

Conceptualization of the core (Communication-oriented revitalization enhancement) Perspective as strengthening destination branding in the East Java Mangrove Area

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Abstract: The mangrove ecosystems of East Java serve as both critical environmental assets and emerging tourism destinations. However, these destinations face challenges in creating a strong destination brand that connects with tourists and encourages sustainable practices. This paper introduces the CORE (Communication-Oriented Revitalization Enhancement) framework as a conceptual model aimed at strengthening destination branding for the mangrove regions of East Java. CORE integrates communication theories, including Lasswell's Communication Model, Behaviorism, Public Relations, Mass Communication, and Media Ecology, to build a holistic branding approach. The research utilized participatory action research (PAR) to engage local communities, tourism stakeholders, and visitors in co-developing branding strategies. Results indicate that an integrated communication approach can significantly improve the destination's image, increase community engagement, and foster sustainable tourism practices. This study provides insights into the application of theoretical frameworks in real-world tourism branding and offers recommendations for implementing effective communication-based strategies for sustainable destination branding.

Keywords: *Communication-oriented revitalization enhancement (CORE), Destination branding, East Java, Mangrove tourism, Participatory action research, Sustainable tourism.*

1. Introduction

Natural tourism destinations, especially ecotourism areas such as mangrove forests, have great potential in attracting tourists seeking nature-based and environmental experiences. On the other hand, destination branding is an important tool to increase tourism visibility and attractiveness in an increasingly competitive market. Effective destination branding can create a strong image, build tourist loyalty, and contribute to local economic development and environmental sustainability (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). In this context, the mangrove area in East Java requires a branding strategy that not only highlights its natural beauty but also illustrates its ecological, social, and economic values. However, the destination branding process often faces challenges in connecting tourist expectations, local community needs, and sustainable development goals.

Mangrove areas in East Java, like other ecotourism destinations, are faced with complexities involving various stakeholders, ranging from the government, local communities, to tourism industry players. Each stakeholder group has different perspectives and interests in the development of the destination. Therefore, to achieve optimal results in destination branding, an approach is needed that integrates effective communication, community participation, and ecological considerations (Buhalis & Licata, 2002). One approach that can answer this challenge is through the application of the CORE (Communication-Oriented Revitalization Enhancement) model, which emphasizes the importance of communication revitalization in strengthening mangrove destination branding.

The CORE model was developed to address several key issues in branding mangrove destinations in East Java, including low tourist awareness of the value of the mangrove ecosystem, lack of local

community involvement in the decision-making process, and the lack of effective communication strategies in destination promotion (Dinnie, 2007). CORE aims to increase the attractiveness of destinations by utilizing modern communication theories, such as the Lasswell Communication Model, Behaviorism Theory, Public Relations Theory, and Media Ecology Theory, to create a holistic and innovative strategy. This approach focuses not only on increasing the number of tourist visits, but also on strengthening local community involvement and promoting environmental sustainability.

As a theoretical foundation, the CORE model draws on several key communication theories. Lasswell's model, with its five key elements – who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect – provides a clear framework for directing the right message to the relevant audience (Lasswell, 1948). On the other hand, Behaviorism Theory helps in understanding tourist behavior by looking at how branding messages can influence their perceptions and decisions in choosing a destination (Skinner, 1953). Public Relations Theory provides insights into how to build positive and sustainable relationships between stakeholders, while Media Ecology Theory highlights the importance of utilizing various communication platforms, including social media, to extend the reach of branding messages (McCluhan, 1964).

Through the integration of these theories, this study aims to build a branding model that is not only able to promote the East Java mangrove area as an attractive tourist destination, but also as an area that supports environmental sustainability and local socio-economic welfare. This approach also emphasizes the importance of local community involvement in every stage of the branding process, from strategy formulation to implementation and evaluation. Thus, the branding developed is not only top-down, but also reflects the aspirations and needs of the local community.

This study uses the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, which aims to actively involve various stakeholders in the process of data collection and branding strategy development. This approach allows for more intensive dialogue between researchers, local communities, and tourism industry players, so that the resulting solutions can be more contextual and relevant to field conditions (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). The final results of this study are expected to provide significant contributions to the literature on destination branding and strategic communication in the context of ecotourism, as well as being a practical guide for the development of mangrove destinations in East Java.

