

Cultural Tourism Branding in Kuta Traditional Village, Ciamis - West Java

<http://dx.doi.org/10.25008/jkiski.v10i2.1233>

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Submitted: May 20, 2025, **Revised:** August, 26 2025, **Accepted:** December 5, 2025
Accredited by Kemristekdikti No. 152/E/KPT/2023 until Vol 12(1) in 2027

Abstract - The Kuta Ciamis Traditional Village is one of the Sundanese indigenous communities that still preserves its ancestral heritage. The existence of the Kuta Traditional Village to this day is inseparable from the combination of natural beauty, traditional cultural heritage, and mystical aura maintained by the local residents from generation to generation. Located on the border of West Java and Central Java, the uniqueness and local wisdom found in Kuta Village are the main elements in forming a strong and attractive branding for tourists. This study aims to determine and explain how the branding process of Kuta Traditional Village as one of the cultural tourism destinations based on local wisdom in West Java was formed. The research method was carried out qualitatively by collecting data through observations about the lives of indigenous residents and the existence of traditional institutions, interviews with traditional leaders and literature studies from documents, books, journals and other relevant references about indigenous communities. The results of the study indicate that the branding of the "Sacred Cultural Village" in Kuta Traditional Village is reflected in the local cultural identity and traditional symbols communicated to the public interpersonally and through the media. The conclusion of the study shows that the formation of cultural tourism branding is a marketing communication strategy for tourism destinations based on local wisdom in West Java which can strengthen community participation in preserving local cultural identity values and increasing visibility, interest, and tourist visits.

Keywords: *Branding; Local Wisdom; Communication; Indigenous Peoples; Sacred*

Introduction

Indigenous communities possess a noble cultural identity in sustainably managing their places and territorial environments. Their existence is characterized by adherence to and steadfast adherence to their traditional character and ancestral belief systems (Sumarlini et al., 2022); hereditary, friendly, living together and having a binding system of customs, and having a traditional leader (Mangumpaus & Permana, 2022). Maintaining traditional cultural values and local wisdom through the preservation of natural resources and social behavior is the primary foundation for indigenous communities to survive today.

The local wisdom found within indigenous communities typically encompasses historical values, traditions, cultural rituals, and belief systems that are still firmly held by each generation. As society experiences changes in sociocultural values, local cultures within indigenous communities are also beginning to experience erosion and erosion, becoming vulnerable to change. Yet, the existence of indigenous communities is a key pillar in preserving the noble traditions of their ancestors, enabling them to face the challenges of an increasingly globalized era. In Indonesia, there are more than 2,000 indigenous communities spread throughout the archipelago. Various terms refer to these communities, including Indigenous Communities, Remote Indigenous Communities, and Indigenous Legal Communities (Mangumpaus & Permana, 2022). The main characteristics of a society categorized as an indigenous society are its distinctive culture, language, local traditions, territory, and history. Indigenous communities are groups with a distinct cultural identity, traditions, and way of life, which have been passed down from generation to generation as a social institution worthy of emulation.

On the other hand, the values of local wisdom practiced by indigenous communities are key to and the identity of cultural tourism objects. Through their rich culture and traditions, rituals and beliefs, the Kuta Traditional Village community plays a crucial role in preserving local knowledge and culture amidst the increasingly widespread flow of globalization. Recent scientific findings confirm that indigenous community imagery can empower communities and preserve culture if the strategy is authentic, community-based, and sensitive to the local context (Raja et al., 2022). In cultural tourism, preserving local culture serves as social capital and a form of respect for the ancestors of indigenous communities.

A study by Jasmine (2023) confirms that local culture plays a crucial role in creating prosperity, preserving, and sustaining natural resources (Jasmine et al., 2023). Meanwhile, (Dharmawibawa, 2019) explains that the local wisdom of indigenous communities is usually related to the preservation of nature and culture which needs to be internalized, practiced, and passed down from generation to generation and internalized in the souls and daily actions of the community members (Senoaji, 2011). Furthermore, (Suparmini et al., 2013) explains that local wisdom exists in the cognitive, affective, and motoric domains of society. While research (Suryawan, 2023) states that local wisdom is a complex, collaborative activity that involves members of indigenous communities.

Internalizing various traditional elements within a community creates a distinctive and unique identity that can be used to brand cultural tourism destinations based on local wisdom. In tourism marketing, introducing traditional elements is part of the cultural promotion process to attract tourists to traditional areas. Integrating local cultural values into sustainable marketing strategies can increase the competitiveness of destinations and empower local communities (Meditama et al., 2024). Strong and effective branding helps improve the image of traditional villages, the number of visitors, and the economic value of local communities.

This is consistent with research showing that developing community-based tourism can increase brand awareness and attract visitors (Abdurrozaq & Deni, 2023); branding a tourism object can be done by utilizing marketing and media (Prayudi & Herastuti, 2020); using taglines, elaborating on tourist objects & cultural attractions, and strengthening local cultural identity (Ohorella & Prihantoro, 2021); and promoted through advertising (Afdhal et al., 2022). The challenges in managing, developing and strengthening branding in indigenous communities in West Java are relevant in the context of globalization and strengthening cultural identity, especially in the Kuta Ciamis Traditional Village.



Figure 1. Geography Map of Kuta Traditional Village
Source: Archives of Customary Institutions, 2023

Geographically, the Kuta Traditional Village is situated in a valley, flanked by rolling hills and dense green forests, offering a captivating exotic landscape. Other views include expanses of rice paddies, fields, plantations, traditional settlements, and the simple social and cultural life of the Kuta indigenous people. The simplicity of life in the Kuta Traditional Village offers the potential for unique and distinctive cultural tourism. The strong negative stigma and social framing of the indigenous community, perceived as old-fashioned and "far from modern civilization," presents both a challenge and an opportunity for tourism destination managers.

