

The Application Of Branding Concepts In Tourism Villages: Building Local Destination Identity In Banyubiru Subdistrict, Semarang Regency

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Abstract: This research examines the application of branding concepts in the development of tourism villages in Banyubiru District, Semarang Regency. Tourism villages as a form of community-based tourism require appropriate branding strategies to build strong and sustainable destination identities. This descriptive qualitative research used data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies involving local stakeholders. The results show that the application of branding concepts has succeeded in increasing tourist awareness and local community participation, although some challenges were found in implementation consistency. The development of local destination identity through a branding approach has proven to contribute to increasing tourist visits and village economic sustainability. This research recommends strengthening branding strategies through community involvement and managing local assets as elements of differentiation.

Keywords: Destination Branding, Tourism Village, Local Identity, Banyubiru, Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism in the form of tourism villages has developed rapidly in recent years as an alternative for sustainable local economic development. According to Hadiwijoyo (2012), a tourism village is a rural area that offers an overall atmosphere reflecting the authenticity of rural life, both from the socio-economic and socio-cultural life, customs, and has distinctive architectural buildings and village spatial structures. This uniqueness becomes an attraction for tourists, especially in experience-based tourism which is increasingly in demand today. Banyubiru Subdistrict in Semarang Regency has various tourism potentials, ranging from the natural beauty of Rawa Pening, local cultural traditions, to distinctive handicrafts that have the potential to become leading tourist attractions. However, like many other rural tourism destinations in Indonesia, villages in Banyubiru Subdistrict face challenges in building a strong identity as a competitive tourist destination. This situation provides an opportunity to apply the concept of destination branding as a strategy to build a unique and sustainable tourism identity.

Destination branding, according to Morgan et al. (2011), is an effort to create a unique identity for a destination that distinguishes it from competitors. In tourism villages, branding is not just about creating a logo or slogan, but includes strategic efforts to communicate the authentic values possessed by a destination. This study aims to analyze the process of applying the branding concept in building the local destination identity in the tourism villages of Banyubiru Subdistrict, Semarang Regency, as well as identifying the factors that influence the success of the process. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the development of a destination branding model that is suitable for tourism villages in Indonesia, especially those focusing on the preservation of local values while optimizing the economic

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potential of the local community. As stated by Anholt (2007), the right branding approach can be a catalyst for sustainable local economic development while strengthening the cultural identity of the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination Branding Concept

Destination branding is a tourism development strategy that focuses on forming a unique identity of a place to distinguish it from other destinations. According to Ritchie and Ritchie (1998), destination branding is “a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that identifies and differentiates a destination; further, it promises a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with that destination.” Research by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) emphasizes that destination branding is not only about promotion, but also about the formation of an identity that reflects the authentic values of a place. Pike (2005) identifies five main components in destination branding: brand identity, brand positioning, brand image, brand essence, and brand personality. In tourism villages, Echtner and Ritchie (2003) argue that the destination image formed through branding plays an important role in the decision-making process of tourists to visit a destination. In line with this, Baker (2007) asserts that destinations that successfully build a strong brand will be more resilient in the increasingly intense global competition.

Tourism Villages as a Sustainable Tourism Product

The concept of tourism villages has developed as a model of sustainable tourism development based on community participation. Nuryanti (1993) defines a tourism village as a form of integration between attractions, accommodation, and supporting facilities presented within a structure of community life that is united with existing customs and traditions. Inskeep (1991) highlights the importance of community participation in the development of tourism villages to ensure sustainability and equitable distribution of economic benefits. Research by Damanik and Weber (2006) shows that sustainable tourism villages must be able to maintain a balance between economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects. Dewi et al. (2013) found that successful tourism village development in Indonesia generally involves strong community-based tourism management. Hadiwijoyo (2012) further identifies several criteria of a successful tourism village, including strong local uniqueness, high community support, and readiness of basic infrastructure.