In this article, we will explain in detail how the CORE model is implemented in the context of mangrove destination branding, and how this approach has succeeded in increasing tourist awareness, community participation, and environmental sustainability. Finally, the article will identify challenges faced during the branding process and offer recommendations for further development.

2. Literature Review

In the context of developing destination branding, the core concept that needs to be understood is how branding can help build a strong and consistent image, and how this can influence tourists' decisions to visit a destination. Destination branding is a strategic process that focuses not only on promotion, but also on developing a distinct and authentic destination identity, so that it can increase its attractiveness and competitiveness in the tourism market (Pike & Page, 2014). One of the main challenges in destination branding is creating an image that matches tourists' expectations while maintaining sustainability and supporting the welfare of local communities. This is especially relevant in the context of ecotourism, including mangrove destinations, which face challenges related to environmental sustainability and the balance between economic use and nature conservation (Kalandides et al., 2012).

2.1. Conceptualization of Destination Branding

Destination branding first emerged as a strategic tool to enhance tourism appeal, with the aim of creating a prominent and easily recognizable image for potential tourists (Ooi, 2011). Branding does not only include visual elements, such as logos and slogans, but also includes aspects of perception, experience, and narrative related to the destination. According to (Anholt, 2006), destination branding not only serves to attract tourists, but also plays an important role in building a collective identity for local communities, which can strengthen their pride and participation in tourism development. In the

context of this study, branding of mangrove destinations in East Java aims to promote ecotourism potential, preserve the environment, and encourage active participation from local communities in destination management.

The destination branding model proposed in this study is rooted in the concept of communication revitalization, which emphasizes the importance of effective interaction between all stakeholders. Communication theories provide a strong foundation for building a holistic branding strategy. According to (Kotler & Keller, 2013), effective communication is the key to delivering the right message to the right audience. In the CORE (Communication-Oriented Revitalization Enhancement) model, communication plays a central role in connecting tourist perceptions, local community needs, and destination management strategic objectives. Modern communication theories, such as the Lasswell Communication Model, are very relevant in designing a targeted and efficient communication strategy.

2.2. Communication Theory in Branding

(Lasswell, 1948) Communication Theory, which defines communication in five main elements — who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect — is the basis for developing messages in destination branding. In the context of mangrove destination branding, these elements are applied to design messages that reflect the natural beauty, ecosystem benefits, and the importance of environmental sustainability to tourists. The "who" element is represented by local stakeholders, such as local governments and local communities, who have the authority to manage mangrove areas. The "says what" element refers to narratives that emphasize ecotourism aspects and the importance of preserving mangroves. The "in which channel" element includes various communication media, such as social media, brochures, and tourism websites, used to convey messages. The "to whom" element is the audience, namely tourists, who are interested in ecotourism destinations. Finally, the "with what effect" element measures the impact of messages on tourist perceptions and behavior.

In addition, Skinner's Behaviorism Theory (B.F. Skinner, 1982) provides an understanding of how communication messages influence tourist behavior. According to this theory, human behavior is influenced by external stimuli, which in the context of destination branding can be advertising, promotions, or positive reviews. In this study, a behaviorism approach is used to understand how tourists respond to various branding messages delivered, and how this influences their decision to visit the mangrove area. By utilizing the positive influence of stimuli, communication strategies in the CORE model can be optimized to direct tourist behavior towards more sustainable behavior, such as maintaining environmental cleanliness and respecting the mangrove ecosystem.

2.3. The Role of Public Relations and Social Media

In addition to communication and behavioral theories, public relations theory also plays an important role in building positive and sustainable relationships between destination stakeholders and tourists. Grunig and Hunt (1984) proposed four models of public relations, where the two-way symmetrical model is considered the most ideal model for creating open and mutually beneficial communication between stakeholders. In this context, public relations functions to strengthen the positive image of East Java mangrove destinations through planned and measured communication efforts. A good relationship between destination managers and tourists can increase tourist loyalty and encourage them to participate in mangrove conservation efforts.