However, this negative stigma does not necessarily reflect the reality. There is much to be explored, including the natural and cultural potential of the Kuta Traditional Village, which has not been fully utilized to support cultural tourism initiatives initiated by traditional leaders, traditional institutions, and the Ciamis Regency Government Tourism Office. The tourism sector is a future industry and a key pillar of local revenue, driving economic growth. (Situmeang, 2020).

Amidst the increasingly powerful influence of modernization, the residents of the Kuta Traditional Village face significant challenges in preserving local customs and traditions. As the tourism "business" sector develops, a destination area is required to have a distinctive branding identity for easy recognition by the wider public. The branding attached to the Kuta Traditional Village area is no exception, as it will create a certain preference in the minds of the community if packaged and managed well. Public interpretation of a product can be influenced by their existing knowledge and information.

To date, activities to introduce the area and the lives of the residents of the Kuta Traditional Village have been less successful due to the lack of fully explored and socialized cultural potential and local wisdom. In fact, performances of arts and cultural attractions, traditional rituals, and local culinary delights by the residents of the Kuta Traditional Village are often held to attract the general public. Furthermore, the popularity of a cultural tourism attraction also depends on how the management brands or promotes its customs and cultural potential. Successful branding efforts typically have a positive impact on the indigenous community, particularly in economic and welfare aspects.

The researchers found several similar literatures indicating that existing destination branding models, such as those developed from the Aaker and Keller framework (Keller, 2013), have begun to incorporate the dimension of cultural brand assets. This is evident in research on the cities of Semarang (Soetjipto & Satyagraha, 2020), Solo (Luqmanul Hakim & Syaodih, 2024), and Yogyakarta (Mansur & Muhammad, 2024), which have successfully utilized local cultural assets to attract tourists. Meanwhile, for indigenous community destinations, which tend to be more conservative than commodified urban destinations, a branding model that is easily recognized, unique, and remains attractive to visitors is needed. The uniqueness of the Kuta Traditional Village tourist destination can be created from community habits born from a prescriptive heritage model in the form of firmly held customary rules or prohibitions, which foster a sense of awe, awareness, and a desire for visitors to participate in preserving the traditional area.

The unique potential of the Kuta Traditional Village can be developed as a cultural tourism destination. However, without a branding strategy that is communicated in a structured manner to the wider community, the cultural values and uniqueness of the Kuta Traditional Village will not have any impact on improving the welfare of its residents. Based on the above background, this study aims to explore the phenomenon of the formation of branding within the Kuta Traditional Village community in supporting the development of a cultural tourism destination based on local wisdom by describing understandings derived from the perspectives of traditional chiefs, traditional figures, and other members of the general indigenous community.

Theoretical Framework

Branding has long existed as a means of distinguishing an object. Today, branding plays a number of important roles and functions in improving lives, including increasing economic and financial value. Through branding, a mental structure can be created that helps individuals manage knowledge about a product or service to form the basis for decision-making and provide a valuable impact for the company/institution.

In the context of cultural tourism, branding indigenous communities is crucial because it can serve as a communication strategy and a medium for tourism promotion. The existence of cultural

branding has the potential to influence visitors' perceptions of a tourism object, both relationally and emotionally. The following is a conceptual explanation that supports this research:

Indigenous Communities

Indigenous communities are groups of people with a systematic system of norms that serve as a guideline for their social lives, such as farming methods, environmental stewardship, traditional calendars, belief systems, and so on. Indigenous communities are distinct communities with distinct characteristics. According to Tawadin (2010), the term "indigenous legal communities" was first introduced by Cornelius van Vollenhoven. They are organized groups of people who reside in a specific area, possess their own authority, and possess their own wealth, both tangible and intangible, (Rachman, 2019).

The values of local wisdom inherited from the ancestors of the Indonesian people, which are still present and preserved, can be found within indigenous communities (Sukmayadi, 2018). According to Konradus (2018), indigenous communities are ethnic groups living in an independent country whose social, cultural, and economic conditions differ from other communities, which have their own economic, cultural, and political institutions (Chairul, 2019). The term used by indigenous communities for certain places in West Java is also called *Kasepuhan*.

Kasepuhan is defined as a Sundanese customary unit or customary community tasked with preserving native Sundanese culture, such as shared norms and customs, in terms of agriculture, social institutions, belief systems, and environmental knowledge (forest utilization) that can adapt to modern culture (Rahmawati et al., 2016). In this context, the existence of indigenous communities that uphold the values of their cultural traditions will strengthen tourist attractions so that the extinction of a tradition can be maintained through the branding formed within the indigenous community.

Local Wisdom

Etymologically, local wisdom consists of two words: wisdom and local, meaning local, while wisdom is synonymous with wisdom. Therefore, etymologically, local wisdom can be defined as local ideas that are wise, full of wisdom, and have good values, embedded in and followed by members of the community (Maridi, 2022). Other authors state that local wisdom is a system of values/behaviors of local communities that interact wisely within a specific environment (Yunus, 2014). Therefore, the values of local wisdom will vary from region to region.

Furthermore, (Negara, 2011) states that local wisdom concerns not only the knowledge or understanding of indigenous/local communities about humans and how to maintain good relationships between them, but also the knowledge, understanding, and customs about humans and nature, and how these relationships are experienced, practiced, taught, and passed down from one generation to the next. Thus, local wisdom is knowledge held by a community from generation to generation, implemented in their daily lives and proven to benefit those who adhere to it.

The existence of indigenous communities is inextricably linked to the issue of local wisdom. In every socio-cultural system, indigenous peoples adhere to various forms of knowledge, including values, norms, and specific rules, which are still practiced, adhered to, and maintained to this day. The preservation of this local wisdom serves to preserve natural resources, prevent environmental damage, and regulate the use of natural resources in their environment.

