



Digital Branding Strategy for White-Water Rafting Tourism: An Integrated SWOT and SOAR Analysis of FAJI Garut Regency

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed tourism promotion, making digital branding a critical strategy for destination competitiveness, particularly in special-interest tourism. This study aims to analyze the digital branding strategy of white-water rafting tourism managed by the Indonesian Rafting Federation (FAJI) of Garut Regency by integrating SWOT and SOAR analytical frameworks. A qualitative descriptive approach with a phenomenological perspective was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of digital platforms, and documentation, and were analyzed using SWOT to identify strategic conditions and SOAR to formulate strength-based and future-oriented strategies. The results indicate that FAJI Garut possesses strong internal assets, including unique natural rafting resources and institutional legitimacy under a national federation. However, digital branding implementation remains suboptimal due to limited digital marketing capabilities, budget constraints, and inconsistent content management. The SWOT analysis effectively captures internal weaknesses and external challenges, such as increasing competition and rapidly changing digital trends. Meanwhile, the SOAR framework highlights organizational strengths, strategic aspirations, and desired outcomes, enabling FAJI Garut to articulate clearer brand positioning and measurable digital branding goals. The integration of SWOT and SOAR provides a more comprehensive strategic perspective, balancing problem diagnosis with aspiration-driven planning. This study contributes to the digital branding and tourism literature by demonstrating the relevance of a combined SWOT–SOAR approach for community-based adventure tourism destinations. Practically, the findings offer strategic insights for improving digital branding effectiveness and enhancing the sustainable competitive advantage of white-water rafting tourism.

Keywords: digital branding; adventure tourism; white-water rafting; SWOT; SOAR; tourism strategy.

1 Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the tourism industry, particularly in the way destinations build brand awareness and engage with potential visitors. Digital platforms such as social media, websites, and search engines have become essential tools for destination branding, enabling tourism organizations to reach broader markets in a cost-effective and interactive manner. However, many local and community-based tourism destinations in Indonesia still face significant challenges in adopting and managing digital branding strategies effectively (Aryasanti et al., 2021; Sukmasetya et al., 2021).

One of the key problems encountered by adventure tourism destinations is the limited capacity to implement consistent and strategic digital branding. In the context of white-water rafting tourism in Kabupaten Garut, the Indonesian Rafting Federation (FAJI) Garut Regency experiences constraints in human resources, budget availability, and digital marketing expertise. These limitations lead to fragmented promotional efforts, low content consistency, and suboptimal online visibility, despite the strong natural potential of the Cimanuk River and the growing demand for special-interest tourism (Novita et al., 2022; Dewi, 2023).

The impact of this problem is substantial. Ineffective digital branding reduces destination visibility, weakens brand image, and limits tourist engagement and loyalty. In a highly competitive tourism market, destinations that fail to optimize digital branding risk losing market share to competitors that are more adaptive to digital transformation. For adventure tourism such as rafting, weak branding may also result in underutilized tourism potential, limited economic benefits for local communities, and reduced contribution to regional tourism development.

Given these conditions, research on digital branding strategies in adventure tourism is critically important. Understanding how digital branding can be strategically designed and implemented will help tourism organizations improve competitiveness, strengthen destination image, and enhance visitor attraction. Moreover, research focusing on community-based tourism organizations is essential to support sustainable tourism development aligned with local capacities and resources (Sudirjo et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on digital branding, several research gaps remain. Previous studies have predominantly focused on digital branding in UMKM, culinary tourism, village tourism, or single-platform social media strategies. Studies examining digital branding in special-interest adventure tourism particularly white-water rafting are still limited (Dewi, 2023). Furthermore, most prior research employs SWOT analysis, which emphasizes weaknesses and threats, rather than strength-based strategic approaches that encourage organizational aspirations and measurable outcomes.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting the SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) framework to analyze digital branding strategies in rafting tourism. The use of SOAR represents a novel approach in this context, as it emphasizes positive organizational capabilities, future aspirations, and strategic results rather than problem-centered analysis. In addition, this research examines digital branding as a multi-platform strategy encompassing social media, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), Search Engine Optimization (SEO), benchmarking, and digital content strategy (Syamsiah et al., 2021; Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009).