Social media has also become a very influential tool in modern branding strategies. According to McLuhan's Media Ecology theory (McLuhan, 1964), media not only functions as a communication channel, but also shapes the way we view and understand the world. In destination branding, social media plays an important role in expanding the reach of messages, accelerating the spread of information, and enabling direct interaction with the audience. Research by Kaplan and Haenlein (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) shows that social media has great potential to influence tourist perceptions, especially through user-generated content, such as reviews and photos uploaded by visitors. In this study, the use of social media is integrated into the branding strategy to raise awareness of the importance of the mangrove ecosystem and encourage active participation of tourists in preserving the environment.

2.4. Community Based Destination Branding

Local community participation is also a key element in sustainable destination branding. According to Jamal and Getz (Jamal & Getz, 1995), the concept of community-based tourism emphasizes the importance of involving local communities in every stage of destination development, from planning to implementation. In the context of this study, local community involvement is not only important to ensure that branding reflects their values and needs, but also to empower them as key actors in destination management. This involvement can increase the sense of community ownership of the destination, so that they are more motivated to maintain and promote the destination to tourists.

By combining various theories of communication, behavior, and community participation, this study seeks to develop a holistic and innovative branding model for the East Java mangrove area. Through the CORE approach, it is hoped that destination branding can increase tourist awareness of the importance of mangrove conservation, while encouraging active involvement of local communities in sustainable destination management.

3. Materials and Methods Methodology

This study uses a qualitative and quantitative approach (mixed methods) to understand and analyze the CORE (Communication-Oriented Revitalization Enhancement) perspective in strengthening the branding of mangrove destinations in East Java. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive picture, both in terms of numerical data and in-depth narratives, so that it can capture the diversity of perspectives from various stakeholders. According to (Creswell John W., 2014), the mixed methods approach provides the advantage of combining the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data to produce more complete and holistic conclusions.

3.1. Research Design

This study applied exploratory sequential design, where qualitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by quantitative data collection. The first step involved collecting qualitative data to explore experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced in the mangrove destination branding process. The results of this qualitative analysis were then used to build a quantitative instrument in the form of a questionnaire used in the second stage. This design allows for the development of relevant and contextual research instruments, in accordance with the initial findings from the qualitative exploration stage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018)

3.2. Research Location and Participants

The research was conducted in several mangrove areas in East Java, such as in Surabaya, Gresik, and Probolinggo. These locations were chosen because of the high potential for mangrove ecotourism and conservation efforts that have been carried out by the local government and local communities. Research participants involved various stakeholders, including local residents, tourism industry players, mangrove area managers, and tourists.

The target respondents for this study were selected using purposive sampling techniques to ensure that participants had relevant experience and knowledge about destination branding and the problems faced in mangrove area management. According to (Patton, 2002), purposive sampling is very useful in exploratory research to select individuals or groups who are considered most capable of providing rich and in-depth information about the phenomenon being studied. The main stakeholders in this study include:

- 1) **Local residents:** Those who live around the mangrove areas and are involved in tourism or conservation activities.
- 2) **Mangrove area managers:** Representatives from tourism offices, conservation institutions, or management communities.
- 3) **Tourism industry players:** Local business owners who depend on tourist visits to mangrove areas.
- 4) **Tourists:** Visitors who come to mangrove destinations, both domestic and international tourists.

3.3. Data Collection Technique

3.3.1. In-Depth Interview

In-depth interviews were used to gain rich information about stakeholders' experiences and views on mangrove destination branding. According to (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), in-depth interviews allow researchers to gain deeper insights into how individuals interpret destination branding, including the challenges faced in managing it. Interviews were conducted directly with stakeholders, using a semi-structured interview guide that was designed based on a literature review. Topics discussed included experiences in managing mangrove areas, their perceptions of branding, and hopes for the future of the destination.

3.3.2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

FGDs were conducted to gather collective views from different stakeholders. These discussions were designed to identify common perceptions, challenges, and potential solutions related to mangrove destination branding. According to (Krueger & Casey, 2015), FGDs were effective in identifying common themes and revealing social dynamics that may not have emerged in individual interviews. FGDs involved representatives from local community groups, tourism industry players, and mangrove area managers.

