



# Establishing City Branding Strategy for Tomohon Central Tourism Area in Indonesia in Attracting Interest in Visiting Tourists

**Beldie Aryona Tombeg<sup>a,b\*</sup>, Soemarno<sup>c</sup>, Amin Leksono<sup>d</sup>  
and Utami Aziz<sup>e</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> Student of Doctoral Program on Environment and Development Studies, University of Brawijaya, Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

<sup>b</sup> Department of Civil Engineering, Manado Polytechnic, North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

<sup>c</sup> Department of Soil Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Brawijaya, Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

<sup>d</sup> Department of Biology, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Brawijaya, Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

<sup>e</sup> Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Engineering, University of Brawijaya, Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** City branding is a marketing strategy aimed at building a positive image of a city, building differentiation and increasing the city's competitiveness as well as attracting tourists and investors.

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [beldie.tombeg@polimdo.ac.id](mailto:beldie.tombeg@polimdo.ac.id);

**Aims:** This study aims to determine the city branding strategy in the central area of Tomohon City and see the effectiveness of implementing this strategy in attracting tourists to visit.

**Methods:** This study used a descriptive qualitative method with data collection through interviews and documentation studies. Subjects on this research were conducted with 3 people from Tomohon City government representatives and 2 people from Tomohon City Tourism Office. The research site is in Tomohon City, focusing on its tourism area. The data analysis used in this research was conducted during data collection and used the interactive model of Miles and Huberman

**Findings:** The results of this study indicate that the government of Tomohon City together with stakeholders have implemented a city branding strategy that is in accordance with the Anholt city branding concept, although overall it has not been optimally implemented because it is only focused on promoting TIFF as an international event and the utilization of promotional media and community participation has not been optimal.

**Conclusion:** The Tomohon City Center area already has various cultural activities, characteristics, positive perceptions and names that are known as potentials that can be further developed to attract tourists to visit.

*Keywords: Strategy; City branding; visiting interest; tourism; Tomohon City.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the potential fields that can be developed for the economic progress of a region [1]. Because tourism has now become an additional source of foreign exchange for a region [2]. Now every region in Indonesia is competing to introduce their respective regional tourism sector, especially with regional autonomy regulations requiring districts or cities to live independently, including in tourism management [3]. Weaknesses in tourism at this time can be seen from the brand, which is considered not strong enough [4]. So, it is necessary to have a marketing strategy, one of which is through a branding strategy to introduce and market tourism brands to be better known by domestic and foreign tourists [5].

In the last two decades, city and regional governments have developed various promotional strategies conceptually known as city branding [6]. City branding is a concept in branding that aims to strengthen relationships and build a positive image of a city, differentiate the place from its competitors, attract tourists, investors, and increase trade [7]. Big cities worldwide have widely implemented city branding internationally and have proven to significantly impact the city's progress [8]. Such as the application of slogans and taglines to several cities, including Paris with its tagline "The City of Lights," New York with "I Love NY," and Hong Kong as "Asia's World City" [9], and many more. In Indonesia itself, the implementation of city branding has also been carried out in several cities such as Surabaya

with the tagline "Sparkling Surabaya," Solo with the "Spirit of Java, Yogyakarta with "Jogja Istimewa." Apart from these cities, one of the cities that also implements the city branding slogan based on the potential and local wisdom of the region is the City of Tomohon.

The city of Tomohon is one of the cities in North Sulawesi, which has a lot of tourism potential that can be further developed, both in the form of natural and cultural potential. Since 2008, the Tomohon City Government has been actively promoting Tomohon City as a City of Flowers with the slogan "Greet the World with Flowers." It organizes the Tomohon International Flower Festival (TIFF) as an international scale festival yearly. Along with the increasing recognition of the TIFF festival, various tourist areas in Tomohon are also being developed, including the central area of Tomohon City.