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze and evaluate the digital branding strategy of FAJI Garut Regency in promoting white-water rafting tourism using the SOAR framework. Specifically, the study aims to examine how social media utilization, IMC, SEO practices,

benchmarking, and digital content strategies contribute to destination image building and tourism attractiveness (Brilliantia et al., 2022; Nupi Hasyim, 2023).

The findings of this research are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on digital branding in tourism by introducing a strength-based strategic framework within the context of adventure tourism. Practically, it offers strategic recommendations for FAJI Garut and similar community-based tourism organizations to optimize digital branding efforts, enhance destination visibility, and support sustainable tourism development.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Digital Branding

Digital branding is a marketing strategy that utilizes digital technologies to build, manage, and strengthen brand image through various online platforms, such as social media, websites, and search engines. In the tourism context, digital branding serves as a primary tool to introduce destination identity, shape tourists' perceptions, and enhance brand awareness and visit intention (Aryasanti et al., 2021). Unlike conventional branding, which tends to be one-way, digital branding emphasizes two-way interaction between destinations and tourists. Through visual content, digital narratives, and consistent communication, tourism destinations can create emotional attachment and symbolic experiences for visitors (Pulizzi, 2012). Previous studies indicate that effective digital branding increases tourist trust and reinforces destination image amid increasingly intense digital tourism competition (Novita et al., 2022). In the tourism industry, digital branding has become increasingly important as tourists rely heavily on digital media to search for information and make travel decisions. Destinations that strategically manage digital branding tend to achieve higher visibility and attractiveness compared to those that have not fully optimized digital channels (Sukmaseya et al., 2021).

2.2 Competitive Advantage in Tourism

Competitive advantage in tourism refers to a destination's ability to offer unique value that is difficult for competitors to replicate. Such advantage is not solely determined by natural resources, but also by managerial capability, innovation, service quality, and sustainable marketing strategies (Sukmadewi et al., 2024). In contemporary tourism, competitive advantage is increasingly influenced by digital technology adoption. Digital branding strategies enable destinations to differentiate themselves through identity, experience, and image consistently constructed in the digital space. Research shows that destinations with strong digital images have greater opportunities to attract tourists and maintain visitor loyalty (Dewi, 2023). Furthermore, local community involvement, environmental sustainability, and adaptability to changing tourism trends are critical factors in building competitive advantage. The synergy between local resources and digital marketing strategies is believed to strengthen a destination's position in both regional and global tourism markets (Sukmadewi et al., 2024).

2.3 SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool used to identify internal and external organizational factors, consisting of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This framework has been widely applied in management and tourism studies to formulate development strategies for organizations and destinations (Mashuri, 2020). In the tourism sector, SWOT analysis helps destination managers understand their strategic position within a competitive market. By

identifying strengths and opportunities while anticipating weaknesses and threats, destinations can design adaptive and realistic strategies. However, several studies argue that SWOT tends to focus heavily on problems and risks, which may limit its ability to encourage long-term vision development based on positive organizational potential (Sari et al., 2024). These limitations have led to the development of alternative strategic approaches that are more constructive, one of which is the SOAR framework, emphasizing strengths, aspirations, and desired results.