3.3.3. Quantitative Survey

After in-depth interviews and FGDs, a quantitative instrument was developed in the form of a questionnaire to measure tourists' and stakeholders' perceptions of mangrove destination branding. The questionnaire included questions related to CORE elements, such as communication effectiveness, branding perception, and local community involvement. Quantitative data were collected from 200 randomly selected tourist respondents using convenience sampling method in various mangrove areas in East Java.

3.3.4. Field Observation

Field observations were conducted to understand the actual conditions of the mangrove area and the tourism activities taking place. These observations are important to verify the findings from interviews and surveys, and to record interactions between tourists, local communities, and the natural environment. According to (Angrosino, 2007), field observations provide visual and social context that cannot always be expressed through other qualitative methods. During the observations, researchers also recorded the use of infrastructure, tourism facilities, and environmental conservation practices in the mangrove area.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

3.3.1. Qualitative Analysis

Data from interviews and FGDs were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report themes that emerged from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process involved transcribing interviews, coding data, and grouping key themes related to branding challenges, tourist perceptions, and local community involvement. The themes that emerged from the qualitative data were then used as the basis for designing a quantitative survey instrument.

3.3.2. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, such as regression analysis to test the relationship between variables in the CORE model. Statistical software such as SPSS was used to analyze the data, and the results were presented in tables and graphs for easy interpretation. According to (Field, 2013), statistical analysis helps in exploring patterns of relationships between variables and testing hypotheses proposed based on qualitative data.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure data validity, method triangulation was applied in this study. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources and data collection methods to verify findings and improve the accuracy of conclusions (Fox & Denzin, 1979). Interviews, FGDs, surveys, and field observations were all used to gain a more comprehensive picture of mangrove destination branding. Internal validity was also strengthened by conducting a pilot test of the questionnaire instrument before being used in a large-scale survey.

Data reliability was ensured through consistent data collection procedures and the use of tested research instruments. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, while data analysis was conducted systematically with transparent coding and possible replication.

By using this holistic methodological approach, the research is expected to produce in-depth and comprehensive insights into how mangrove destination branding can be strengthened through the CORE concept, by involving active participation from local communities and utilizing effective communication strategies.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the study reveals the main findings obtained from data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, regarding the application of the CORE (Communication-Oriented Revitalization Enhancement) concept in branding mangrove destinations in East Java. These findings include stakeholder perceptions, challenges faced in branding, effectiveness of communication strategies, and the impact of local community involvement in strengthening the destination image. Based on the data obtained, an in-depth discussion is carried out regarding the implications of these findings for the development of more adaptive and sustainable branding strategies.

Table 1.
Key findings of the CORE element.

Research aspect	Key findings
Stakeholder perceptions	Diverse understanding of branding; tourists prefer natural and educational attractions, while local residents and managers focus more on increasing tourist visits. Social media information is perceived as less engaging.
Branding challenges	Disagreement on prioritized branding elements, limited infrastructure and resources, and minimal involvement of the local community in branding decision-making processes.
Effectiveness of the CORE concept	CORE successfully raised awareness among managers about participatory communication. Around 75% of managers reported being more actively involved in discussions about promotion. Local community involvement strengthens narratives and destination appeal.
Impact of community involvement	Local community involvement enhances a sense of ownership and responsibility in managing destinations. Tourism education by locals provides authentic experiences, attracting more visitors.
Strategic recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance digital communication and branding skills through training. - Improve infrastructure and accessibility to mangrove areas. - Strengthen promotion via digital platforms to broaden the reach to tourists.

4.1. Stakeholder Perceptions of Mangrove Destination Branding

From the results of in-depth interviews and FGDs involving local residents, mangrove area managers, tourism industry players, and tourists, it was found that most stakeholders have different understandings of the concept of destination branding. Local residents and mangrove area managers tend to view branding as a tool to increase the number of tourist visits, but have less understanding of the key elements that form successful branding, such as the importance of a strong narrative or storytelling, consistency in visual communication, and integration of digital marketing strategies. In contrast, tourism industry players showed a more mature understanding of branding, with a focus on creating unique and memorable experiences for tourists.

Tourists who are the target of branding, through a quantitative survey, revealed that they are interested in mangrove destinations that not only offer natural beauty, but also educational experiences related to environmental conservation. As many as 68% of respondents stated that the information conveyed through social media and websites related to mangrove destinations in East Java is still less informative and less interesting, so it does not encourage their interest in actively visiting.