In efforts to develop tourism potential in the central area of Tomohon City after the COVID-19 pandemic, a city branding strategy is needed so that various promotional activities can increase tourists' interest in visiting again. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out further studies in viewing the city branding of Tomohon as a sustainable strategy so that the identity that has been built is more robust and easily remembered. Tomohon City was chosen for this study because the city has diverse natural potential. Tomohon City has a variety of natural attractions that are interesting to visit, such as Lake Linouw, Tomohon Prayer Hill, Mount Mahawu Nature Park, and others. Tomohon City also has a unique and interesting culture to

learn, such as the Tulude traditional ceremony, Kabasaran dance, and others. In addition, Tomohon City is located in North Sulawesi, which is one of the tourist destination provinces in Indonesia. Based on data from the Tomohon City Tourism Office, the number of tourist visits to Tomohon City in 2022 reached 1.2 million people [10]. This number increased by 10% compared to 2021. This increase in the number of tourist visits shows that Tomohon City has the potential to be developed into a better tourist area. This article was created to examine the application of city branding in the central area of Tomohon City and see the effectiveness of implementing this strategy by measuring hexagon city branding. This study also aims to find out the proper city branding strategy for attracting tourists to develop tourist areas in Tomohon City.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to determine the city branding strategy in the central area of Tomohon City and to see the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy in attracting tourists to visit. The selection of Tomohon City as the focus of development was based on the data and research findings to be presented. This research was conducted using open-ended interviews and documentary studies of the Tomohon City Government and the Tomohon City Tourism Office, which are directly related to the city branding strategy in the central area of Tomohon City.

Data collection in this research was conducted with open-ended interviews and documentation studies related to the city branding strategy in the central area of Tomohon City. The interviews were conducted with 3 people from Tomohon City government representatives and 2 people from Tomohon City Tourism Office. The documentation study was conducted by collecting supporting data in the field in the form of documentation, archives and journals related to the research. The research site is in Tomohon City, focusing on its tourism area.

The data analysis used in this research was conducted during data collection and used the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. In the interactive model, there are three types of analysis activities (data reduction, data

presentation, and conclusion drawing), and data collection itself is a cyclical and interactive process. In the first stage, the researchers collected the necessary data according to the topic, which was the city attraction strategy in Tomohon City. After data collection, data reduction involved categorizing, coding, and organizing to identify themes. Data display involves visual representation through graphs or diagrams, while the final stage involves drawing conclusions, which are verified through comparison and triangulation, and relating them to the city attraction strategy.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the analysis process was facilitated by coding and categorizing the interview data and documentation collected. Grouping informants allows researchers to compare and contrast information between different groups or individuals, thus supporting an understanding of the demographic context that influences informants' perspectives. The combination of coding and grouping informants ensured a systematic analysis of the interview data, resulting in reliable findings that enriched the understanding of the phenomenon under study.

### 3.1 City Branding Strategy for the Tomohon City Center Area

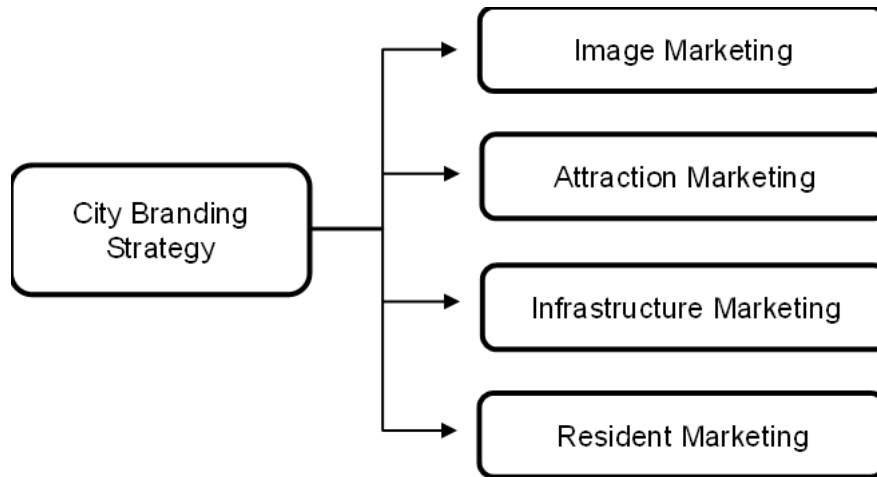
The implementation of the city branding strategy carried out by the local government in the Tomohon City Center Area includes marketing activities as follows:

### 3.2 Image Marketing (Image Marketing)

Image marketing includes the uniqueness and goodness of the image owned by a tourist area, often shown through slogans. In this case, the Tomohon City Center Area strengthens its image as the City of Flowers. The document that explicitly establishes the City of Flowers as the vision of the City of Tomohon is the 2016-2031 Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA), with the vision to make Tomohon the City of Flowers a comfortable, safe, creative, and sustainable tourism destination. Both Tomohon City Spatial Planning (RTRW) 2013-2033, with a vision to realize sustainable development in Tomohon City as an environmentally friendly City of Flowers supported by agriculture and ecotourism activities [11].

**Table 1. Research informants**

No	Scope	Participant Code	Gender	Position
1	Tomohon City Government	AYI	Male	Regional Secretary
		SIS	Female	Public Relations Staff
		FIS	Male	Head of the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda)
2.	Tomohon City Tourism Office	ALI	Female	Head of Tourism Office
		YAS	Male	Tourism Marketing Manager



**Picture 1. City branding strategy**

**The strategies determined to elevate the Kota Bunga brand include:**

a) Building city gates with different floral nuances and symbols as well as being landmarks for the region;  
 A city gate should be constructed at the entrance to Tomohon. The gate should be adorned with different floral shades and equipped with typical Tomohon symbols. This gate will serve as both an entrance and an iconic landmark, attracting the attention of tourists. According to research conducted by Loureiro & Sarmiento, [12], unique and iconic landmarks can become significant tourist attractions. Additionally, a case study of a flower-shaped city gate in Hitachi Seaside Park, Japan, demonstrated a 30% increase in the number of visitors after its construction. The flower-themed city gate will immediately convey Tomohon's identity as the City of Flowers. Different shades of flowers can represent the diversity of Tomohon's flora, while distinctive symbols add to the local wisdom. This gate will become a popular photo spot

and spread the image of Tomohon through social media.  
 b) Developing floricultural activities in the Tomohon City Center Area;  
 The proposal is to reorganize certain areas in the centre of Tomohon city into floriculture activity areas. These areas will include flower-themed gardens, flower-themed art galleries, cafes and restaurants with flower decorations, as well as workshops and educational classes about flower cultivation and processing. According to research conducted by (Wahyuni et al., 2023), agro-tourism-based tourism, including floriculture, has great potential to attract tourists. An example of successful floriculture development can be seen in Keukenhof, the Netherlands, which attracts over 1 million visitors annually [13]. Developing floriculture in Tomohon's city centre will enhance its floral beauty. Tourists can enjoy the flowers' beauty, learn about floriculture, and purchase various processed flower products as souvenirs. This will extend tourists' stay and increase local businesses' income.  
 c) Developing facilities to support flower

industry activities in the Tomohon City Center area, such as building flower windows and markets and making the "Tomohon International Flower Festival" (TIFF) event the highlight of the national tourism agenda.

The Tomohon City government's slogan was "We Greet the World With Flowers," or in English, "We Greet The World With Flowers." Unfortunately, until now, the Tomohon City Government has socialized the slogan "Tomohon Tough" or Tomohon Tranquil, Safe, Comfortable, Superior, and Living in Harmony, as seen on the city government's official website. So the image of the Tomohon City Center Region as the City of Flowers is not visible in any infrastructure or tourism activities and is remembered by the public. Mandic, Mrnjavac, & Kordic, [14] highlights the significance of infrastructure and supporting facilities for sustainable tourism development. International flower festivals, like the Rose Parade in Pasadena, United States, which attracts millions of visitors annually, have proven to be successful in drawing tourists [15]. Complete facilities will make it easier for flower businesses to attract tourists to purchase flowers. The TIFF is expected to become the main attraction of Tomohon tourism, potentially increasing tourist visits and enhancing the city's reputation on a national and international level.