2.4 SOAR Analysis

SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) is a strategic framework developed by Stavros and Hinrichs (2009) based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. Unlike SWOT, SOAR does not focus on weaknesses and threats, but rather emphasizes positive organizational potential and strategic outcomes. The SOAR approach encourages active stakeholder involvement in the strategic planning process, resulting in strategies that are participatory, inspirational, and future-oriented. In tourism, SOAR is particularly relevant for community-based organizations, as it highlights collaboration, shared vision, and measurable results (Brilliantia et al., 2022). Previous research demonstrates that SOAR is effective in strategic planning for public sector and community organizations, including sustainable tourism development. However, studies applying SOAR to digital branding strategies in special-interest tourism, such as white-water rafting tourism, remain limited. Therefore, the application of SOAR in this study contributes novelty to the literature on tourism digital branding strategies (Hasyim, 2023).

3 Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design with a phenomenological approach to explore and analyze digital branding strategies implemented by the Indonesian Rafting Federation (FAJI) of Garut Regency. A qualitative approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of strategic practices, perceptions, and experiences of stakeholders involved in the promotion of white-water rafting tourism. This design allows the researcher to capture contextual and experiential insights that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement alone.

3.2 Research Object and Study Area

The object of this research is digital branding strategy in white-water rafting tourism, with FAJI Garut Regency as the unit of analysis. Garut Regency was selected due to its significant potential in adventure tourism, particularly white-water rafting activities along the Cimanuk River, as well as FAJI's role as a community-based organization responsible for coordination, promotion, and standardization of rafting tourism in the region.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure data richness and triangulation:

- a. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including FAJI management, digital media administrators, and representatives of rafting service providers. The interviews focused on digital branding practices, challenges, strategic objectives, and expected outcomes.

- b. Observation: Direct observations were carried out on FAJI's digital platforms, including social media accounts and online promotional content, to examine branding consistency, content characteristics, and audience engagement.
- c. Documentation: Documentation data included organizational reports, social media analytics, promotional materials, official FAJI documents, and relevant policy or tourism-related publications. These documents supported contextual understanding and validated findings from interviews and observations.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using the SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) framework. The analysis process involved several stages:

- a. Data Reduction: Organizing and selecting relevant information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents.
- b. Data Categorization: Classifying findings into SOAR dimensions: strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results.
- c. Interpretation: Interpreting patterns and relationships among SOAR dimensions to formulate strategic insights regarding digital branding practices.
- d. Strategic Synthesis: Integrating findings into a comprehensive digital branding strategy model for white-water rafting tourism.

The SOAR framework was chosen because it emphasizes positive organizational capacity, future-oriented aspirations, and measurable strategic outcomes, making it suitable for community-based tourism organizations.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of Data

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation techniques, including source triangulation (different informants), method triangulation (interviews, observation, and documentation), and theoretical triangulation. Member checking was also conducted by confirming key findings with selected informants to enhance the accuracy of interpretation.

4 Research Results and Discussion

4.1 Research Results Based on SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the internal and external conditions influencing the digital branding strategy of white-water rafting tourism managed by the Indonesian Rafting Federation (FAJI) of Garut Regency.

1) Strengths

The findings reveal that FAJI Garut possesses strong internal strengths, particularly in terms of natural tourism resources and organizational legitimacy. The Cimanuk River offers challenging rafting routes with scenic landscapes, making it highly suitable for adventure tourism. In addition, FAJI operates under a national federation that regulates safety standards and certification, which enhances credibility and trust among tourists. These strengths align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of unique destination attributes and institutional trust in building tourism competitiveness (Sukmadewi et al., 2024).

2) Weaknesses

Despite its strengths, FAJI Garut faces several internal weaknesses. The most significant issues include limited human resources with digital marketing expertise, budget constraints, and inconsistent management of digital content. These limitations hinder the organization's ability to implement comprehensive and sustainable digital branding strategies. Similar findings have been reported in previous tourism studies, which highlight that limited organizational capacity often reduces the effectiveness of digital promotion efforts at the local level (Sari et al., 2024).

3) Opportunities

Externally, FAJI Garut benefits from growing market demand for adventure and special-interest tourism, particularly among younger travelers who actively seek outdoor and adrenaline-based experiences. The rapid growth of digital media usage also presents an opportunity to promote rafting tourism through cost-effective online platforms. Government support for tourism digitalization further strengthens these opportunities, as noted by Dewi (2023).