According to (Kotler, P., & Keller, 2016), the success of destination branding is highly dependent on the suitability between stakeholder and tourist perceptions of the message to be conveyed. This emphasizes the importance of coordination between the government, managers, and tourism industry players in aligning the vision and branding strategy being carried out.

4.2. Challenges in Branding Mangrove Destinations

This study also identified several key challenges in branding mangrove destinations in East Java. First, there is still disagreement on which branding elements should be prioritized. Some stakeholders want a greater focus on conservation and ecological aspects, while others prioritize commercial aspects and increasing tourist visits. Second, limited resources and supporting infrastructure, such as accessibility to mangrove areas, quality of tourism facilities, and lack of effective promotion through digital media, are obstacles in attracting more tourists.

In addition, the interview results also showed that although local communities are involved in the management of mangrove areas, they are often not fully involved in decision-making regarding branding strategies. This minimal involvement leads to a lack of ownership of the branding initiatives being implemented, which in turn can hinder the success of the overall branding effort. According to (Aaker, 2012), low involvement from local communities can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of destination branding, because local communities are an important element in creating authenticity and unique appeal for tourists.

4.3. Effectiveness of the CORE Concept in Improving Destination Branding

The CORE concept applied in this study aims to strengthen the branding of mangrove destinations by focusing on four main elements: effective communication, revitalizing community involvement, creating a strong narrative, and strengthening destination identity. From the survey and interview results, it can be seen that the CORE approach has succeeded in increasing awareness among stakeholders regarding the importance of targeted and participatory communication in branding. As many as 75% of respondents from mangrove managers stated that they began to be more actively involved in discussions related to the promotion and management of destination image, after being introduced to this concept.

The community involvement revitalization component of CORE has also had a positive impact. Through the involvement of local communities in the development of promotional content and the delivery of mangrove conservation narratives to tourists, an increased sense of ownership of branding efforts was found. This is in accordance with the views of (Phelan et al., 2013), who stated that active involvement of local communities can increase the authenticity of the experience offered to tourists, while strengthening the destination's image as a sustainable ecotourism area.

Table 2.
The effectiveness of the CORE concept in improving destination branding.

CORE element	Findings	Impact
Effective communication	Improved awareness among stakeholders about targeted and participatory communication strategies.	75% of managers became more actively involved in promotional and image management efforts.
Community involvement revitalization	Local communities participated in creating promotional content and delivering conservation narratives to tourists.	Increased sense of ownership and authenticity in branding efforts.
Strong narrative creation	Focused on highlighting ecological, educational, and conservation aspects of mangrove destinations.	Enhanced tourist perception of the destination as a sustainable ecotourism attraction.
Strengthening destination identity	Emphasis on unique aspects of mangroves and active local engagement to differentiate the destination.	Elevated the destination's appeal, aligning with tourists' expectations of authentic experiences.

However, there are still challenges in fully implementing the CORE concept, especially in terms of consistent communication and coordination between stakeholders. Several mangrove area managers admitted that they still face difficulties in conveying a consistent narrative to tourists, especially through digital media. This shows that further training and intensive mentoring are still needed to ensure that all parties understand and implement the CORE elements correctly.

4.4. The Impact of Local Community Involvement on Branding Success

The involvement of local communities in branding mangrove destinations has proven to be a critical factor in the success of this initiative. Through field observations and interviews, it was found that communities who were actively involved in the branding program not only contributed to the promotion of the destination, but also played a role in preserving the mangrove area. For example, community groups involved in tourist education activities about the importance of mangroves for coastal ecosystems showed high enthusiasm, and this resulted in an increase in tourist visits seeking educational experiences.

According to research conducted by (Blichfeldt, 2011), local community involvement can improve destination sustainability through better management and active participation in tourism activities. In the context of this study, community involvement in creating branding narratives and field activities, such as educational tours and mangrove conservation demonstrations, has strengthened the destination's image as an area that is not only beautiful but also beneficial to the environment.