### 3.3 Attraction Marketing

The Tomohon City Center area has a variety of attractions and natural beauty, historical buildings and places, parks and green spaces, convention and exhibition centres, and shopping and trade centres on the main road corridors in the Tomohon City Center area. One of the activities carried out by the City of Tomohon in attracting local and foreign tourists is holding an international standard activity, namely the Tomohon International Flower Festival abbreviated as TIFF, which has been held since 2008 and has become an annual event calendar of the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism. Other activities, such as art performances or cultural activities, are held in the Tomohon City Center area, including the Kulintang Festival, the Maengket Festival, the Ma'zani Festival, and the Kawasaran. The

attractiveness advantages of each tourist destination in the Tomohon City Center Area are then promoted through digital tourism through social media, websites, and so on. The City Government and the Tomohon City Tourism Office have also compiled a program to re-organize local cultural events on a regular and massive basis by mobilizing the community in every village, school, studio, and cultural community.

The statement above is supported by research conducted (Maharani & Setyowardhani, 2018), which demonstrated that local cultural events can be a significant tourist attraction. For instance, a case study of the Lake Toba Festival in North Sumatra revealed a 15% increase in the number of visitors after the festival was held [16]. This is because of the implementation of the Attraction Marketing Strategy, which involves promoting through social media and mass media, collaborating with travel agents and tours, and disseminating information through social networks and communities [17]. Reorganizing local cultural events regularly and on a massive scale is crucial for increasing tourist awareness of Tomohon's local culture, creating a positive image of it, and encouraging tourism. Therefore, implementing a program to reorganize local cultural events on a regular and massive basis is a strategic step towards developing Tomohon City's tourism. Attraction marketing can increase the success of this program by raising tourists' awareness of local Tomohon culture and encouraging them to visit Tomohon.

### 3.4 Infrastructure Marketing

The City of Tomohon has provided several infrastructures that support tourist attractions and ease of access to information. Some of them: providing accommodation in the form of 3-star scale lodging, increasing access or transportation by adding online transportation services, adding road corridors and pedestrian paths, building show windows as agro-tourism locations, maintaining flower markets, and building spaces and city gates that reflect the image of Flower City. Unfortunately, in building easy access to information, the Tomohon City Government has not yet provided a particular application and website that offers various information related to tourist attractions, transportation, and lodging for tourists.

The Tomohon City Government can provide special applications and websites that provide various information related to tourist attractions, transportation and accommodation for tourists. This application and website may include the following information: 1) A list of tourist attractions, complete with information about location, ticket prices, operating hours and facilities. 2) Information about transportation, including routes, schedules and fares. 3) Information about accommodation, including location, prices and facilities. 4) Information about events and activities currently taking place in Tomohon. 5) Information about culinary and shopping in Tomohon. And 6) Information about Tomohon culture and history. This application and website will make it easy for tourists to access the information they need. This can increase tourist comfort and encourage them to visit Tomohon.

Çapar & Aslan, [18] shows that ease of access to information is one of the important factors influencing tourists' decisions to visit a destination. The case study of the tourism application "Visit Jakarta" shows that this application has succeeded in increasing tourist visits to Jakarta by 10% [19]. Therefore, the Tomohon City Government can increase the ease of access to information for tourists by providing special applications and websites. This will support the development of Tomohon tourism and increase the number of tourist visits.