Local wisdom, as it relates to cultural tourism, can encompass the values of the way of life and customs of indigenous peoples in living their lives dependent on nature, manifested in rituals and ceremonies, or norms, including recommendations and prohibitions, to preserve natural resources and behavior. Tangible local wisdom originates from and stems from the noble values agreed upon by the inhabitants of a particular region. Likewise, the local wisdom found in the Kuta Traditional Village is a social capital that supports and characterizes the implementation of cultural tourism activities in the Ciamis area, West Java.

Branding

Branding is crucial for the sustainability of a product or service, and a brand's success depends heavily on its communication with its audience. Essentially, branding is a proprietary name for a product, service, or group. Branding is the collection of tangible and emotional characteristics of a product or service that differentiate it from others in the market (Egan, 2015). A brand is a name,

term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, that serves as the identity of a product or service. Consumers view a brand as an essential part of a product, and branding adds value to a product (Kotler et al., 2017). More broadly, a brand is the sum total of all functional and emotional assets of a product, service, or category that differentiate it from competitors (Mone et al., 2022). Branding is the process of building a brand to create an image (Afdhal et al., 2022). A successful brand is a product, service, person, or place whose added value can be identified and is relevant and unique to the public's needs. In addition, the success of a brand is the ability to maintain added value over its competitors (Comission, 2005).

In the competitive tourism business, branding facilitates the classification and naming of tourist destinations, including marine tourism, nature tourism, culture tourism, and artificial tourism (tourist attractions). Tourist destinations in Indonesia can be categorized as cultural tourism, nature tourism, and artificial tourism (Hariyanto, 2016). In this context, indigenous communities are included in cultural tourism, offering tourism services characterized by distinctiveness, uniqueness, and superior socio-cultural identity based on local wisdom. Indigenous communities also play a crucial role in maintaining cultural diversity and natural resources, prioritizing harmony, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Cultural tourism destination branding is not merely a symbol or logo, but rather a source of inspiration and a defining characteristic of a destination's identity within the community. Destination branding encompasses the overall image that emerges in the minds of the general public when they think of the destination. The image can encompass both tangible and abstract attributes, including the psychological and sociological aspects of the destination. Strong branding is crucial for developing local wisdom-based tourism destinations.

Similar research shows that branding through strengthening an object's identity is always associated with branding, image, and reputation. Reputation is measured by the shape of a brand's logo (Adhrianti & Aditia, 2025). Meanwhile, tourist destinations contribute to regional revenue and image (Rakhmawati et al., 2023). The literature review emphasizes the importance of branding for a product/service or place that is consistent, attractive, and easily recognized by various levels of society. Branding a place can be effectively achieved through continuous communication. Through branding, the role of indigenous communities with their cultural identity and "old-fashioned" local traditions plays a crucial role in supporting the development of sustainable cultural tourism destinations based on local wisdom.

Types of tourism that can be developed in indigenous communities include nature tourism, religious tourism, cultural tourism, culinary tourism, and traditional arts tourism. Until now, indigenous communities have been known only for their "old-fashioned" culture and traditions. However, behind these traditions and cultures lies potential that can be a source for developing tourism attractions, in addition to maritime and nature tourism destinations. Cultural tourism, in particular, serves as a brand identity marketed to the wider community. Brand identity is the unique personality a brand projects to the world, encompassing its values, beliefs, and character (Bolder, 2024).

The formation of the Kuta Traditional Village branding is inseparable from the stakeholders of this traditional area who introduced customary values, local traditions, and taboo cultural practices that were communicated verbally and nonverbally and published in various communication media. When linked to the concept of beliefs and prohibitions that exist in the Kuta Traditional Village, an appropriate branding name that can reflect the spiritual values and local wisdom found in the area, namely Sacred Cultural Village. This confirms that this village has high cultural and spiritual values and is respected by the community and illustrates the importance of prohibitions or taboos and beliefs in ancestral powers are still firmly held and implemented in the daily lives of the residents of the Kuta Traditional Village.

Destination Branding

Destination branding is a branding concept that aims to improve the brand quality of a tourist destination. Destination branding is often interpreted as a more comprehensive form of place promotion (Morgan and Pritchard, 2001; Keller, 2003). The main goal is to attract more tourists, investors, and residents to a particular destination. The functions of a destination branding on a broad scale will increase tourism visits and improve the image of a destination, including: identification

functions, quality assurance, prestige, product differentiation, loyalty, and market segmentation. Destination Brand has a meaning that is not limited to slogans, taglines, destination logos, and so on. A destination brand must encompass the entire destination, which includes values, philosophy, culture, and the expectations of the community or stakeholders within the destination. The components in the formation of destination branding are tourism, people, governance, export, investment, culture, and heritage (Farhanas, 2018).

Cultural Branding

Cultural branding is building a reputation for the environment and people of a particular location or nationality. Cultural branding is the activity of showcasing a particular culture within a society as a way of identifying that society to the outside world. Cultural branding is the effort to provide an identity or brand tailored to the reputation, culture, and customs of a nation, location, or people from a particular region. Cultural branding itself is the activity of showcasing a particular culture within a society as a way of identifying that society to the outside world. Cultural branding adds a crucial strategic perspective for market strategy purposes, particularly in developing new businesses and revitalizing dying ones (Holt, 2012).

Brand culture can support a product's brand values, communicated and promised to stakeholders regarding its activities and behaviors, which will help define the brand community (Balmer, 2006). A key aspect of brand culture and community is its ability to transcend traditional internal/external organizational boundaries and even reach diverse organizational groups. Therefore, brand culture is not only relevant to customers, but also to employees, potential employees, investors, business partners, and can also accommodate the government and media (Balmer, 2006).

Cultural Tourism

Based on its geographical distribution, the Kuta Traditional Village was designated as a cultural tourism destination by the Ciamis Regency Government due to its unique cultural diversity and attractiveness. Culture plays a crucial role in the development of the tourism sector, utilizing cultural resources as the primary source of attractions and activities. Therefore, cultural tourism is tourism based on cultural elements within a specific region or area, including historical buildings and sites, traditional art, customary and religious rituals, philosophies or belief systems held by local communities, traditional clothing, and food and beverage products that attract and attract tourists..

