

Destination Branding Strategies of Kuta Mandalika, Lombok as a World-Class Halal Tourism Destination

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Abstract: *This research analyzes the destination branding strategies of Kuta Mandalika, Lombok as a world-class halal tourism destination. The type of this research is a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through library research and secondary sources, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings show that Mandalika's branding is built through five main strategies such as competitive identity and destination positioning, halal tourism identity integration, digital branding, stakeholder collaboration, and global competitiveness. Among these, stakeholder collaboration is the most dominant factor in strengthening destination branding. Digital branding plays a key role in increasing global visibility, while competitive identity enhances destination differentiation. Halal tourism identity is applied in an inclusive way by emphasizing universal values such as cleanliness and hospitality. Global competitiveness is still developing and requires stronger international positioning and more consistent branding strategies.*

Keywords: *Destination branding, Kuta Mandalika, World- Class , Halal Tourism.*

Introduction

Lombok's Mandalika is a tourist resort located on the Indonesian island of Lombok. It is a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists and is known for its beautiful beaches, lush tropical forests, and traditional culture. The area is being developed as a major tourist hub, with the Indonesian government investing heavily in infrastructure and facilities to attract more visitors (Said, Daeng, et.al: 2023). The area is being developed as a major tourist hub, with the Indonesian government investing heavily in infrastructure and facilities to attract more visitors. Development of this area includes the construction of hotels, entertainment centers, international sports facilities, and improved transportation accessibility. The presence of various international events, such as the MotoGP race, has also increased Mandalika's global exposure.

Lombok Island promotes the Friendly Lombok brand for international promotion and Lombok Wisata Halal for domestic promotion. The tourism industry can develop optimally through ongoing collaboration and support between the government, the private sector, and all levels of society on Lombok Island for successful tourism development. Lombok Island itself has established itself as a halal tourism brand since 2015 after winning the World Best Halal Destination award at the World Halal Travel Summit in Abu Dhabi, UAE (Kudsi & Sukardani: 2018). The halal tourism industry is growing rapidly as the number of Muslim tourists increases in various countries. Halal tourism focuses not only on religious aspects but also includes the provision of tourism services in accordance with Islamic principles, such as halal food, prayer facilities, and a welcoming environment for Muslim travelers. Indonesia has a significant opportunity to become a leader in this industry, as it has the largest Muslim population in the world.

With this award, the Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with the West Nusa Tenggara Tourism Office, promoted the halal tourism brand to promote and implement it for sustainable tourism on Lombok Island. Lombok's branding targets the Muslim market, given the large Muslim population in Asia and Southeast Asia. To universally define halal tourism, the Friendly Lombok branding was used, which is interpreted as friendly, welcoming, safe, and comfortable.

Research on halal tourism in Mandalika has extensively discussed halal destination development strategies, halal facilities, and the influence of branding on tourist interest (Bisit, 2022). Furthermore, destination branding studies have been conducted at the Lombok level through the Friendly Lombok concept (Kudsi & Sukardani, 2018) and at the national level through the Halal Wonders Indonesia program (Subarkah et al., 2020). However, previous research has focused on destination development and branding in general. To date, there is limited research specifically examining Kuta Mandalika's branding strategy as a world-class halal tourism destination through the integration of destination identity, digital marketing, and global positioning.

This research seeks to fill this gap by analyzing branding strategies that can strengthen Mandalika's competitiveness in the international halal tourism market. Therefore, this research offers a novelty in the form of formulating a branding strategy for Kuta Mandalika as a world-class halal tourism destination through the integration of destination branding, digital branding, and stakeholder collaboration, which has not been widely studied in previous studies. In addition, this study emphasizes the importance of aligning local cultural values with global halal tourism standards to create a distinctive destination identity. The integration of digital media is also considered crucial in enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of Mandalika in the international tourism market. Furthermore, this research highlights the role of multi-stakeholder synergy in ensuring sustainable and competitive destination branding. Ultimately, this research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically in strengthening Mandalika's position as a leading halal tourism destination at the global level.