4) Threats

The main threats identified include intense competition from other adventure tourism destinations and the rapid evolution of digital marketing trends. Destinations that fail to adapt to changing digital behaviors risk losing visibility and market relevance. In addition, safety-related perceptions and environmental risks associated with rafting tourism may negatively influence tourist decisions if not managed properly through effective communication strategies. Overall, the SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview of FAJI Garut's current strategic position. However, its problem-oriented nature highlights limitations in guiding future-oriented and strength-based strategic development.

4.2 Research Results Based on SOAR Analysis

To complement the SWOT findings, this study applies the SOAR framework to emphasize positive organizational capacity and strategic outcomes.

1) Strengths

Consistent with the SWOT analysis, SOAR confirms that FAJI Garut's key strengths lie in its natural adventure assets, community-based organizational structure, and institutional credibility. These strengths form a solid foundation for digital branding strategies that emphasize authenticity, safety, and adventure experience.

2) Opportunities

SOAR analysis highlights opportunities in leveraging digital storytelling, social media engagement, and collaborative branding with rafting operators and local tourism stakeholders. Unlike SWOT, SOAR frames opportunities as strategic enablers rather than external pressures, encouraging FAJI to actively capitalize on digital platforms to strengthen brand identity.

3) Aspirations

One of the most critical contributions of the SOAR framework is the identification of organizational aspirations. FAJI Garut aspires to become a leading white-water rafting tourism destination in West Java, supported by a strong and consistent digital brand image. The

organization also aims to enhance internal digital capabilities through capacity building and structured branding management. These aspirations reflect the importance of long-term vision and strategic alignment, which are often underemphasized in traditional SWOT analysis (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009).

4) Results

The desired results identified through SOAR include increased digital visibility, stronger destination image, and higher tourist engagement and visitation. While current outcomes remain limited, the SOAR framework enables FAJI to define measurable and achievable results that align with its aspirations and strengths. This result-oriented perspective supports strategic clarity and performance evaluation.

4.3 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the application of SWOT and SOAR analyses provides complementary insights into understanding the digital branding strategy of white-water rafting tourism managed by FAJI Garut Regency. SWOT functions as a diagnostic tool to identify internal and external organizational conditions, while SOAR serves as a strategic framework that directs organizations toward strength-based development and long-term objectives. The integration of these two approaches enables a more comprehensive analysis than relying on a single method (Sari et al., 2024; Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009).

From the SWOT perspective, the primary strengths of FAJI Garut lie in the natural advantages of the Cimanuk River and its institutional legitimacy as an official organization under a national federation. These findings align with previous studies suggesting that destination uniqueness and institutional credibility are fundamental in building tourism competitive advantage, particularly in high-risk special-interest tourism such as white-water rafting (Sukmadewi et al., 2024). Such strengths should be leveraged through digital branding strategies that emphasize safety, professionalism, and authentic adventure experiences.

Nevertheless, the SWOT analysis also reveals significant weaknesses, particularly limited human resources in digital marketing, constrained promotional budgets, and inconsistent digital content management. These weaknesses reduce the intensity and quality of digital exposure for the destination. This finding supports prior research indicating that many local tourism organizations face structural barriers in adopting sustainable digital strategies (Sari et al., 2024).

In terms of opportunities, SWOT highlights the increasing trend of adventure tourism and the widespread use of digital media as major external drivers that FAJI Garut can capitalize on. Government support for tourism digitalization further strengthens these opportunities. However, threats such as intense inter-destination competition and rapidly changing digital trends require FAJI Garut to be not only adaptive but also proactive in building sustainable brand differentiation (Dewi, 2023).