### 3.5 Resident Marketing

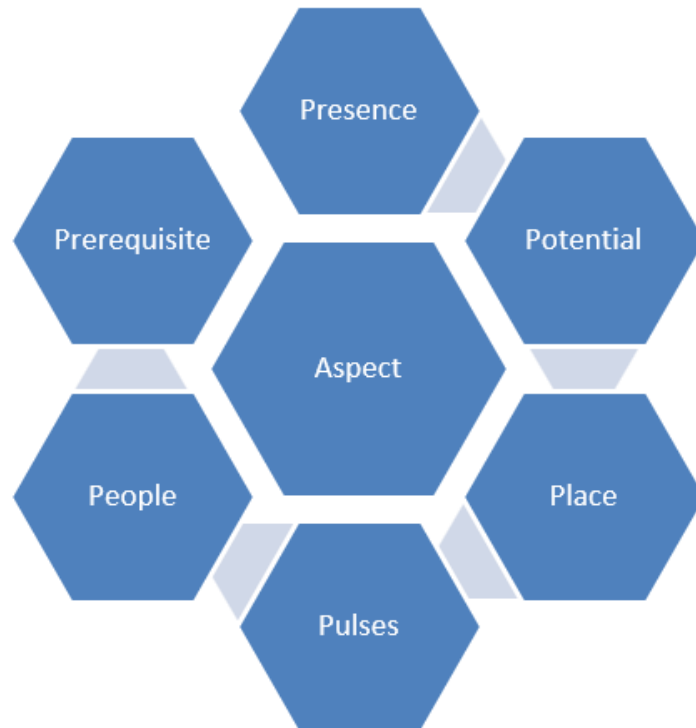
Community participation and support are urgently needed to create a conducive culture and climate for advancing tourism in the Tomohon City Center Area. Synergy among the stakeholders has been established but has yet to be maximized because participation is visible only in TIFF implementation. The involvement of the Tomohon community is most evident when the community is competing to make gardens for their respective sub-districts within the framework of TIFF activities. At the same time, flower farmer groups have yet to be fully involved. As for the private sector through entrepreneurs, the government has not been directly involved in strengthening the brand but has taken advantage of the potential of Tomohon City by presenting tourist attractions that rely on flowers as their attraction. The Tomohon City Government has subsequently

drawn up a plan to increase community participation by carrying out and facilitating training for creative tourism economy actors.

Creative tourism economic actors are individuals or groups involved in creativity-based tourism economic activities, such as arts, culture, culinary and crafts [20]. Community participation in tourism development is important because it can provide benefits, including increasing community understanding of tourism and its potential, increasing community skills and competence in the tourism sector, and improving the community's economy through tourism activities. The Tomohon City Government plans to increase community participation in the creative tourism economy by carrying out training for creative tourism economy actors. The government will hold skills training and business development programs in the field of creative tourism. This is in line with research by [21] showing that training for creative tourism economic actors can increase their knowledge, skills and motivation in developing tourism. A case study of training for creative tourism economic actors in Yogyakarta shows that this training was successful in increasing the number of tourist visits to Yogyakarta by 15% [22]. Tourism entrepreneurship training has a positive effect on community participation in developing creative tourism businesses (Duxbury et al., 2021). Training improves entrepreneurial skills and spirit.

The next way is to facilitate training for creative tourism economy actors. The government will provide support for facilities, funding and access to creative tourism training. Government support for training facilitation, business capital and marketing of creative products is a key factor in the success of developing the creative economy [23]. This support encourages community participation. The development of sustainable and participatory local community-based creative tourism has succeeded in improving community welfare in several areas [24]. This kind of development pattern needs to continue to be encouraged. Thus, it can be concluded that the Tomohon City Government's efforts are in line with research results regarding the importance of training and facilitation to increase community participation in the creative tourism economy.

The Effectiveness of City Branding Strategy for Tomohon City in Attracting Tourists' Interest in Visiting.



Picture 2. Six aspects analysis

**3.6 Following are the Results of the Analysis of Six Aspects which show that the City Branding Strategy in the Tomohon City Center Area in Attracting Tourists Visiting Bypasses has been Running Effectively:**

**3.6.1 Presence**

This aspect is used to measure a city's branding based on a town's international status. Since 2008, Tomohon City has been widely recognized for holding the Tomohon International Flower Festival (TIFF), which has developed into an annual international event. This increases the potential for other tourist objects in the Tomohon City Center Area to be more widely known by local and foreign tourists.