In line with this gap, this research is guided by the following research questions: What is the branding strategy of Kuta Mandalika developed in building its image as a world-class halal tourism destination?, This research questions is formulated to explore both the conceptual and practical dimensions of halal destination branding in Kuta Mandalika. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how branding strategies are designed and implemented in a global tourism context. The findings are expected to offer strategic insights for strengthening Mandalika's position as a competitive halal tourism destination at the international level.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research approach with a case study design. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2018). This research aims to understand in depth the phenomenon of destination branding strategy, particularly the integration of destination branding, digital branding, and stakeholder collaboration in the development of halal tourism.

The data were collected through library research by reviewing relevant academic literature, including journal articles, books, research reports, policy documents, and official publications related to halal tourism, destination branding, and the development of Kuta Mandalika. In addition, secondary data are also obtained from credible online sources, government publications, and tourism authority reports that are relevant to the development of Mandalika as a tourism destination.

The data analysis technique were used follows the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2014) which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, relevant information related to branding strategies and halal tourism is selected and organized. In the data display stage, the data is presented in a structured form to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions are drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and strategic implications of branding Mandalika as a halal tourism destination.

Result and Discussion

1. Result

The branding strategies used to build Kuta Mandalika as a world-class halal tourism destination are as follows:

a. **Competitive identity strategy and a destination positioning strategy**

The branding of Kuta Mandalika is strongly influenced by its positioning as part of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK Mandalika), which emphasizes tourism development based on international standards. In this context, Mandalika applies a **competitive identity strategy** combined with a **destination positioning strategy**, aiming to differentiate itself in the global halal tourism market through unique place-

based advantages. The results show that Mandalika's destination branding relies on three main pillars:

- 1) Natural attractiveness, including beaches, coastal landscapes, and tropical scenery as part of its image-based branding strategy.
- 2) Cultural identity, represented by Sasak traditions and local wisdom as a form of authenticity branding strategy.
- 3) Infrastructure development, such as hotels, tourism facilities, and international event venues as part of a functional infrastructure branding strategy (Pike, 2008; Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

b. Halal Tourism Identity Integration strategy

The research finds that the halal tourism identity in Mandalika is not only represented through religious facilities but also embedded in the broader tourism experience. Halal elements include halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and Muslim-friendly services. However, the halal branding of Mandalika is designed to remain inclusive. This means that halal values are positioned as universal values such as cleanliness, safety, comfort, and hospitality, which are acceptable to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists. This approach strengthens Mandalika's positioning as a "friendly and inclusive halal destination" rather than an exclusive religious tourism site. (Results of an interview with West Nusa Tenggara policy makers).

c. Digital Branding Strategy

Digital branding plays a significant role in increasing Mandalika's global visibility. The findings show that digital platforms such as social media, official tourism websites, and online promotional campaigns are actively used to promote Mandalika internationally. Key digital branding strategies include:

- 1) Social media marketing (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) showcasing tourism experiences.
- 2) International event exposure (e.g., MotoGP coverage).
- 3) Influencer and travel vlogger collaborations.
- 4) Multilingual digital content targeting global Muslim markets

Digital media has significantly contributed to shaping a modern and dynamic image of Mandalika, making it more accessible to international audiences.

d. Stakeholder Collaboration in Branding

The results indicate that successful branding of Mandalika is strongly supported by multi-stakeholder collaboration (pentahelix model) involving:

- 1) Government (policy and infrastructure development)
- 2) Private sector (investment and hospitality services)
- 3) Local community (cultural preservation and hospitality)
- 4) Academics (research and development support).