5. Discussion of Findings and Implications

The above findings indicate that the implementation of the CORE concept has great potential to strengthen the branding of mangrove destinations in East Java. However, the success of its implementation is highly dependent on good coordination between all stakeholders and consistency in communication. In addition, the involvement of local communities plays a key role in creating authentic and sustainable attractions for tourists. The implications of this study indicate that mangrove destination branding efforts must consider aspects of local community participation, capacity building in digital communication, and the delivery of strong and consistent narratives to tourists.

Communication strategies based on participatory communication theory, as proposed in the CORE concept, can be an effective approach to address the challenges faced in branding mangrove destinations. By prioritizing active participation, revitalizing the relationship between local communities and tourists, and delivering consistent messages, the destination image can be significantly strengthened, in accordance with the objectives of this study.

6. Conclusion

This study successfully identified the potential and challenges in developing a mangrove destination branding strategy in East Java through the Communication-Oriented Revitalization Enhancement (CORE) approach. The main findings show that the CORE approach, which focuses on effective communication, active involvement of local communities, and strong narratives, has a significant impact on strengthening the destination image. This concept is able to accommodate various important elements in branding, such as community participation, consistent messaging, and collaboration between stakeholders, which overall contribute to increasing the attractiveness of mangrove destinations.

6.1. *The Success of the CORE Approach in Branding*

The CORE approach has proven effective in strengthening the identity of mangrove destinations by integrating aspects of participatory communication, local community revitalization, and strengthening authentic branding elements. In this study, CORE has encouraged active involvement of local communities, which not only contributes to the sustainability of ecotourism but also to better environmental management. As a result, mangrove destinations in East Java have great potential to become sustainable tourist attractions based on nature conservation and educational experiences for tourists.

The involvement of local communities as one of the cores of the CORE approach has produced positive results, both in terms of community understanding of the importance of mangrove conservation and their participation in promotional activities. Active participation of local communities increases a sense of ownership of the destination, as well as building a sense of shared responsibility in maintaining and promoting the destination's image. For example, local residents involved in tourist education activities showed enthusiasm and a better understanding of the importance of the mangrove ecosystem.

6.2. *Main Challenges in Branding Implementation*

Although CORE has a lot of potential, this study also found several challenges that must be overcome in implementing a mangrove destination branding strategy. One of the main challenges is the lack of adequate human resources and supporting infrastructure to run the branding program consistently. In addition, there are different views among stakeholders regarding the priority of branding elements. Some parties emphasize more on commercial aspects and increasing the number of tourists, while others focus on environmental conservation and the educational value of the destination.

This misalignment between stakeholders can hinder branding success, especially if effective communication and cross-sector coordination are not strengthened. Therefore, further efforts are needed to align the vision and mission of mangrove destination branding, as well as strengthen cooperation between stakeholders so that branding strategies can run harmoniously.

6.3. *Implications and Recommendations*

The results of this study have important implications for the development of ecotourism-based destination branding in Indonesia, especially in mangrove areas. Communication strategies that emphasize active community participation and cross-sector collaboration have proven to be effective approaches to creating a strong and authentic destination image. Thus, this study recommends that destination managers and stakeholders strengthen training and education related to branding and digital communication for local communities, as well as build a stronger framework for their involvement in the decision-making process.

Other recommendations resulting from this study include the need to improve the quality of infrastructure and accessibility of mangrove areas, which are one of the main obstacles in increasing tourist appeal. In addition, strengthening promotions through digital platforms and social media should also be a priority to expand branding reach, especially to the segment of tourists looking for unique and sustainable ecotourism experiences.

7. Recommendations For Further Research

In closing, this study suggests that further research should be conducted to explore more deeply how various elements of the CORE approach can be adapted to other tourism destination contexts in Indonesia, such as coastal or mountainous tourism areas. Further research can also focus more on developing methods for measuring the success of destination branding through a digital approach, as well as how technological innovation can help create more efficient and effective branding strategies.

Overall, this study provides a significant contribution to the understanding of ecotourism-based destination branding in East Java, while offering innovative solutions through the CORE approach that can be adopted and applied in other ecotourism contexts. By prioritizing active participation, community revitalization, and effective communication, this study hopes to have a positive impact in creating sustainable, attractive, and beneficial mangrove destinations for all stakeholders.

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