**3.6.2 Potential**

This aspect is used to measure the branding of a city based on economic and educational opportunities in a city. The town of Tomohon is in a mountainous area with a mountainous and hilly topography, making agriculture a leading sector. There are various types of plants cultivated in Tomohon City. Because of the cold

and cool mountain climate, this attracts investors to build lodging in villas or hotels. Even the Tomohon City Center area's shopping and trading area is decorated with various types of flowers cultivated by regional farmers.

**3.6.3 Place**

This aspect is used to measure the branding of a city based on people's perceptions of the physical parts of each town. The Tomohon City Center area has cool air, which can provide comfort for the community to enjoy urban space, and has well-managed infrastructure and urban planning. These various physical aspects have improved the community's welfare and increased the number of tourist visits; based on data from the Tomohon City Tourism Office, in 2022, the number of visits by local or domestic tourists will reach 416,671 people (Bapan Pusat Statistik Kota Tomohon, 2020). The many tourist visits show the community's reaction to Tomohon City is perfect.

**3.6.4 Pulses**

This aspect is used to measure the branding of a city based on the perception that there are exciting things in a town, whether it's activities

or events that can fill spare time or attract visitors' interest. The Tomohon City Center area currently has 96 tourist destinations divided into 61 natural objects, eight artificial objects, and 27 cultural tourism objects [25]. The TIFF event is an annual festival leading a tour of the City of Tomohon.

### 3.6.5 People

This aspect is used to measure city branding based on how friendly the residents are, what communities exist in the community, and how the area can provide a sense of security for visitors. The Tomohon City Center area has offered various services to give every visitor a sense of satisfaction and security. The availability of services at tourist attractions begins with daily needs services such as food vendors, drink stalls, or snacks, then trade services such as sales assistants, carpenters, or other services, services for convenience and pleasure such as clothing stores, household furniture stores, then services related to the security and safety of doctors, pharmacies, police and firefighters, and many other tourist services.

### 3.6.6 Prerequisite

This aspect is used to measure city branding based on the quality of a city, whether it is satisfactory, has standard public facilities such as schools, hospitals, transportation, and sports facilities. Tomohon City, in terms of vehicles, already has transportation facilities that reach all areas, from public transit and taxis to transportation to explore tourist villages. Educational facilities are available in the Tomohon City Center area: the Bethesda Academy, GMIM II Tomohon Elementary School, Caritas Catholic High School, Gonzaga Catholic Middle School, St. Familya, and Stella Marris Catholic Middle School. Worship facilities, namely the GPD Church and the Hati Kudus Catholic Church. As well as other facilities include the shopping centre area, culinary, Bethesda General Hospital, and RTH, Alfa Omega Park.

City branding has a vital role in building a city's brand so that it is better known by the public and attracts tourists and investors [26]. City branding is a form of marketing promoting a positive image of a tourist destination to influence tourists' decisions [27]. City branding has become a strategy for city and regional

governments worldwide to improve the image of their cities to the global community [28-31].

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been done, it is known that the Central Region of Tomohon City has implemented a city branding strategy to have differentiation and identity as the City of Flowers. However, the city government and stakeholders have yet to implement this strategy optimally. Overall, the marketing of Tomohon as a city of flowers still needs to be improved because the Tomohon City Government is more focused on creating international events, and the use of mass media and website/internet advertisements is not optimal. Implementing these components is not optimal and still leads to the promotion of the International Flower Festival. At the same time, there are many potential tourist objects in the Tomohon City Center Area. On the other hand, the Tomohon City Center area already has various cultural activities, characteristics, positive perceptions, and a name that is widely known as the organizer of international TIFF events. So that the Tomohon City Center Area has the potential to be further developed and managed to form an identity and uniqueness as a Flower City that can attract tourists to visit.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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