The successful branding of Mandalika is driven by a pentahelix collaboration involving government, private sector, local community, media, and academics. This

synergy supports policy development, promotion, cultural preservation, and research to strengthen Mandalika's destination branding.

e. Global Competitiveness of Mandalika Halal Tourism

The integration of branding strategies has positioned Mandalika as a rapidly growing international destination. The presence of global events such as MotoGP has significantly increased international recognition. However, the study also finds that although Mandalika has strong potential, its branding as a world-class halal tourism destination is still in the development stage and requires:

- 1) Stronger global positioning strategy
- 2) More consistent halal branding identity
- 3) Improved international digital marketing reach

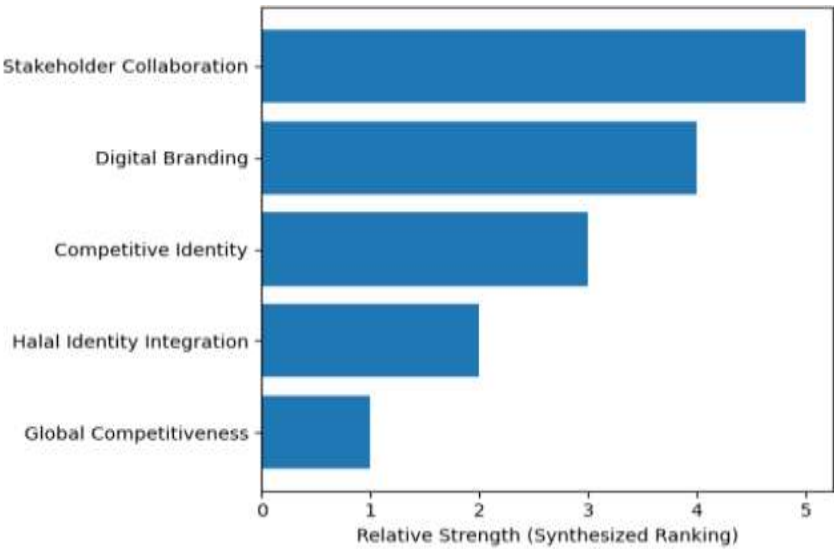
This collaboration ensures that branding strategies are not only top-down but also community-based, allowing local participation in tourism development.

Tabel 1
Summary of Findings on Branding Strategies of Kuta Mandalika

No	Branding Strategy	Main Focus	Result Findings
a	Competitive identity & destination positioning strategy	Differentiation based on local advantages	Utilization of Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK Mandalika); emphasis on natural attractiveness, cultural identity, and tourism infrastructure (Pike, 2008; Kotler & Gertner, 2002).
b	Halal tourism identity integration strategy	Integration of halal values into tourism experience	Availability of halal-certified food, prayer facilities, Muslim-friendly services, and an inclusive approach based on universal values (cleanliness, safety, comfort).
c	Digital branding strategy	Global promotion through digital platforms	Use of social media (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok), official tourism websites, influencer marketing, multilingual content, and international

			event exposure (e.g., MotoGP)
d	Stakeholder collaboration	Multi-actor synergy in branding development	Collaboration among government, private sector, local community, academics, and media in tourism development and promotion
e	Global competitiveness strategy	International halal tourism market positioning.	International event exposure increases recognition. However, needs stronger global positioning, consistent halal branding identity, and improved digital marketing reach.

Figure 1
Ranking of Branding Strategies in Kuta Mandalika Destination Development



The diagram shows that stakeholder collaboration is the most dominant strategy in building Kuta Mandalika’s branding. Digital branding also plays a crucial role in enhancing global visibility and attracting international tourists. Competitive identity contributes significantly by strengthening Mandalika’s position among global tourism destinations. Halal identity integration supports the branding strategy but is not the most dominant factor. Global competitiveness appears as the least influential factor compared to other strategic elements.

2. Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that the branding of Kuta Mandalika as a world-class halal tourism destination is shaped by an interconnected set of strategies rather than a single dominant approach. The most influential factor, namely stakeholder collaboration, highlights that destination branding is fundamentally a collective process involving government, private sector, local communities, academics, and media. This supports the view that successful tourism branding cannot rely solely on top-down policy, but requires participatory governance that ensures alignment between development goals and local socio-cultural realities. The strong role of collaboration also explains why Mandalika's branding can be implemented relatively effectively, particularly in infrastructure development and international event hosting.