Material and Methodology

This research applies qualitative methods. According to Marshal (1995) in Sarwono (2006), qualitative research is a process that seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of human interactions (Fateqah & Nuswardhani, 2024). By using qualitative research, in-depth data will be obtained regarding the process of branding formation in the Kuta Traditional Village community. This research paradigm uses a post-positivism paradigm, which recognizes that social reality is not entirely objective and measurable, but can be influenced by the social context and individual interactions (Bungin, 2008).

The form of social context and interactions that occur among the residents of the Kuta Traditional Village is a village atmosphere that maintains and emphasizes the richness of ancestral cultural values and local traditions as well as the natural environmental conditions that are still strongly maintained among the indigenous community. This paradigm serves as a guideline for collecting research data in the field. Data collection was carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews in this study were conducted in depth by interviewing the chief/elder/traditional figure.

Meanwhile, the observation technique is intended to obtain data on the implementation of brand communication activities or branding carried out when interacting with fellow indigenous communities and outside indigenous communities. Documentation is used to support the results of observations and interviews, especially data on branding activities in various customary implementation activities. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation are processed through recording and compiled in text format (Miles et al., 2014). Informants in this study were conducted based on purposive sampling, where informants were selected by researchers based on certain criteria, namely those who are registered as Kuta Village Traditional Community Officials:

Tabel 1. Informant from the Kuta Indigenous Community, Ciamis, West Java

No	Informan	Potition
1	Warsim Setiaman	Chief of Kuta Traditional Village
2	Aki Warja	Eldery of Kuta Traditional Village
3	Maman Sarno	Caretaker of Kuta Traditional Village
4	Firman Khabibi	Figures of Kuta Traditional Village

Source: Research Results, 2023

In analyzing the data from interviews with informants and the results of field observations, they are explained through descriptive sentences and explanations regarding the research object (Moleong, 2010). The clarity of the field data results is categorized with the aim of facilitating data processing using the data reduction analysis approach, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). This research data reduction is carried out by selecting things that focus on the theme regarding the elements that influence the formation of cultural tourism branding, then presented in the form of narrative text and research results charts on branding in the Kuta Traditional Village. For the conclusion drawing stage, a description or picture of the object of the Kuta Traditional Village branding name that is formed and known by the wider community is provided.

Result and Discussion

The presence of indigenous communities in West Java, with their diverse natural and cultural heritage, attracts many visitors to their territories. However, a lack of information about the uniqueness and distinctiveness of indigenous identities hinders the development of these territories into tourism villages based on local wisdom. This is because indigenous communities are not yet oriented towards making their territories cultural tourism destinations that can boost the economy. The increasing number of visitors to indigenous locations has prompted traditional leaders and elders to consider and act to ensure that these territories benefit both indigenous people and visitors. This was revealed in an interview with Warsim Setiaman, the Customary Head of the Kuta Traditional Village, who stated:

“Sebagai wilayah yang disakralkan, Kampung Adat Kuta ini sering dikunjungi oleh berbagai masyarakat, seperti dosen dan mahasiswa yang ingin tahu tentang kehidupan dan budaya warga lokal. Tetapi ada juga masyarakat lainnya yang sekedar bershilaturahmi dengan warga kampung dan berziarah ke Leuweung Gede. Intinya kedatangan mereka ke sini, mudah-mudahan dapat memberikan kebermanfaatan bagi kita semua”. Translation: As a sacred area, the Kuta Traditional Village is frequently visited by various groups, such as lecturers and students who are curious about the local life and culture. Others also simply come to socialize with the villagers and make pilgrimages to Leuweung Gede. Hopefully, their visit will be beneficial for all of us (Interview with Warsim Setiaman, the Customary Head of Kuta Traditional Village, on October 7, 2023, in Kuta Hamlet, Karangpaningal Village, Tambaksari District, Ciamis Regency).

As a region still steeped in traditional culture, the people of Kuta Traditional Village have a local culture evident in their daily activities, which are characterized by a "pilemburan" atmosphere. Furthermore, the cohesiveness of the Kuta Traditional Village community is renowned for its spirit of mutual cooperation, both in social life and in preserving the environment. The beautiful natural scenery, diverse culinary traditions, diverse arts and culture, traditional rituals, and strong sense of tolerance also attract visitors/tourists to the Kuta Traditional Village area.

Characteristics of the Kuta Traditional Village Community

The Kuta Village Traditional Community is located in Karangpaningal Village, Tambaksari District, Ciamis Regency, West Java Province. Its territory is surrounded by hills covered with various types of vegetation as a green area. The village area reaches 97 hectares, including 40 hectares of protected forest, settlements, fields, rice fields, roads, open fields, and sacred springs. The Kuta Traditional Village reflects the continuity of traditions and customs that are very strong to this day. All the words and actions of the Ancestors serve as guidelines for the local community.

In the Kuta Traditional Village, various prohibitions and customary rules are an integral part of their identity. This integral has become a high historical value and a symbol of the cultural and

spiritual resilience of the community. Despite their simple life, the Kuta Village Traditional residents have strong life principles based on harmony between humans, nature, and God. They are very selective about outside influences, especially related to house construction, to maintain the authenticity of the culture and customs that have been inherited. However, some of them are beginning to open themselves to information technology, education, and other services, as long as they don't disrupt established customary practices. The traditional life of the Kuta Village community reflects a blend of steadfastness in maintaining tradition and a wise approach to facing changing times.