In contrast to SWOT, the SOAR framework shifts the analytical focus from organizational problems to potential and future-oriented development. Through SOAR, strengths and opportunities are not merely mapped as existing conditions but are framed as strategic assets for achieving organizational aspirations. This approach is particularly relevant for community-based organizations like FAJI Garut, where collaboration and shared vision are essential in tourism development (Brilliantia et al., 2022).

FAJI Garut's aspiration to become a leading white-water rafting destination in West Java reflects strategic awareness of the importance of brand positioning and identity. This aspiration aligns with digital branding theory, which emphasizes identity clarity, message consistency, and audience engagement in building a strong destination image (Novita et al., 2022). Without clearly defined aspirations, digital branding efforts tend to become fragmented and lack strategic direction.

The Results dimension of SOAR strengthens the outcome-oriented nature of strategic planning. The findings show that although FAJI Garut's digital branding outcomes remain limited, the SOAR framework enables the organization to formulate more measurable performance indicators, such as increased digital visibility, tourist engagement, and visitation interest. This result-oriented perspective offers a distinct advantage over SWOT, which does not explicitly emphasize long-term strategic outcomes (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009).

Overall, the integration of SWOT and SOAR in this study demonstrates that the digital branding strategy of white-water rafting tourism in FAJI Garut Regency requires a balance between problem diagnosis and potential development. SWOT provides a realistic understanding of existing challenges, while SOAR offers a constructive, future-oriented strategic direction. These findings reinforce the argument that strength-based approaches such as SOAR are highly relevant in enhancing competitiveness and sustainability of special-interest tourism destinations through adaptive and strategic digital branding (Sukmasetya et al., 2021).

5 Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusions

This study examines the digital branding strategy of white-water rafting tourism managed by the Indonesian Rafting Federation (FAJI) of Garut Regency through an integrated SWOT and SOAR analytical framework. The findings indicate that FAJI Garut possesses strong internal assets, particularly in terms of natural adventure resources and institutional legitimacy, which form a solid foundation for destination branding. However, these strengths have not been fully transformed into competitive digital branding outcomes due to limitations in digital marketing capabilities, budget constraints, and inconsistent content management. The SWOT analysis effectively captures these internal and external challenges but remains limited in guiding long-term, future-oriented strategic development.

The SOAR framework complements SWOT by shifting the focus toward organizational strengths, aspirations, and measurable results, thereby providing a more constructive and strategic perspective. The integration of SWOT and SOAR highlights the importance of aligning digital branding initiatives with clear aspirations and outcome-oriented strategies, especially for community-based tourism organizations. Overall, this study contributes to tourism and digital branding literature by demonstrating that a combined SWOT–SOAR approach can enhance strategic clarity and support the development of sustainable competitive advantage in special-interest tourism destinations such as white-water rafting.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are proposed: First, FAJI Garut should strengthen its digital branding capacity by investing in human resource development, particularly in digital marketing, content creation, and social media management. Training programs and partnerships with academic institutions or digital communities may help overcome existing skill

gaps. Second, FAJI Garut is encouraged to develop a more structured and consistent digital branding strategy that integrates social media, website management, and content planning. Emphasizing storytelling, safety standards, and authentic adventure experiences can help differentiate the rafting destination and enhance brand credibility. Third, adopting the SOAR framework as a regular strategic planning tool is recommended to ensure that future digital branding initiatives remain aligned with organizational strengths, aspirations, and measurable results. This approach can support continuous improvement and long-term strategic focus. Fourth, collaboration with local rafting operators, tourism stakeholders, and government agencies should be intensified to create integrated promotional efforts and shared branding initiatives. Such collaboration can expand digital reach and reinforce the destination's competitive position. Finally, future research is encouraged to extend this study by incorporating quantitative methods to measure the impact of digital branding strategies on tourist engagement, visitation, and loyalty. Comparative studies across different adventure tourism destinations may also provide broader insights into the effectiveness of SWOT–SOAR integration in tourism digital branding.

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