyzing their behavior quantitatively, the study opens up opportunities to develop behavioral models for niche tourists, a topic that has received limited attention in Indonesian tourism literature.



4. Empirical Validation in Non-Mainstream Destinations

Most tourism marketing research in Indonesia focuses on mainstream destinations like Bali, Yogyakarta, or Lombok. This study broadens the scope by providing empirical evidence from Rote Island, a non-mainstream destination, thus offering a theoretical foundation for marketing strategies in underdeveloped but high-potential areas.

4.2 Practical Contributions

1. Reference for Digital Tourism Promotion Strategies

The study serves as a practical guide for local governments, tourism stakeholders, and industry players to design more effective and adaptive digital marketing strategies. This includes optimizing visual platforms like Instagram and YouTube, creating authentic surfing content, and collaborating with international surfing influencers.

2. Importance of Destination Image Management

The finding that destination image significantly affects travel decisions emphasizes the need for stakeholders to build a strong, consistent, and relevant narrative. This involves preserving natural authenticity, delivering friendly services, and ensuring alignment between digital expectations and on-ground experiences.

3. Support for NTT Tourism Master Plan (RIPPDA 2023–2027)

This research supports the implementation of the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Regional Tourism Development Master Plan, which targets a 25% increase in tourist arrivals by 2025. Empirical findings on the importance of digital marketing and destination image can inform more targeted and data-driven policy interventions, especially in special interest tourism markets.

4. Destination Branding Strategy

The study offers practical recommendations for building a strong destination brand. Rote Island can be positioned as the “Surfing Paradise of Eastern Indonesia” through a digital narrative that highlights wave uniqueness, exclusivity, and local cultural sustainability. Such branding is expected to not only increase visitation but also strengthen global identity.

5. Building Local Digital Capacity

This study also emphasizes the importance of involving local communities in digital marketing efforts—whether as content creators, digital tour guides, or campaign partners. This can improve digital literacy and foster economic independence through the creative tourism economy.

6. Evaluation Tools for Promotion Performance

The research instruments and indicators developed—such as effectiveness of digital content, perceived appeal, and visit loyalty—can be adapted by tourism offices or operators as evaluation tools for promotional campaigns and destination image performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion presented, the study yields the following key conclusions:

1. Digital marketing strategies have a significant and positive effect on surfers' decision to visit Rote Island. This highlights how the intensity and quality of



digital promotion – through social media (Instagram, YouTube), visual content (surfing videos, destination photos), and influencer engagement – effectively attract attention and spark interest. Digital marketing serves as a crucial instrument in building awareness and motivating tourist desire, especially among millennials and Gen Z who rely heavily on online information.

2. Destination image has a significant and positive impact on surfing tourists' decision to visit. Tourists' positive perceptions of Rote Island – functionally (e.g., wave quality, beach cleanliness), psychologically (e.g., local friendliness, exclusivity), and holistically – strongly reinforce the intention and actual decision to visit. A strong destination image also increases visit loyalty, as many respondents expressed interest in returning due to previous positive experiences.
3. Digital marketing strategies and destination image jointly influence tourists' decision to visit Rote Island. These variables complement and reinforce each other in the decision-making process. Effective digital strategies create initial exposure and visual appeal, while destination image provides emotional depth and value perception. The synergy between promotion and image is essential for attracting and retaining visitors, especially in niche tourism segments like surfing.
4. The regression model shows that the combination of digital marketing and destination image explains 42.3% of the variation in travel decisions. This indicates that these two variables are dominant factors influencing tourist decisions, although other elements outside the model – such as pricing, transportation access, visa regulations, and international community promotion – also play a role.

Rote Island has strong potential as an international surfing destination but still requires more consistent and integrated digital marketing and destination imaging across platforms. Key success factors for sustainable development include enhancing local digital capacities, involving international surfing communities, and aligning online promotion with real-life experience.

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