In the context of the belief system, the Kuta indigenous people adhere to Islam and the Sunda Wiwitan belief, which is a belief in honoring the spirits of ancestors and belief in one entity, namely Batara Tunggal. On the other hand, the existence of the Kuta Village indigenous people is identical to the Sunda Buhun story that the Kuta area will be used as the center of government of the Galuh Kingdom during the reign of Prabu Permana Dikusuma. In other words, the Kuta Traditional Village is a relic of the Galuh Kingdom since the 8th century which until now has had 14 kuncen who are tasked with guarding this village.

This was revealed from the results of interviews with traditional officials who stated that they are currently present in Kuta Village in order to preserve the ancestral values that have been brought by the Galuh Kingdom. The name Kuta is taken from the word *Mahkuta* which contains the meaning of rank in a kingdom, a fortress or a circular royal wall because it is located in a hilly area that is circular like a royal fortress and looks like a crown (Interview with Aki Warja, the traditional elder of Kuta Traditional Village, on October 7, 2023, in Kuta Hamlet, Karangpaningal Village, Tambaksari District, Ciamis Regency).

Indigenous Community Branding

Currently, the Ciamis Regency government continues to promote the existence of the Kuta Traditional Village as a leading tourist attraction based on cultural communities. The Kuta Traditional Village has become an alternative destination for travelers to visit and conduct cultural studies on the "traditional" life of rural areas. The tourists' visits are inseparable from information about the uniqueness of the Kuta Traditional Community's taboos.

This uniqueness is conveyed through word of mouth, piquing tourists' curiosity to visit the Kuta Traditional Village directly. Information circulating in the community regarding the potential natural resources and socio-cultural heritage of the Kuta Traditional Village residents has been conveyed through social and digital media channels as awareness for potential local and international tourists.

Cultural tourism information conveyed on social and digital media such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram indirectly serves as a branding medium for the Kuta Traditional Village, better known as the Sacred Cultural Village. This is indicated by several documentary film video titles and commands on social media accounts about the Kuta Traditional Village which are always accompanied by the terms Cultural Village and "Prohibitions/Taboos/*Pamali*".

The term "Prohibition/Taboo/*Pamali*" attached to the Kuta Traditional Village has become a branding identity used as a keyword for the uniqueness of cultural tourism objects in Ciamis. *Pamali* or Kuta traditional taboos form the basis for the realization of local wisdom regarding rules for building houses, naming newborns, work systems, environmental health, marriage, pregnancy, burial of the dead, and the existence of sacred forests. For example, houses should not be built from brick and tile but must be built on stilts.

The philosophical reason is that all humans will ultimately return to nature. Therefore, the use of natural materials such as wood and *injuk*, which are easily decomposed into the soil and will "reunite" with the earth's elements. Thus, the condition of simple houses with regular, traditional patterns gives the impression of the atmosphere of community life in the past, which becomes a draw for people to visit. In the context of branding, cultural expressions consisting of an ideology, then "brought to life" with appropriate myths and cultural codes, will have a certain impact on stakeholder perceptions (Holt, 2012), especially for non-traditional communities.



Figure 2. The shape of the traditional houses of the residents of Kuta Village
Source: Research Results Documentation, 2023

The uniqueness of the Kuta Traditional Village serves as its identity, allure, and foundation for branding. Branding is a continuous effort to demonstrate the identity of an object, including the traditional community area (Judisseno, 2019). Therefore, branding is essential to realize the authenticity of the cultural diversity of the Kuta Village indigenous community, as an area with distinctive characteristics that are easily recognized and visited. This is reinforced by research findings that demonstrate the positive image of a traditional village through the activation of the branding process (Afdhal et al., 2022).

Branding of indigenous communities is crucial because it makes a place memorable in the minds of the public. Likewise, the Kuta Traditional Village community is often viewed as an area that maintains "old-fashioned" traditions and is filled with a sacred/mystical aura. In fact, these "old-fashioned" and sacred traditions and culture constitute local wisdom that serves as a source of pride and guidelines that regulate the harmony of the socio-cultural life of the Kuta Traditional Village residents with each other, God, and nature. To build good branding, it is necessary to integrate various information media with message content that contains a strong, unique identity and has diverse characteristics compared to other regions (Abdulloh & Indrojarwo, 2021).

In terms of the environment, cultural branding is based on taboo traditions that must be adhered to by residents of the Kuta Traditional Village and visitors when entering the Sacred *Leuweung*. These prohibitions include not being allowed to wear jewelry, footwear, uniforms, litter, spit, urinate, eat, behave indecently, and wear black uniforms. This prohibition is intended to prevent people from being arrogant because in the eyes of God all creatures are equal, and the cleanliness of the sacred *leuweung* is also maintained.

In addition to the prohibition, visits to the sacred *leuweung* can only be made on Mondays or Fridays with the knowledge of the kuncen or forest caretaker. This permission from the kuncen is required because the sacred *leuweung* is considered sacred, has guardians and protectors, and is the abode of "Anceupan" or astral beings. This was revealed in a statement by Abah Maman Sarno who said that:

"Untuk masuk hutan keramat ini perlu ruwatan melalui kuncen, sebagai penjaga hutan larangan agar selamat bagi yang berziarah maupun tidak. Selain itu, juga pengunjung ke hutan ini harus mematuhi berbagai larangan, salah satunya tidak boleh menggunakan pakaian serba hitam karena terkait dengan leluhur Ambu Raima Mbah Bima Raksa yang berpakaian hitam, sehingga tidak boleh disamai".

Translation: "To enter this sacred forest, a ritual ceremony is required through the caretaker, who serves as the guardian of the forbidden forest, ensuring the safety of both those visiting and those not. Furthermore, visitors to this forest must adhere to several prohibitions, including them prohibition of wearing all black, as this is associated with the ancestor Ambu Raima Mbah Bima Raksa, who wore black and is therefore not to be imitated." (Interview with Firman Khabibi, a Kuta Traditional Leader, on October 7, 2023, in Kuta Hamlet, Karangpaningal Village, Tambaksari District, Ciamis Regency).