According to Confetto, Siano, and Vollero (2023), digital destination branding refers to the process of managing and communicating a destination's brand image through digital platforms by utilizing websites, social media, and online communication technologies. In this research, digital branding emerges as the second most dominant strategy, emphasizing the increasing importance of online visibility in global tourism competition. The use of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, along with influencer marketing and multilingual content, demonstrates how Mandalika positions itself within the contemporary digital tourism landscape. This finding is consistent with modern destination branding theories that highlight the role of digital media in shaping tourist perceptions before actual visitation. The exposure from international events such as MotoGP further strengthens this strategy by creating globally shareable content, thereby accelerating destination recognition at the international level.

Competitive identity and destination positioning also play a significant role in shaping Mandalika's branding framework. The integration of natural attractions, cultural heritage, and infrastructure development reflects a place-based differentiation strategy that aligns with global destination branding principles. The presence of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK Mandalika) further reinforces its positioning as a competitive tourism hub. However, while this strategy contributes strongly to image formation, its effectiveness depends on how well it is communicated and reinforced through digital and collaborative platforms.

Maulana, R. (2026) explains that halal tourism identity should move beyond functional elements such as halal certification and facilities, and instead integrate Islamic values such as trust, honesty and hospitality into the core of destination identity. In this research, the halal tourism identity integration strategy, although important, is positioned as a supporting rather than dominant element in the branding hierarchy. The findings suggest that Mandalika adopts an inclusive halal tourism concept, where halal values are interpreted broadly as cleanliness, safety, comfort, and hospitality. This approach is strategically beneficial because it avoids exclusivity and allows the destination to appeal to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists. Nevertheless, the inclusivity of this approach may also lead to a lack of distinctiveness in global halal tourism competition.

Finally, the global competitiveness strategy appears as the least dominant factor, indicating that Mandalika's positioning as a world-class halal tourism destination is still in a developing stage. Although international events such as MotoGP have significantly increased global awareness, the findings suggest that consistency in branding identity and international marketing reach still need to be strengthened. This implies that global competitiveness is more of an outcome of the other strategies rather than an independent driving force. Strengthening integration between stakeholder collaboration, digital branding, and destination positioning is therefore essential to enhance Mandalika's long-term global competitiveness.

The results demonstrate that Kuta Mandalika's branding strategy is highly multidimensional and interdependent. Stakeholder synergy functions as the foundation, digital branding acts as the visibility amplifier, while identity-based strategies (competitive identity and halal integration) shape the destination image. However, to achieve stronger global competitiveness, a more coherent and consistent integration of all branding elements is required.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the branding of Kuta Mandalika as a world-class halal tourism destination is shaped by a multidimensional and integrated strategy involving competitive identity, halal tourism identity integration, digital branding, stakeholder collaboration, and global competitiveness. Among these strategies, stakeholder collaboration emerges as the most dominant factor, indicating that successful destination branding strongly depends on the synergy between government, private sector, local community, academics, and media.

Digital branding plays a crucial role in enhancing Mandalika's global visibility through social media marketing, influencer engagement, multilingual content, and international event exposure. This strategy significantly strengthens destination awareness and position of Mandalika within the global tourism market. Competitive identity and destination positioning further reinforce Mandalika's uniqueness by highlighting its natural attractions, and cultural heritage, supported by the Special Economic Zone (KEK Mandalika).

The halal tourism identity integration strategy contributes to the destination's branding by embedding Islamic values into tourism services such as halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and Muslim-friendly services. However, this study finds that Mandalika adopts an inclusive halal tourism approach, emphasizing universal values such as cleanliness, safety, comfort, and hospitality, which makes the destination attractive to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists. Although global competitiveness is supported by international events such as MotoGP, the findings indicate that Mandalika's positioning as a world-class halal tourism destination is still in a developing stage. Strengthening consistent halal branding, improving global positioning strategies, and expanding digital marketing reach are necessary to enhance its international competitiveness.

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