Branding in Tourism Villages

The application of branding concepts in tourism villages has different characteristics compared to urban destination branding or mass tourism destinations. Morgan and Pritchard (2004) argue that branding in tourism villages must emphasize authenticity and experiences based on local culture. Research by Balakrishnan (2009) identifies five dimensions that need to be considered in rural tourism destination branding: physical attributes, tourist experience, community cultural identity, destination values, and stakeholder engagement. Previous research by Prasiasa (2013) in several tourism villages in Indonesia shows that branding success is greatly influenced by consistency in communicating local values and the active involvement of the community as “brand ambassadors.” In line with this, Saleh et al. (2019) found that tourism villages that successfully build a strong brand generally have a clear storyline about the unique local features they offer. In local economic development, Aaker (2012) emphasizes that tourism village branding can be an instrument to increase the value of local products and expand market reach. This is reinforced by research by Hermantoro (2011), which shows a positive correlation between the strength of a tourism village brand and the increase in local community income as well as the diversification of micro, small, and medium enterprises around the destination.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Approach and Type

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research type. The qualitative approach was chosen as it is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena such as destination branding, which involves various stakeholders with diverse perceptions (Creswell, 2014). This approach enables the researcher to observe the branding implementation process and how it influences the formation of destination identity in the tourism villages of Banyubiru Sub-district.

Research Location and Period

The research was conducted in three tourism villages in Banyubiru Sub-district, Semarang Regency, which have implemented branding concepts in their tourism development: Rowoboni Village, Kebondowo Village, and Tegaron Village. The selection of locations was based on the diversity of tourism village characteristics, offering different attractions ranging from the natural tourism of Rawa Pening, cultural tourism, to craft tourism. The research was conducted over six months, from January to June 2024.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using several techniques:

1. **Participatory Observation**
The researcher participated in various tourism activities and community events to directly observe the implementation of the branding concept in the operation of the tourism villages.
2. **Interviews**
Conducted with key informants consisting of tourism village managers, community leaders, local business actors, village government officials, district tourism office representatives, and tourists. A total of 25 informants were selected using purposive sampling.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**
Three FGDs were conducted involving various stakeholders to obtain collective perspectives on the implementation of tourism village branding.
4. **Document Study**
Analyzed relevant documents such as tourism village development plans, promotional materials, media coverage, tourist visit statistics, and related policy documents.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis used the interactive model by Miles and Huberman (2014), consisting of three components conducted simultaneously:

1. **Data Reduction**
The process of selecting, simplifying, and transforming raw data from field notes.
2. **Data Display**
Organizing the data into coherent descriptions to facilitate conclusion drawing.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification**
Interpreting the meaning of the analyzed data and verifying it through source and method triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Tourist Villages in Banyubiru Sub-District

Banyubiru Sub-District has three main tourist villages that are the focus of this research. Rowoboni Village is known for Rawa Pening tourism and traditional fish-catching practices using local fish cages (keramba). Kebondowo Village excels in cultural tourism, offering traditional rituals and art performances. Meanwhile, Tegarong Village highlights bamboo weaving crafts and distinctive local cuisine as its main attractions. These three villages have different geographical and socio-cultural characteristics but face similar challenges in tourism development, namely competition with more popular tourist destinations in Semarang Regency. Data from the Semarang Regency Tourism Office (2022) shows that the number of tourist visits to villages in Banyubiru Sub-District is still relatively low compared to popular destinations such as Gedong Songo Temple or Bandungan.

Implementation of Branding Concept in Tourist Villages

This research found that the implementation of branding in the three tourist villages in Banyubiru Sub-District was carried out through several strategic stages:

1. Identification of Local Uniqueness

Each village identified potential factors that could become their unique selling proposition (USP). For instance, Rowoboni Village emphasized "The Life of Rawa Pening Fishermen" as the main theme of its branding. As the Head of Rowoboni Village stated: "We explore the potential that is truly unique and not possessed by other villages. The life of fishermen in Rawa Pening with its traditions and local wisdom sets us apart from other tourist villages." (Interview, February 15, 2024)

2. Brand Identity Development

Each village developed brand identity elements such as logos, taglines, and narratives that reflect the unique characteristics of the village. For instance, Kebondowo Village uses the tagline "The Village of a Thousand Traditions," which reflects the rich cultural heritage it possesses.

3. Brand Communication

Brand communication strategies were implemented through various channels, including social media, brochures, and collaboration with tourism stakeholders such as travel agencies and tourism associations. The manager of Tegarong Tourist Village explained: "Social media has become the spearhead of our communication. We consistently upload content showcasing bamboo crafts and local cuisine to build awareness." (Interview, March 5, 2024)

4. Brand Experience

The implementation of the brand in the form of tourist experiences through travel packages, activities, and services that are consistent with the brand promises. For example, Rowoboni Village developed the "A Day as a Rawa Pening Fisherman" tourism package, which allows visitors to experience the authentic life of local fishermen.