This type of prohibition serves as a one-way communication, marking and symbolizing ownership of the cultural assets of the Kuta Traditional Village residents. In this context, branding serves as an identifier for an object (Tjiptono, 2014). Strengthening the branding of indigenous communities can be done by integrating all physical, cultural, customary, natural, economic, and socio-cultural potential, as well as the potential of existing flora and fauna, thus creating a unique and competitive identity represented in a logo.

The existence of a logo is an important identity needed by indigenous communities as a marker and also a promotional medium for an entity. In addition, a logo can provide benefits and positive impacts in strengthening and developing the identity and uniqueness of indigenous communities towards the realization of culture-based tourism with orderly administration. As stated by the resource person

"Logo Masyarakat Adat Kuta sudah digunakan dalam bentuk cap maupun kop surat lembaga adat untuk keperluan dan kepentingan administratif seperti surat menyurat, pembuatan proposal bantuan serta penciri identitas salah satu lembaga adat yang ada di Jawa Barat. Masyarakat adat Kuta ini merupakan satu-satunya komunitas adat yang diakui secara legal formal oleh pemerintahan desa, kabupaten, provinsi maupun Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup & Kehutanan, karena kita memiliki SK (Surat Keputusan)" Translation: "The Kuta Indigenous Community logo has been used on the stamp and letterhead of traditional institutions for administrative purposes such as correspondence, aid proposals, and as an identifier for one of the traditional institutions in West Java. The Kuta Indigenous Community is the only indigenous community legally recognized by the village, district, provincial, and Ministry of Environment and Forestry governments, as we have a Decree (Interview with Firman Khabibi, a Kuta Traditional Leader, on October 7, 2023, in Kuta Hamlet, Karangpaningal Village, Tambaksari District, Ciamis Regency).



Figure 3. Identity Logo of the Kuta Ciamis Village Traditional Institution

Source: Research Results Documentation, 2023

Figure 3 shows that the logo of the Kuta Village traditional institution is designed to reflect the uniqueness and iconic identity of the ketupat (rice cake), traditional houses, and padi-kapas (rice-cotton), which implicitly represent the potential of the traditional community. The logo above also serves as a tool to expand the marketing of cultural tourism destinations that can communicate indirectly with their target audiences. This is based on the existence of a brand logo that can provide an affective reaction before promotional or marketing activities are carried out (Bresciani & Del Ponte, 2017).

Through the artistic display of the logo in various communication media, the entity is actually building its identity as a sign of ownership. In other words, branding is a process of forming a brand or product (object) identity that aims to increase awareness and brand image of a product so that it can be recognized more widely, especially regarding the sacredness of the Kuta Traditional Village area. A logo equipped with a style of language or writing has symbolic value and reflects the truth of the identity and brand value contained in an object it communicates (Gains, 2014).

In addition to adhering to traditional customs, the people of Kuta Traditional Village now use electricity, electronic goods, motorized vehicles, and other technologies. This openness to technology demonstrates that the residents of Kuta Traditional Village are not allergic to changes, but rather strive to communicate their technologically literate regional identity. This technological utilization is

evident in the use of digital-based financial payment methods in the form of QRIS, which bears the official identity of Kuta Traditional Village and the Al-Hidayah Mosque DKM. Both digital payment methods are managed by the Kuta Village Traditional Institution under the supervision of the Traditional Leader, aiming to facilitate financial transactions for stakeholders, both for sales and social assistance.



Figure 4. Digital Financial Transaction Media for Kuta Village Traditional Institutions
Source: Research Results Documentation, 2023

Based on Figure 4, the indigenous community has actually begun to build its identity to be known by the wider community through digital financial innovation in the form of QRIS. The use of QRIS shows that the residents of the Kuta Traditional Village are highly literate in technological changes, including in the fields of digital financial literacy and banking. QRIS, with the name Kampung Adat Kuta, has become a medium for identity and promotion of the cultural tourism destination area and the indigenous community in Ciamis.

A brand becomes more well-known as a result of extensive exposure and public experience with the use of a brand over a long period of time (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, the existence of QRIS is a long-term investment by the indigenous institution to become known by the wider community, especially the millennial generation who visit the Kuta Traditional Village area.

On the other hand, the process of forming indigenous community branding can be born from identity, positioning, and image. All three are interrelated in shaping public perception of the existence of indigenous communities. In the context of the Kuta Traditional Village, identity refers to "who they are," namely the characteristics, values, and social systems that distinguish indigenous communities from other groups. This is demonstrated by the residents of the Kuta Traditional Village who have a strong identity as a community that maintains the purity of ancestral customs, guardians of Leuweung Gede, and obeys prohibitions.

Positioning is explained as how indigenous communities position themselves within the broader social and cultural context, both at the local, national, and global levels, related to how they want to be perceived by the external community. The positioning display of the Kuta Traditional Village has positioned itself as the protector of the sacred Leuweung Gede forest and a strong guardian of sacred cultural heritage, including their role in environmental and cultural change issues. Meanwhile, the image element referred to in this context is how indigenous communities are perceived by outsiders.

The image of the Kuta indigenous community is a combination of its original identity and positioning strategies, but is heavily influenced by media framing, visitor experiences, education, and narratives/stories spread through word of mouth about the indigenous community. A positive image of the indigenous community is seen as the guardian of local wisdom, a source of inspiration for sustainability, or a community that lives in harmony with nature. Negative is perceived as backward, immature, or merely an object of exoticism in tourism. The image of the Kuta Traditional Village is that of a community that adheres firmly to the teachings of its Sundanese ancestors (the descendants of the Galuh Kingdom), located in a remote hilly/mountainous area, close to rivers and forests as sources of life, and able to embrace modern life.

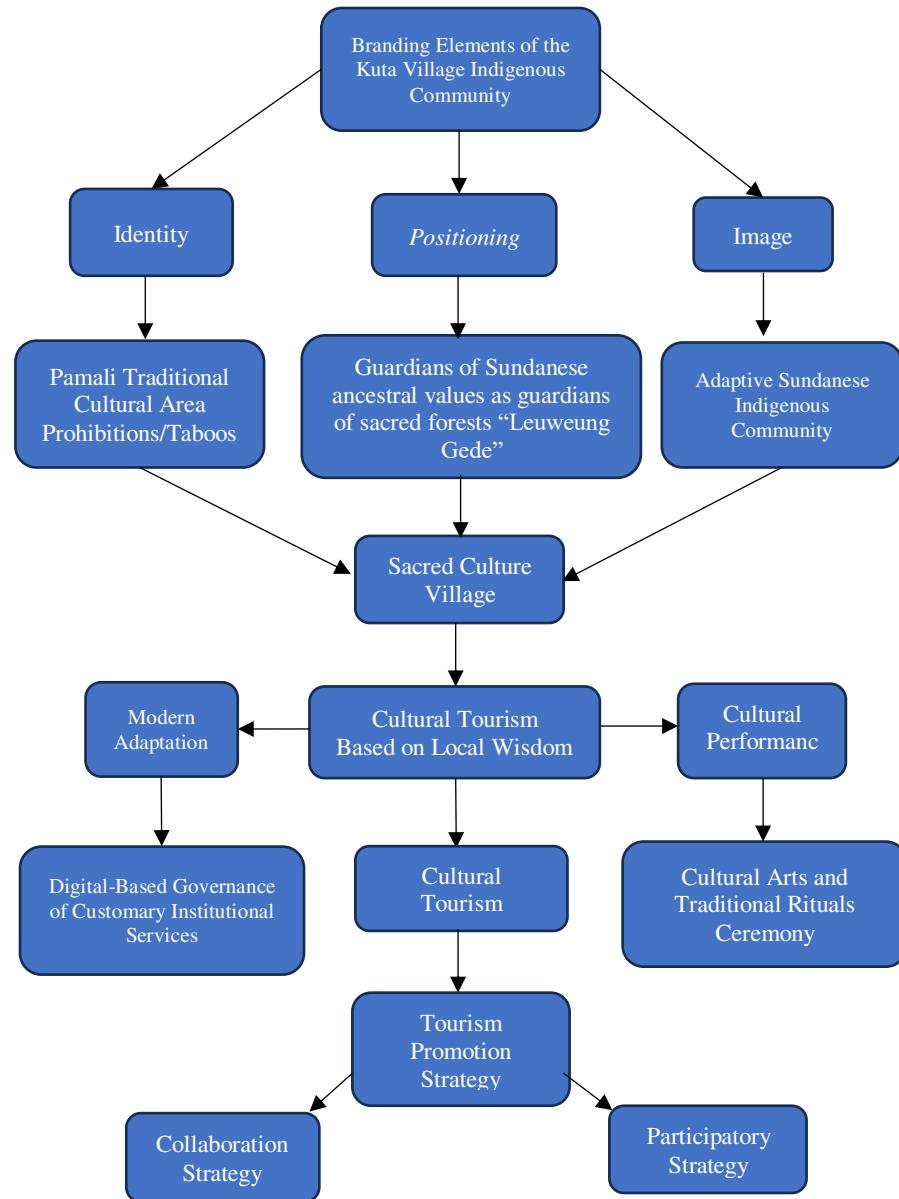


Chart 1. Branding Formation Model in Kuta Traditional Village
(Source: Research Results, 2024)

Over time, branding has a stimulating effect on promoting a tourist attraction, better known as destination branding. Destination branding is an effort to build a positive image by combining the unique aspects of a place (Cai, 2002); the image of a place is ingrained in the minds of outsiders (Gupta et al., 2018). Destination branding can also build and evoke memories among tourists, and enhance the appeal of the local wisdom of indigenous communities. The basic principle of destination branding is that every promotional action, exchange, or representation should be seen not as an end in itself, but as an opportunity to build the image and reputation of a region (Anholt, 2010).

The form of destination branding of the Kuta indigenous community that is remembered by the public is a rural area in West Java that upholds ancestral customs and exotic scenery. Therefore, destination branding is an effort to create a positive image of a tourist destination with the aim of attracting tourists and providing memorable experiences for visitors (Subarkah et al., 2020).

The branding of this indigenous community activity based on local wisdom is formed by utilizing mass media, social media, and other public communication channels regarding the annual traditional performances that are conveyed formally to the wider community. Meanwhile, informally, information about socio-cultural activities in the Kuta Traditional Village is conveyed through

interpersonal communication such as word of mouth from visitors. By embedding the branding of the Kuta Traditional Village as a Sacred Cultural Village, it is hoped that visitors will form a positive impression of the indigenous community as a social entity in West Java that still upholds the principles of ancestral heritage that are exotic, exclusive, tolerant, and harmonious with the surrounding environment.

Discussion

Not only as a place to live, the Kuta Traditional Village is a bastion of tradition that remains strong amidst the currents of modernization. Local cultural values and traditions can be used as attractions for cultural ritual tourism, sacred forest nature tourism, culinary tourism in the form of coffee, palm sugar and ant sugar, traditional arts tourism, annual cultural events and ceremonies. As a traditional village, various local wisdom is still firmly held by the Kuta community in the agricultural management system and forest conservation, government and leadership systems, and belief systems. To compete with the demands of the times, the branding management of the Kuta Traditional Village community is also aimed at increasing the visibility and sustainability of the local culture and economy. Branding is one of the most important aspects in product marketing, including tourist destinations (Yuristadi & Sari, 2017).