The Role of the Community in the Branding Process

This study found that community involvement is a crucial factor in the success of branding for tourist villages. In Kebondowo Village, the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis), consisting of local residents, plays an active role as "brand ambassadors" who communicate the values of the village to tourists. As stated by the Chairperson of Pokdarwis: "We invite every resident to understand our village brand, so when interacting with tourists, they can convey consistent values." (Interview, February 20, 2024). On the other hand, the research also identified challenges in building a uniform understanding among the community about the branding concept. Some residents still view branding as merely a promotional activity, rather than a comprehensive strategy that involves all aspects of tourism village development. This

aligns with the findings of Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), who emphasized the importance of internal understanding before communicating the brand externally.

Impact of Branding on Tourism Village Development

The implementation of the branding concept has resulted in several positive impacts on the development of tourism villages in Banyubiru District:

1. Increase in Tourist Visits

Data from tourism village managers show a trend of increased tourist visits following the implementation of consistent branding strategies. For example, Rowoboni Village experienced a 45% increase in visits in 2022 compared to the previous year.

2. Diversification of Community Businesses

Strong branding has encouraged the emergence of tourism-supporting businesses managed by local communities, such as homestays, local food, and handicrafts. One MSME actor in Tegarom Village said: "Since our village became known for bamboo handicrafts branding, demand for our products has increased. We have also started developing new product variants that are more modern, yet still maintain traditional techniques." (Interview, April 12, 2024)

3. Strengthening Cultural Identity

Branding that focuses on local values has driven the preservation and revitalization of local traditions and culture. In Kebondowo Village, for instance, cultural rituals that had previously been abandoned were revived as part of an authentic tourist attraction.

4. Increased Community Participation

Branding strategies that involve various elements of society have encouraged broader participation in tourism development. As stated by the Head of the Semarang District Tourism Office: "We see that the community-based branding model in Banyubiru has successfully increased the sense of ownership among residents for the tourism village development program." (Interview, May 25, 2024)

Challenges and Branding Strengthening Strategies

This study also identifies several challenges in the implementation of branding in tourism villages:

1. Consistency in Implementation

It was found that there is inconsistency between the brand promise communicated and the actual experience received by tourists. This is particularly related to the quality of services and supporting facilities that are still inadequate.

2. Limited Human Resources

The capacity of local human resources to understand and implement the branding concept is still limited, especially in terms of managing digital media for brand communication.

3. Coordination Among Stakeholders

Coordination between the village government, tourism village managers, and local business actors in communicating a consistent brand message still needs improvement.

Strategies for Strengthening Branding

To overcome the identified challenges, several branding strengthening strategies have been implemented:

1. Training and Mentorship

The Department of Tourism, in collaboration with universities, has provided training on branding concepts and their implementation for tourism village managers and local communities.

2. Development of a Strong Storyline

Each village has developed a compelling narrative about its local uniqueness, which facilitates consistent brand communication.

3. Involvement of the Younger Generation

The younger generation is actively involved in managing social media and developing digital content to strengthen brand communication.

4. Regular Monitoring and Evaluation

Periodic evaluations are conducted to assess tourists' perceptions and the implementation of the brand, ensuring consistency and continuous improvement.

Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of branding concepts in tourism villages in Banyubiru District, Semarang Regency, has positively contributed to the development of a strong and sustainable local destination identity. Through the process of identifying local uniqueness, developing brand identity, consistent brand communication, and implementing it in the form of tourist experiences, the tourism villages in Banyubiru have succeeded in creating a distinctive image that differentiates them from other destinations. The active involvement of the community in the branding process has been a key success factor, although challenges remain regarding the understanding of the branding concept and implementation consistency. The positive impacts of branding are seen in the increased number of tourist visits, diversification of community businesses, strengthening of cultural identity, and increased community participation in tourism development.

To strengthen tourism village branding in the future, comprehensive strategies are needed, including enhancing the capacity of local human resources, developing strong storylines based on local wisdom, involving the younger generation in digital communication, and conducting periodic monitoring and evaluation to ensure consistency in brand implementation. Furthermore, better coordination among tourism stakeholders is needed to communicate the brand message consistently and expand the market reach. This study provides theoretical contributions to the development of a contextual branding model for tourism destinations in Indonesia, as well as practical contributions to the development of sustainable and community-based tourism destination branding strategies.

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