Branding, in the context of cultural tourism, refers to the process of creating a local brand identity through traditional ritual performances in Kuta Village such as Nyuguh, Hajat Bumi, and Babarit, which are part of cultural branding. These various local cultural performances are cultural products that need to be marketed as part of a cultural tourism branding development strategy. The cultural products of the Kuta Traditional Village community that can be used as cultural tourism branding are: (1) *Nyuguh*. This ritual activity is carried out during the month of Maulid, and is intended to provide offerings to the spirits of the ancestors and the rulers of Leuweung Gede, as well as an expression of gratitude to God. The ceremony involves all residents and is centered at the eastern end of the hamlet, on the west bank of the Cijolang River, opened by the caretaker and enlivened by performances of Gemyung, Gondang, and Ronggeng Buhun arts; (2) *Hajat Bumi*. This activity is a ritual usually carried out between September and November, where in these months the rainy season arrives, as well as a sign that the main planting season can begin; and (3) *Babarit*.

In the form of traditional ritual activities carried out by all the indigenous people of Kuta Village together after a natural disaster such as Lini (earthquake), long drought or other natural phenomena, as a proof of gratitude for being safe in facing the disaster. The three traditional performances are cultural tourism potentials that can be developed in the Kuta Village Traditional Community which can be communicated online and offline, which not only introduces socio-cultural life to the wider community, but also ensures that the life of the indigenous people can be integrated with nature so that it has an attraction as a sustainable and environmentally friendly cultural tourism village object..

As a traditional village, the Kuta area is characterized by three things: the similarity of house structures, "*pamali*" customs, and the presence of a traditional leader and a caretaker as the guardian of ancestral traditions. All of these are very important branding identities to communicate to the public. Because the existence of a brand can be seen from the presence of a collection of key visuals, keywords, and key sounds that create an emotional bond between the product (place) and consumers (visitors) (Kodrat, 2020). The Kuta Indigenous People still believe in the existence of supernatural beings, sacred places and have customary rules reflected through the concept of "*pamali*" or taboo.

To maintain and preserve the values of local traditions and culture in the Kuta Traditional Village, the Government issued regulations on customary law as stated in Ciamis Regency Regional Regulation No. 15 of 2016 concerning the Recognition and Protection of the Kuta Village Indigenous Law Community, which aims to strengthen and protect the indigenous law community. Another regulation that strengthens the existence of the Kuta Traditional Village community comes from Decree No. 1301/MenLHK-PSKL/PKTHA/PSL.1/3/2018 dated March 28, 2018 concerning the designation of the Leuweung Gede Customary Forest to the Kuta Village Customary Law community to be managed and utilized based on local wisdom and applicable customary law in accordance with its function.

The branding elements formed in indigenous communities focus not only on visual aspects but also on narratives of cultural values. As stated, branding can be defined as the process of identifying

and developing the values of a product or service brand, which generates customer interest and loyalty to a brand (Swasty, 2016). Creating compelling and relevant stories is crucial as part of branding that connects tourists' imaginations with those of indigenous communities about the tourist destinations they visit.

Creating a regional identity for the Kuta Traditional Village community is one effort to ensure the cultural potential of indigenous communities in Ciamis remains widely recognized. Furthermore, collaboration between the government, businesses, and indigenous communities is necessary to create a sustainable tourism branding ecosystem. Furthermore, the tourism industry recognizes the role of culture as an attractive element that can promote the cultural characteristics of a destination. Cultural resources are a key factor in attracting tourists. The existence of tourist destination branding creates an identity and image recognized by various parties and is used as a means to develop the tourism industry (Salam & Nurjanah, 2019).

The well-known "*Pamali*" tradition has become a key element of branding formed in the Kuta Traditional Village area. This "*Pamali*" tradition has given the impression of something sacred yet still practiced. This "*Pamali*" or Sacredness has become a unique identity of the Kuta Traditional Village and simultaneously becomes the branding of the region. The branding of "*Pamali*/Sacred" is trying to be presented to the indigenous people of Kuta Village, a natural transformation process that is demanded and intentionally communicated continuously by the apparatus/stakeholders of the indigenous community to create an indigenous community that is obedient, independent, competitive, and prosperous.

Therefore, the branding of the Kuta Traditional Village community is inseparable from the promotional strategy of tourism villages supported by the government as a sector that can generate local revenue and can improve the welfare of local residents. Through the branding that is known, someone can articulate the reasons why they should choose a brand (area) over another brand (Wheeler, 2018). The role of indigenous communities in realizing the branding of the Kuta Traditional Village is by informing the public about various traditional activities, culture, and rituals involving traditional leaders through various media channels and forms of interpersonal communication, as well as social media, to increase public awareness of the existence of indigenous communities in Ciamis, West Java. Through the continuous use of technology, it will certainly have an impact on catalyzing the rapid branding of the Kuta Traditional Village community, making it increasingly known throughout the archipelago and the world.

Conclusions

The traditional "*pamali*" culture is the essence of cultural branding in the Kuta traditional area, thus establishing the brand as a Sacred Cultural Village. This reflects a sense of pride and serves as a symbol of respect for ancestors and maintaining good relationships with God, nature, and each other. The management of this "*pamali*" culture has been manifested in the legalization of the traditional community name, the organization of cultural events, the establishment of a cultural secretariat, and the promotion of cultural activities through various digital and social media platforms.

The branding of the Kuta Traditional Village is carried out through an interpersonal communication approach, delivered face-to-face between traditional leaders and visitors, generating word of mouth within the wider community about the "*pamali*" lifestyle in this village. Furthermore, the use of information technology in digital communication has made the cultural tourism market more competitive in competing for potential tourists to visit cultural destinations. Conversely, cultural tourism branding can emphasize the equity of the unique culture of the indigenous community, creating visibility and ensuring the well-being of the local community, one example of which is through the implementation of the "*pamali*" culture in the Kuta Traditional Village.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) for providing research opportunities in the Advanced Indonesia Innovation Research Scheme (RIIM) Contract Number: 61/IV/KS/5/2023 dan 2131/UN6.3.1/PT.00/2023.

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